



Women in Europe for a Common Future | WECF

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Munich, 26 April 2010

Re: WHO/IAEA Agreement of 1959

Dear Dr Maria Neira,

Women in Europe for a Common Future (WECF) is a network of 100 environmental and women's organisations in 40 European and EECCA countries. WECF represents the European Eco-Forum, an alliance of 300 environmental NGOs, in the European Health and Environment process, of which WHO Europe holds the secretariat. WECF cooperates with WHO in the area of the water and health protocol implementation, through its work on Water Safety Plans. WECF builds on WHO's expertise for its work on inclusion of asbestos in the Rotterdam convention.

WECF's members and many Eco-Forum members address the specific environmental health risks in the EECCA and EU regions, with a particular focus on children's environmental health. Some of our member organizations actively work in the nuclear contaminated areas of Chernobyl and Mayak.

We would first of all like to congratulate the WHO on its excellent scientific and policy work on urgent and difficult environmental health issues such as children's developmental health impacts from hazardous chemicals, and on the effects of asbestos on workers and public health.

However, regarding WHO's work on health effects from human nuclear activities, we would like to express our concerns with regard to the continuing application of the WHO/IAEA Agreement of 1959 (WHA 12.40) which impacts, in our opinion, on the ability of the WHO to act freely in nuclear matters, in particular to publish research on the health impacts of radiation and assist the population of contaminated areas. In these times of nuclear revival, it is more than ever necessary to increase the world's decision makers and citizens knowledge about the health risks and risks to the survival of humankind related to nuclear power and technologies.

We subscribe to the arguments expressed in the Appeal by Health Professionals for the independence of WHO.[1] In addition, we would like to emphasize that the wordings of the WHO-IAEA Agreement of 1959 are not the same as the wordings in agreements concluded by the WHO with other organizations, e.g. FAO, UNESCO or UNIDO. The WHO/FAO Agreement of 1948 request the two organizations to "consult each other regularly in regard to matters of common interest", which undoubtedly does not go so far as the WHO/IAEA Agreement of 1959 does by requiring consultations "with a view to adjusting the matter by mutual agreement".

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Moving People for a World in Balance

¹ Appeal by Health Professionals for the Independence of WHO, launched in 2007.
http://independentwho.info/IMG/pdf/appeal_healthprofessionals_eng.pdf



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Even if the WHO considers that the WHO/IAEA Agreement of 1959 follows the model of agreements concluded between WHO and other international organizations^[2], the facts show the difference in application. It shall also be stressed that the confidentiality clause of the WHO/IAEA Agreement of 1959 is misused when it prevents the publication of the proceedings of the WHO Conference on Chernobyl (1995) since the speakers of the conference never asked for confidentiality.

Substantial revision of the WHO/IAEA Agreement of 1959 is extremely important for the WHO to recover its full independence and to prevent the WHO from being influenced by the nuclear lobby. “Adjusting the matter by mutual agreement” is totally unacceptable when one million children are condemned to live in areas contaminated by radionuclides from Chernobyl, and when “Chernobyls” can happen in the future.

In the light of the newly created International Renewable Energy Agency, where WHO should be scrutinizing also the health effects linked to the production, use and disposal of renewable energy technologies, we would suggest that WHO reviews its agreement with the IAEA whilst developing a new agreement with IREA, so that both mirror each other.

We would like to ask you for a meeting to discuss this matter.

We look forward to hearing from you, with my best regards

Sincerely yours,

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