



Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

Geneva, 20 January 2000

**The President
Executive Board
World Health Organization
20 Avenue Appia
1211 Geneva 27**

Dear Mr. President,

The enclosed petition has been signed on behalf of different organizations and by individuals who are deeply worried by the World Health Organization's seeming silence about the effects that radiation has on the health of people.

We believe that the reason for this may lie in the Agreement between WHO and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), two organizations with contradictory purposes. While one of the IAEA's goals is "to accelerate and enlarge the contribution of atomic energy to peace, health and prosperity throughout the world" (IAEA Statutes, 1956), WHO's goal is to

promote and protect "health for all".

There is evidence that the nuclear cycle and its by products, including nuclear weaponry, and nuclear accidents have caused serious harm to people's health. The petition therefore calls on WHO to amend the WHO/IAEA agreement with a view to giving WHO full freedom of investigation and publication, and asks the Executive Board to place the item on the agenda of the forthcoming World Health Assembly.

The signers of the petition are worried about the consequences of Chernobyl, especially the damage done to the human genome, the most dramatic ethical problem connected with the development of atomic industry. This concern was already expressed by the outstanding WHO working group on genetics, at its meeting in Geneva in 1956.

After the Chernobyl disaster, WHO had the opportunity to verify the predictions of its expert group and its recommendations, published in the WHO Document "Effets génétiques des radiations chez l'homme, OMS, 1957", in particular: "It is recommended that the investigation of the amount and type of damage and related genetic questions, be greatly extended and intensified with a view to safeguarding the well-being of future generations." Such a verification can still be

undertaken now and it is urgent that WHO do so.

During the IAEA congress in Vienna, 8-12 April 1996, the genetic damages were minimized or even completely denied by the official speakers, whereas at the same time the Editorial in NATURE, April 25 1996, by Prof. Hillis of the University of Texas, concluded : "We now know that the mutational effects of nuclear accidents can be much greater than suspected, and that evolutionary rates in at least parts of eukariotic genomes can be raised well beyond levels previously considered possible."

After reading "Health Consequences of the Chernobyl Accident" (WHO, Geneva 1996), which concluded the IPHECA programme, the petitioners fear that the Agreement with the AIEA of 28 May 1959 may explain WHO'S delay in initiating post-Chernobyl research projects. It may even be the principal explanation why e. g. dental health in Belarus was considered as more important by WHO than genetic damages due to the exposure to chronic low-dose radiation?

The Agreement between the IAEA and the WHO also contains a confidentiality clause (Article 3 of this Accord), which is in contradiction with the Constitution of WHO, recommending a thorough and full information to the public as an important means to solve and prevent health problems.

The proceedings of the important congress organized by WHO on Chernobyl in Geneva in November 1995 were to be available in March 1996. They have still not been published and we wonder whether this also may be related to the restrictions imposed by the 1959 Agreement? On the other hand, the proceedings of the IAEA conference on Chernobyl, 8-12 April 1996 in Vienna, were published already in September of the same year. On the first page of this publication, the principal objective of the Agency is restated

"to accelerate and enlarge the contribution of atomic energy to peace, health and prosperity throughout the world".

With such a principal objective, assessments of the consequences of the nuclear cycle on health must not be under the control of the IAEA, but be freely undertaken by the WHO with full transparency. The population of the world needs to be informed about the real risks of atomic energy, and about the full extent of the consequences of accidents such as in Sellafield, Three Mile Island and especially Chernobyl.

We therefore reiterate our appeal to urgently amend the Agreement between the International Atomic Energy Agency and the World Health Organization (Res WHA12-40, 28.5.59), so as to liberate WHO from any restrictions due to a conflict of interests in the field of health consequences of radiation, and to place the matter on the agenda of this forthcoming World Health Assembly.

Sincerely,

Michaela Told
Secretary General

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