

*NGO PRESENTATION TO THE NPT REVIEW CONFERENCE PREPARATORY
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**FISSILE MATERIALS, HEALTH AND THE ENVIRONMENT: THE HIDDEN
COSTS OF MILITARY AND CIVILIAN NUCLEAR PROGRAMS**

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Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates, and non-governmental observers,

Nearly six decades after the first nuclear weapons explosion in New Mexico the global community is continues to pay the price for the nuclear powers' obsession with the bomb. We now have considerable evidence that nuclear weapons production and testing have harmed human health and the environment, and their legacy will remain for generations to come.

Tragically and paradoxically, in its continuous quest for military advantage, the first nuclear weapon state has irreparably harmed hundreds of thousands – if not millions – of its own people.

Many of the 500,000-600,000 people who have worked in the U.S. nuclear weapons production complex over the past 50 years may have been exposed to significant doses of radiation, toxins, and other dangerous materials.

Data from a recent U.S. study suggests radioactive fallout from Cold War nuclear weapons tests across the globe may have caused as many as 15,000 cancer deaths and 22,000 non-fatal cancers in residents born after 1951. An independent study conducted in 1991 concluded that between 70,000 and 800,000 people in the U.S. and around the world would have died or will die prematurely from a fatal cancer attributable to nuclear testing. Governments have not adequately informed nor educated their citizenry about the possible health outcomes even in the areas of known high fallout.

In the U.S. much of this weapons work was carried out under a veil of secrecy. Workers were not warned of the risks associated with the weapons activities and were often intentionally misled with regard to hazards of their work. Communities situated downwind or downstream from complex sites were also not informed of health impacts of the weapon complex activities or the waste it would leave behind.

Wherever nuclear weapons have been tested and produced, under the guise of “national security” their deadly toxic and radioactive byproducts have similarly killed and injured innocent workers and their families, and the communities downwind. This has been true in Russia and the former Soviet republics, the South Pacific, the Algerian desert, and Western China in recent decades, and now in India and Pakistan.

The nuclear power industry's record is no better. Proponents of nuclear power initially pushed it as the "green" option, one that was supposed to save us from an impending global energy crisis. There were high hopes and indeed some assumptions that it would be safe, clean, and inexpensive and that its proliferation risks could be contained. Experience has now given us the

data to say that these assessments cannot be supported. Indeed the risks were gravely underestimated.

Baby teeth of children born since 1990 show some of the highest levels of radioactive materials since the early 1960s, when superpowers tested atomic bombs in the atmosphere. Study researchers point to leaks from nuclear power plants as the likeliest cause of the rising radioactive levels in the teeth.

This statistic addresses the kinds of concerns we should have for communities in proximity to nuclear power facilities when the reactors are working properly. In the event of an accident or terrorist attack the toll would be far worse. In all, 7 million people in Belarus, Russia and Ukraine are estimated to suffer physical or psychological effects of radiation related to the Chernobyl catastrophe, the largest nuclear reactor accident to date.

A power reactor at the end of its life has manufactured lethal radioactive products equivalent to those from several thousand nuclear bombs. We know there is no suitable place in our environment to dispose of either present or future nuclear waste in a manner that will protect future generations. At all stages of nuclear power generation, from uranium mining tails to spent nuclear fuel, nuclear energy produces substantial radioactive waste some of which remains dangerously radioactive for a quarter million years,. The danger of released radioactivity may adversely affect, not only our immediate health, but our very genetic heritage.

While there is not total consensus in the NGO community on a path forward, some have proposed the following solutions:

A UN-Sponsored Global Truth Commission

A wide-ranging public discourse is needed within every nuclear-weapon state about the health and environmental harm that they have inflicted upon their own people. A global debate is needed about harm outside the borders of those states. Much of that harm was knowingly inflicted.

It is time for the United Nations General Assembly to establish an independent and open Truth Commission on the ravages that have been inflicted upon the world by nuclear weapons production and testing. That commission should not only examine the nature and extent of that harm, and whether and how deliberately it was inflicted; it should recommend ways in which the world's people can hold nuclear weapons establishments accountable. It should also examine whether and to what extent the security arguments that have been claimed for nuclear weapons have been constructed with the aim of keeping people ignorant and fearful so that the weapons bureaucracies might perpetuate themselves. Such an examination would be of some considerable relevance today, given that nuclear weapons establishments are still refusing to meet their nuclear disarmament commitments under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and that people are still getting ill and dying from the harm that nuclear weapons establishments have inflicted upon them.

A Global Sustainable Energy Agency

Parties to the NPT should replace their dependence on nuclear power and with a commitment to the use of sustainable sources of energy.

Sustainable energies, in their production or consumption, have minimal adverse impacts on human health, and the health functioning of vital ecosystems, including the global environment. The supply of fossil fuel and nuclear resources are inherently exhaustible. Sustainable energies represent an inexhaustible potential, and can be supplied continuously to future generations on earth.

Parties should create a Global Sustainable Energy Agency to help achieve these goals.

CONVENOR:

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