

Public Statement in Condemnation of the Forum on “Increasing Nuclear Literacy in Hong Kong”

by No Nukes @ China Hong Kong, Socialist Action

June 10, 2011.

We strongly protest against the staging of the captioned forum for reasons as follows:

1. Hong Kong people are not nuclear risk-illiterate as the conference title implies. We are fully aware of the risks of using nuclear energy and will struggle for an open, democratic, and responsible system for energy decision making, whereby we can get rid of nuclear power and the lethal radioactivity it releases in the first instance.
2. Hong Kong people particularly do not find the speakers of this forum qualified to “educate” them on nuclear risks topics. These speakers have their own interests to serve in defending the nuclear industry and its related businesses, including selling of nuclear power plants, management of these plants, uranium mining, and reprocessing of nuclear waste into the most deadly man-made substance on earth- plutonium.
3. We are extremely angry at those spineless universities which take part in organizing this forum to curry favour with big corporations. We would like to remind university authorities that higher education institutions are set up and run by a lot of public money. Not only should they not bite the hand that feeds them, they must also revisit their basic role, which is to be responsible to knowledge, truth, and society.
4. We would also like to remind Civic Exchange that in order to live up to its self-proclaimed identity of “an **independent** think tank”, under no circumstances should it exchange public interest for China Light & Power’s sponsorship. And, in colluding with the nuclear industry to confuse the public, it has taken a path diametrical to being “green”, an image that the organization has always been eager to acquire.
5. Concerning nuclear risks, we have the following questions and comments to direct to all mouthpieces of the nuclear industry:

A. Nuclear risks are **involuntary risks** for the general populace. Comparing these risks to many other risks taken voluntarily by individuals or collectively (such as going on an air flight, rock climbing) is totally misleading. Nuclear risks are forced upon the people, future generations, and the ecosystems. The injustice of imposing nuclear risks on the public is heightened by the long history of suppression of any non-official information revealing the negative side of the technology. (cf. reading list)

B. The pro-nukes “experts” tend to denigrate peoples’ “**risk averse**” stance regarding nuclear. This is both arrogant and shows exactly the ignorance of these “experts” on the basic concept of **risk**. What is **risk**? It can easily be explained by the following formula:

$$\text{Risk (taking nukes)} = \sum_{i=1}^n [\text{Probability (} i\text{th accident occurring given taking nukes)} \times \text{Expected Loss in the case of } i\text{th accident}]$$

(a simplified representation of this formula is Risk = Probability x Expected Loss)

With i covering some extremely severe scenarios resulting from taking nukes, the Expected Loss figure can be astronomical. As a result, the Risk of taking nukes is also an astronomical figure. Hence, in rejecting nukes or, simply, to adopt a risk averse stance towards nuclear, is the most rational and scientific attitude that people can take.

“Risk assessment” by “experts” is made even more ridiculous by the actual occurrence of many serious accidents (most of which are hidden from the public) in the past decades. We can now deem totally wrong the assertion of “extremely low” probability of nuclear accidents (including the core melt-down rate) made by the “experts”.

- C. The industry’s strategy of using risk-benefit analysis to justify nuclear power consistently fails to address the question of “**who are the ones to take the risks and who are the ones to reap benefits**”. The huge injustice embedded in the practice of the nuclear industry should no longer be tolerated. All workers of nuclear facilities (uranium mines and tailings, milling and enrichment plants, nuclear reactors, reprocessing plants, nuclear wastes dumping sites...) and people living in the neighborhood, as well as all life forms subjected to radionuclides pollution, have never been properly indemnified. In an overwhelmingly majority of cases, they have not even been informed about the risks of nuclear radioactivity – high and low dosages included.

One anecdotic way to sum up nuclear injustice is: If nuclear facilities are so safe, why aren’t they built in Manhattan, NYC, downtown Tokyo, Elysee Palace and Zhong Nan Hai?

Another question commonly raised and addressed by nuclear risk “experts” is: How safe is safe enough? The question, however, is also deceptively oversimplified. The right way to ask it is to specify “**safe to whom**”. Hence, it is hideously irresponsible and dictatorial for the “experts” to assert that such and such a level of nuclear risk is “acceptable” while the public who are exposed to it don’t find it acceptable at all.

- D. Up till now, there is no proof that nuclear “experts” know how to handle the disastrous consequences of nuclear accidents. The Fukushima nuclear disaster has further highlighted their ignorance and incompetence in such regard. Why should we listen to these self-aggrandizing people’s guarantee on the safety of nuclear technology, when they hardly know how to handle the technology under extraordinary and emergency circumstances?

6. Last but not the least, it is obvious that throughout Europe and North America, the nuclear business is facing a very dim future. There were only one or two new plants commissioned in the whole of the past decade. With the Fukushima disaster, the industry’s business prospect in the West will simply be nonexistent. It is therefore extremely unethical for CLP to bring in more European models (such as Areva’s second+ generation) of nuclear reactors to Guangdong at this point of time. This, together with China’s “adventurous” endeavors in building the much criticized AP1000 model and other models of reactors, amounting to hundreds in number, will spell a disastrous, genocidal future for Asia and the world. We protest against all attempts to greenwash and whitewash such irresponsible behavior, including the organization of this forum.

Reading List

1. *Chernobyl: Consequences of the Catastrophe for People and the Environment* (Alexey V. Yablokov, Vassily B. Nesterenko & Alexey V. Nesterenko, edited by Janette D. Sherman-Nevinger, Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, vol. 1181, 2009.)
2. *Chernobyl: The Hidden Legacy* (Pierpaolo Mittica, London: Trolley Ltd, 2007.)
3. *Chernobyl Legacy* (Paul Fusco & Magdalena Caris, New York: de. MO, 2001.)
4. *Radiation-Induced Cancer from Low-Dose Exposure: An Independent Analysis* (John W. Gofman, San Francisco: Committee for Nuclear Responsibility, 1990.)
5. *The Woman Who Knew Too Much: Alice Stewart and the Secrets of Radiation* (Gayle Greene, Michigan: University of Michigan, 1999.)
6. *Medical Research and Radiation Politics: Oral History Transcript / 1982* (John W. Gofman & Sally S. Hughes, Berkeley: University of California, 1985.)
7. *Bending Science: How Special Interests Corrupt Public Health Research* (Thomas O. McGarity & Wendy E. Wagner, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008)