

International physicians' recommendations for protecting health after the Fukushima nuclear disaster

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FUKUSHIMA/TOKYO "Our most important obligation to the many harmed by the Fukushima disaster is to eradicate nuclear weapons and phase out nuclear power," says Associate Professor Tilman Ruff, Co-President of IPPNW - International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War after a visit to Fukushima. Thirty physicians, medical students and scholars from the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Germany, Finland, Israel, India, New Zealand and Australia visited Fukushima yesterday for an investigative tour.

The event was hosted by Physicians Against Nuclear War in Japan. The foreign experts have followed the Fukushima nuclear disaster with deep concern. In the past few days, they heard presentations by Japanese radiation, medical and nuclear engineering experts at the IPPNW 20th World Congress in Hiroshima and experts at a 27 August symposium in Tokyo.

The fundamental processes in nuclear reactors and nuclear weapons are the same. In 1998, IPPNW first took a clear position that on medical grounds nuclear power should be phased out. Nuclear power is unacceptably hazardous to health at all stages, risks catastrophic radiation releases, and is inextricably linked with the production of enriched uranium and plutonium which can be used for nuclear weapons, the greatest and most acute threat to global health.

The expert group made the following **key recommendations** for action to put the health and safety of people first in the continuing Fukushima nuclear disaster:

- People living in contaminated regions should have access to full information on their likely radiation exposures and supported in all possible ways to minimize these. For those with anticipated annual exposure greater than 5 mSv, or more than 1mSv for children and women of child-bearing age, equitable and consistent access to health care, housing, employment and educational support and compensation should be provided if they choose to re-locate. The recent Nuclear Accident Child Victims Law is an important step in the right direction and should be effectively implemented as soon as feasible. All such measures should be based on actual radiation exposure levels and not distance. Every effort should be made to reduce exposures below 1 mSv per year as quickly as possible.
- Early establishment of a comprehensive register of all likely to have been exposed to more than 1mSv of radiation from all sources as a result of the Fukushima disaster. This will include people in prefectures neighbouring Fukushima. This register should be linked with best estimates of radiation exposures since the disaster, and used as a basis for linkage with national data on mortality, cancer, congenital malformations and pregnancy outcome.
- The group expressed concern for the health of the more than 20,000 workers who have worked at the Fukushima Daiichi plant since the earthquake, and the many more who will need to work there over the many decades it will take to decommission the damaged reactors and spent fuel ponds. They were disturbed by frequent reports of inadequate protection of workers and falsely low radiation exposure measurements. A lifetime radiation exposure register should quickly be established for all workers in the nuclear industry.
- There has been regrettable misinformation disseminated, including by senior professionals and in school educational materials, downplaying the risks of radiation. The corrupting influence of the 'nuclear village' is widespread. Provision of accurate, independent, timely public information on radiation health is essential.

No effective treatment is possible for the catastrophic effects of a nuclear explosion or reactor disaster. When the imperative to prevent what cannot be controlled is so strong, it is clear that both nuclear weapons and nuclear power have no place in a safe, sustainable world.