

Doctors: UNSCEAR report systematically underestimates health effects of the Fukushima nuclear catastrophe

Today, physicians from 19 affiliates of the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) have published a critical analysis of the Fukushima report of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR). The efforts made by UNSCEAR committee members to evaluate the extensive and complex data concerning the Fukushima nuclear catastrophe are appreciated. The report shows that the Fukushima nuclear disaster was not a singular event, but is an ongoing catastrophe; that it is not confined to Fukushima Prefecture, but affects people all over Japan and beyond; and that it constitutes the largest single radioactive contamination of the ocean ever recorded. Based on the collective lifetime doses of the Japanese population, which are presented in the report, it must be expected that about 1,000 excess cases of thyroid cancer and between 4,300 and 16,800 other excess cancer cases will occur in Japan due to Fukushima radioactive fallout. It must be said, however, that predictions can only be as good as the presumptions and data they are based on. UNSCEAR attempts to downplay the true extent of the catastrophe. Its conclusions must be viewed as systematic underestimations for the following reasons:

- 1 The validity of UNSCEAR's source term estimates is in doubt
- 2 There are serious concerns regarding the calculations of internal radiation
- 3 The dose assessments of the Fukushima workers cannot be relied upon
- 4 The UNSCEAR report ignores the effects of fallout on the non-human biota
- 5 The special vulnerability of the embryo to radiation is not taken into account
- 6 Non-cancer diseases and hereditary effects were ignored by UNSCEAR
- 7 Comparisons of nuclear fallout with background radiation are misleading
- 8 UNSCEAR'S interpretations of the findings are questionable
- 9 The protective measures taken by the authorities are misrepresented
- 10 Conclusions from collective dose estimations are not presented

Until December 31st, 2013, 33 children have been diagnosed with thyroid cancer and 41 more have tumor-suspect biopsies, indicating possible malignancies. Although it is not possible to determine whether a single case is caused by radiation, as cancers do not carry a "label of origin", the number of cases found so far is unexpectedly high. Japanese cancer statistics suggest an incidence of less than 1 case of thyroid cancer in this population per year. Moreover, the number of cases is likely to increase, as results are only available for about 70% of the affected pediatric population so far and hundreds of children with suspicious examination results have yet to be reassessed. General health checks of the affected population and studies of other types of diseases are required to ensure that the effects of the nuclear disaster are properly monitored and that the people who suffer from radioactive fallout receive the best possible health care attention.

The authorities in Japan failed to properly protect children from irradiation by refusing to distribute stable iodine and by raising the permissible annual exposure limits to 20 mSv, thus effectively forcing many children to live in contaminated areas. School officials are ignoring radiation hot spots just a few feet outside of school premises and are reintroducing Fukushima rice to school lunches. As the government urges people to return to their homes in the evacuated zones, even offering money for people moving back into contaminated areas, the decontamination efforts have failed to deliver the promised results. None of this finds mention in the UNSCEAR report.

Reducing the horrible effects of the Fukushima nuclear disaster on tens of thousands of families to a statistical problem by stating that radiation exposure from fallout "is unlikely to be able to attribute any health effects in the future among the general public and the vast majority of workers" is inappropriate and ignores the many individual stories of suffering.

Finally, it should be emphasized that the events in Fukushima were not the worst-case scenario. If the wind had blown in a different direction, millions of people living in metropolitan areas of Eastern Japan could have been affected by nuclear fallout, which luckily rained down on the Pacific Ocean instead. This is an important factor to consider for future nuclear safety guidelines and public policy recommendations. Ultimately, what is at stake is not only the principle of independent scientific research, which does not bow to the influence of political and industrial interests, but also the universal right of every human being to a standard of living adequate for health and well-being. This should be the guiding principle in evaluating the health effects of the Fukushima catastrophe.

The critical analysis of the UNSCEAR report was published on June 6th, 2014 by 19 affiliates of the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War and can be found online at: www.fukushima-disaster.de/information-in-english/maximum-credible-accident.html

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