

**THE FUKUSHIMA-DAIICHI ACCIDENT –
QUESTION OF MOTIVES OF INTERNATIONAL BODIES ATTENDING THE NIPPON
FOUNDATION SYMPOSIUM**

September 8th 2011

Dr Frank Barnaby and Shaun Burnie

"We won't see any problems from this reactor. The release is tiny and likely to remain so, so I don't think we need to worry," Professor Gerry Thomas.¹

The hosting of an international seminar to assess the radiation health impacts of the Fukushima-daiichi accident is an important opportunity – but perhaps not the one stated by the Nippon Foundation.² Specifically, the opportunity arises to ask fundamental questions about the role of key international bodies with global responsibility in the area of man made radiation, the nuclear industry and human health. The past record of three bodies – the ICRP, IAEA and WHO – in particular in the aftermath of the Chernobyl accident, raise serious concerns over their objectives, methodology and approach to assessing the human health impacts of the Fukushima-daiichi nuclear accident. We remain concerned that rather than an inclusive approach involving a wide range of civil society in Japan, the Japanese authorities are cherry picking the scientists to suit their aims of minimizing the scale of the accident and its consequences. This brief note provides a short overview of three of the key international bodies attending the Nippon Foundation Symposium.

The International Commission for Radiological Protection (ICRP)

The ICRP describes itself as an independent, international, non-governmental organisation.³ The Commission proposes protection policies aimed at both legislators and regulators, operators and licensees, and, ultimately, members of the public. The international organisations of the United Nations system, in particular the IAEA, utilise the recommendations of ICRP when producing their Basic Safety Standards for radiation protection.

However the ICRP has been much criticized over the years for its secretive approach to setting radiation protection standards, its close relationship to the nuclear industry and nuclear defence establishments and for consistently underestimating the risks of radiation exposure.⁴

The danger of the regulator being too close to the industry it oversees has been exposed with the accident at Fukushima-daiichi. The thirteen members of the Main Committee of ICRP, the decision makers, are either users of ionizing radiation in their employment, or are government regulators, primarily from countries with nuclear weapon programs, the vested interests are clear.

While the scientific evidence shows that radiation risks are greater than that stated by the ICRP, governments continue to maintain that the ICRP are an independent organization and that the risk from low level radiation are insignificant. This has led to an understandable lack of trust in the

1 See, Gerry Thomas is one of the speakers at the Nippon Foundation symposium 11th-12 March, 2011, as quoted on Sky News March 13th, 2011 - <http://news.sky.com/home/world-news/article/15950994>

2 See, http://www.nippon-foundation.or.jp/eng/news/Fukushima_Expert_Symposium.html

3 See, <http://www.icrp.org/docs/The%20History%20of%20ICRP%20and%20the%20Evolution%20of%20its%20Policies.pdf>

4 The drafting of the 2005 Recommended Guidelines generated controversy worldwide, see, http://www.icrp.org/consultation_viewitem.asp?guid=%7B07A7B32B-137B-4009-8F24-45A21B36B98B%7D, see also (<http://www.greenpeace.org/canada/Global/canada/report/2007/6/tritium-hazard-report-pollu.pdf>)

ICRP – a body that has never spoken out against any practice which involved excessive or unnecessary exposure to ionising radiation. Since the Chernobyl accident of 1986 they have only sought to down play the risks. One of the most revealing comments on the ICRP was made by one of its founder members, Karl Z Morgan, regarded as the founder of health physics, who stated in 1977,

“in spite of its usefulness in the past, the ICRP has never been willing to offend the establishment and I'm not sure its an organization I would trust my life with”⁵

In recent years the ICRP attempted to introduce guidelines that would lower radiation protection for workers and the public. Most notably in its draft 2005 guidelines it stated that, ***“The primary aim of radiological protection is to provide an appropriate standard of protection for man (sic) without unduly limiting the beneficial actions giving rise to radiation exposure.”***⁶

This concern for not limiting the benefits of radiation exposure – in other words the commercial nuclear industry – should raise questions with those in Japan relying upon the ICRP for independent advice on the aftermath of the Fukushima-daiichi accident.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and World Health Organizations (WHO)

The IAEA since its foundation in 1957 has had the primary role to promote the global expansion of nuclear power, with the additional role of attempting to safeguard the peaceful use of nuclear power. The WHO's role in radiation health issues is determined today by a 1959 agreement with the IAEA.⁷ This states that,

“it is recognized by the World Health Organization that the International Atomic Energy Agency has the primary responsibility for encouraging, assisting and co-ordinating research on, and development and practical application of. atomic energy for peaceful uses throughout the world”

and that,

“Whenever either organization proposes to initiate a programme or activity on a subject in which the other organization has or may have a substantial interest, the first party shall consult the other with a view to adjusting the matter by mutual agreement.”

In other words when there was evidence that undermined the objective of the IAEA – specifically the expansion of nuclear power – agreement would be reached between the two agencies on a way forward.

The clearest manifestation of this agreement followed the 1986 Chernobyl accident. The IAEA (and WHO) have long been criticized for misrepresenting the human health impacts of Chernobyl. Four months after the Chernobyl accident the IAEA hosted an international conference to make an initial assessment of the accident and its consequences. It was at this conference that the figure of 32 fatalities was agreed. In advance of the 20th anniversary of the accident in 2005, the IAEA (and

5 as cited by Dr Pad Green, Radiation Consultant Friends of the Earth UK, available at <http://www.radstats.org.uk/no039/green.pdf>

6 See, http://www.icrp.org/docs/2005_recs_CONSULTATION_Draft1a.pdf, as cited by Jean McSorely, Greenpeace submission to ICRP consultation, http://www.icrp.org/consultation_viewitem.asp?guid=%7B07A7B32B-137B-4009-8F24-45A21B36B98B%7D

7 See, Extract from 28 May 1959 WHO/IAEA Agreement, World Health Assembly, the governing body of the WHO, ratified Agreement with with the the IAEA (annex 1), as cited in The International Atomic Energy Agency and the World Health Organization: two conflicting logics in the UN System, Solange Fernex, President WILPF France

WHO) continued to report that under 50 direct fatalities had been caused by Chernobyl, with between 4000-9000 eventual fatalities.

Coinciding with the 20th anniversary of Chernobyl, reports from across Europe provided estimates of very much higher fatalities than the IAEA/WHO report – ranging from 30,000-200,000. When challenged over the IAEA report, a WHO scientist admitted that the report was limited in its geographical scope and that it was *"political communication tool...(and that) Scientifically, it may not be the best approach"*.⁸

The debate over the number of fatalities arising from Chernobyl will likely never be settled. However, sufficient evidence exists that fundamentally challenges the position of the IAEA and WHO.

Six months after it began, the accident at Fukushima-daiichi continues. The IAEA has demonstrated a poor understanding of the accident.⁹ And yet they are one of the principal agencies that will inform the international debate, including at the United Nations General Assembly, on the accident and its consequences. The ICRP, IAEA and WHO due to their track record, raise serious questions as to what the real objectives are of the Nippon Foundation symposium.

The Fukushima-daiichi accident has already had major consequences for the people of Fukushima and Japan. The issues are too serious and too long lasting for there to be a repeat of the distortion and deception witnessed since the Chernobyl accident.

Dr Frank Barnaby is a health physicist, formerly of the UK Atomic Weapons Establishment, and former Director of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, SIPRI. Shaun Burnie is an independent nuclear consultant and former head of Greenpeace International Nuclear Campaigns. Both have visited and worked in Japan over the past 25 years, including Fukushima.

Contact details: frank.barnaby1@btinternet.com and burnie.shaun@gmail.com

8 See, How many more lives will Chernobyl claim? Rob Edwards, New Scientist, April 6th 2005, available at http://www.robbedwards.com/2006/04/how_many_more_1.html

9 See, REVIEW OF THE INTERNATIONAL ATOMIC ENERGY AGENCY (IAEA) PRELIMINARY SUMMARY OF ITS FACT FINDING EXPERT MISSION TO JAPAN OF 24 MAY TO 1 JUNE 2011, Large and Associates for Greenpeace France, <http://www.greenpeace.org/france/PageFiles/300718/Fukushima-Analyse%20LargeAssociates.pdf>

