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7 September 2007

Open Letter Concerning the IAEA's Kashiwazaki-Kariwa Nuclear Power Plant Earthquake Damage Investigation

To:

- IAEA Expert Mission to the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa Nuclear Power Station
- Director General Mohamed ElBaradei, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)

On 6 August 2007, we wrote to you concerning the IAEA Expert Mission to the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant. In particular, we requested that the Expert Mission "not permit its report to be used...to diminish the significance of...the risks posed by earthquakes to nuclear power generation."

The Expert Mission failed on this count.

It is highly regrettable that, on the basis of less than three days at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant, without seeing inside the reactors, the Expert Mission's report issued 17 August, 2007,* made statements which could be expected to mislead the public regarding the significance of the risks posed by earthquakes to nuclear power generation and the possibility of restarting the plant.

Key components of the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant have yet to be examined for internal structural damage. The IAEA's initial report should have therefore been indeed preliminary, stressing what it in fact does admit, that there is "the possibility that the long-term operation of components could be affected by hidden damage from the earthquake."

Instead, the Expert Mission report and the issues report released by IAEA staff on the same day chose to arbitrarily and subjectively emphasize another view. The Expert Mission report states, "Safety related structures, systems and components of the plant seem to be in a general condition, much better than might be expected for such a strong earthquake, and there is no visible significant damage..." The headline of the issues report declares, "Earthquake damage at Japanese nuclear station less than expected, report says." Predictably, the media reported accordingly. A careful reading of the Expert Mission report, however, reveals that the true picture is far less rosy.

The head of the Expert Mission, Philippe Jamet, was widely quoted by the media saying it would take "months or a year" to put the plant back into operation. In fact, the report provides no grounds for believing that the plant can be restarted in a year's time. On the contrary, the abovementioned problem of "hidden damage" and also "the potential existence of active faults underneath the site" both pointed out in the report are strong grounds for believing that the plant can never be operated again.

The investigations of the Expert Mission are ongoing. We recommend that it give serious consideration to a statement made on 21 August, 2007, by the newly formed Group of Concerned Scientists and Engineers Calling for the Closure of the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa Nuclear Power Plant. Their statement contains the following key points:

1. In light of the "Regulatory Guide for Reviewing Seismic Design of Nuclear Power Reactor Facilities (Seismic Guide)," which was revised by the Japanese Government in September 2005, it is clearly inconceivable to continue to operate a nuclear power plant at the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa site. The reason for this is that the basic policy stated in the revised Seismic Guide is that all buildings and structures must be installed on ground having adequate support performance. There can be no doubt now that the ground of the site of the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa Nuclear Power Plant does not fulfill this requirement.
2. It should be assumed that plastic deformation (permanent strain) remains in many facilities and items of equipment and that in some cases cracks may have formed. In other words, nobody can objectively claim that the seven units are sound.
3. Earthquake ground motion smaller than that of 16 July 2007 could cause a major accident at this already damaged site. The Kashiwazaki-Kariwa region is located at the center of an area of particularly high crustal activity and has many active faults. It is impossible to say that large earthquakes in this region ended with the 2004 Chuetsu earthquake and the recent Chuetsu-Oki earthquake. Also, over the next several to ten years, large earthquakes could occur as aftershocks of the Chuetsu-Oki earthquake that damaged the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa plant.

The full statement can be found on the following web site:

<http://cnic.jp/english/topics/safety/earthquake/kkscientist21aug07.html>

The Expert Mission stated that it was willing "to share the findings and lessons learned with the international nuclear community." We fully support this goal. However, there is a major barrier to its achievement. That is that Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) does not translate most of its reports into English. We are not referring to confidential documents. We are referring to documents which are publicly available in Japanese. The Citizens' Nuclear Information Center (CNIC) contacted TEPCO to ask if it intended to translate technical information released in Japanese on 10 August, 2007. TEPCO replied that it did not. Therefore, CNIC took the initiative of translating charts on neutron flux and reactor pressure. We have made this information available to the English-speaking world on the following web site:

<http://cnic.jp/english/topics/safety/earthquake/kktechreport10aug07.html>

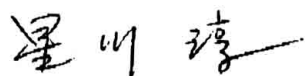
This problem is not restricted to TEPCO. It is endemic in the Japanese nuclear industry and Japanese Government bureaucracy. Just a brief look at their English language web sites is enough to prove this point. We believe this is a reflection of the inward-looking nature of the Japanese nuclear industry and the Government's nuclear authorities and their aversion to and fear of independent international scrutiny. We are calling on them to become more open and to provide more information in English, in particular in relation to the effects of the Chuetsu-Oki Earthquake on the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant. It is in the interests of the IAEA to support our call. **Only when sufficient basic data is available in English will the international community be able to independently analyze the findings and the lessons learned.**

As the Expert Mission continues its investigation, it too will need English translations of technical information related to the impact of the Chuetsu-Oki Earthquake on the Kashiwazaki-Kariwa nuclear power plant. If TEPCO and the Japanese Government can provide such information in English to the IAEA, there is no reason why it cannot provide it to a wider audience.

Yours sincerely,



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cc: IAEA Board of Governors

**Footnote: Mission Report Volume I, "Preliminary Findings and Lessons Learned from the 16 July 2007 Earthquake at Kashiwazaki-Kariwa NPP", International Atomic Energy Agency, 17 August 2007.*