

International Atomic Energy Agency

FIFTH GENERAL CONFERENCE, 1961

THE FIFTH General Conference of the IAEA was attended by representatives of 70 of its 76 members as well as by observers from four non-member states — Congo (Leopoldville), Liberia, San Marino and Niger. It was held, as in previous years, in the Conference Centre of the Hofburg Palace in Vienna, from September 26 to October 6, 1961. Like the United Nations General Assembly, the Conference convened (and this was particularly noticeable during its first few days) under the shadow of the death of Dag Hammarskjold and the possible implications of his death for all the organizations of the United Nations family. As was to be demonstrated at this Conference, these implications are no less discernible in the IAEA. The traditional opening minute of silence was consecrated to Mr. Hammarskjold's memory, and most delegates, with the exception of those from countries of the Soviet bloc, paid tribute to him in their speeches in the general debate. On the day of the funeral of the late Secretary-General, the President of the Conference, Rear Admiral Quihillalt, Chairman of the Atomic Commission of Argentina, delivered a eulogy and expressed the sorrow of the Conference at his untimely death.

While the Agency's General Conference is empowered by its statute to discuss "... any questions or any matters within the scope of this statute or relating to the powers and functions of any organs provided for in this statute . . .", it normally acts on recommendations made to it by the Agency's main policy-making body, the Board of Governors. The Board of Governors is a much smaller body, consisting at the moment of 23 members, which has the authority to carry out functions of the Agency and to give detailed direction to the work of the Secretariat subject to its statutory responsibilities to the General Conference, and which meets "at such times as it may determine" — in practice, about four times a year. By far the most important recommendation of the Board of Governors to this year's meeting, and the issue that dominated both the discussions and the atmosphere of the Conference, concerned the appointment of a new Director-General of the Agency.

The statute of the IAEA provides that the chief administrative officer shall be a Director-General appointed by the Board of Governors, with the approval of the General Conference, for a term of four years. Since the term of office of the Agency's first Director-General, Mr. Sterling Cole, was due to expire on November 30, 1961, it was incumbent upon the Board of Governors to submit the name of a prospective new appointee to the Fifth General Conference for its approval. At its June meeting, therefore, the Board duly appointed Dr. Sigvard Eklund of Sweden as the Agency's new Director-General and recommended this appointment to the General Conference for approval.