

**NUCLEAR REACTOR CATASTROPHE IN JAPAN  
AN OPEN LETTER TO THE WORLD'S ENVIRONMENTAL MINISTERS**

**By**

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The earthquake in Japan and the resulting damage to nuclear power plants have sent shock waves and a dire note of warning to the world's entire population. Despite their obvious dangers, nuclear reactors are proliferating worldwide and sowing the seeds of pollution and congenital deformities for a thousand generations to come (the half life of Plutonium 239, one of the bi-products of nuclear activities is 24,100 years).

Unborn generations are just as much members of the human family as ourselves but have no voice to speak for themselves. We take advantage of this and are damaging them catastrophically by our breach of trust of this environment of which we are custodians and not owners. Every single citizen is a trustee of the environment. All the more are Governments trustees, and in particular the environmental ministers of the world bear a special responsibility in this regard. We are in default of our duties if we continue to keep open such possibilities and create more, despite our knowledge of their dreadful consequences. Our generation and particularly those who are specially entrusted with the care of the environment will have to answer before the bar of history for our default and abuse of trust. Indeed we are committing the gravest possible crime against future generations and are doing so with a full consciousness of the effects of our actions.

If people of the Stone Age had been able to cause damage to the environment and cause congenital deformities to our generation, we would have condemned them as savages, brutes and barbarians. Yet, even if they could have caused such damage, they could have had no idea of the irreparable harm they were causing to generations yet unborn. We, on the other hand, who are fully aware of the catastrophic damage we are causing to unborn generations, still proceed regardless,

pursuing activities which, it is patently clear, will release these dangers sooner or later. We continue to build nuclear reactors all over the world.

Even a school child is aware that no power on earth can insure against earthquakes, tsunamis, wars, insurrections, negligent management and other disasters. These will inevitably occur over a period of years and not only do we know this as a virtual certainty, but we know also that there is no known means of eliminating them. This makes us savages, brutes and barbarians several times over. In a supposedly enlightened age, we are, with total disregard of any sense of responsibility, proceeding to build more reactors, pursuing short term advantages while being fully aware of the long term perils we are inflicting on our own posterity. Solar and other renewable energy sources provide all the energy the world needs but we neglect them, for there are great profits for those few who are engaged in the nuclear energy enterprise, whatever the costs to the vast majority and the generations yet to come.

As a result we have become the most destructive generation in all of human history, regardless of the fact that we are destroying the undoubted birthright of billions of human beings for whom we hold the environment on trust.

I take the liberty of addressing you on this matter as I have for over 30 years campaigned against the dangers of nuclear weapons, nuclear reactors and nuclear waste. As early as 1985, I toured the major cities of Japan at the instance of the Japan Scientists' Association delivering lectures on the dire dangers to humanity resulting from nuclear weapons, nuclear reactors and nuclear waste.

Also, nearly thirty years ago, in *The Slumbering Sentinels: Law and Human Rights in the Wake of Technology*, Penguin 1983, pp 139-141, I foreshadowed this danger, referring to leakages from nuclear reactors and the possibilities of major accidents threatening our very survival. I referred also to the possibility that, if the residents of a city were exposed to radioactive contamination through a serious nuclear accident, the national interest may demand their compulsory sterilisation to prevent the birth of an unprecedented number of defective children, observing that "we are only a nuclear accident away from this". I referred also to the fact that a major accident near a populated city could cause property damage and health damage which could not be estimated even in hundreds of billions of dollars, and for which insurance coverage would be beyond the realm of possibility. As early as 1982, the Nuclear

Regulatory Commission (NRC) released estimates of death and property damage from reactor accidents running to over \$300 billion in crowded city areas. The Harrisburg nuclear leak demonstrated, even then, how close we could be to a nuclear accident, the percentage possibility of a nuclear accident occurring somewhere in the world being assessable at between 5 and 10% within the next few years. Such reasonable forecasts of possible catastrophes have somehow been completely submerged by the combined political and economic strength of those who advocate the extension of nuclear energy.

In my Dissenting Opinion in the case in which an Advisory Opinion was sought from the International Court of Justice on the legality of nuclear weapons, I discussed the possibility of damage to nuclear reactors and the lethal doses of radiation to exposed persons 150 miles downwind and the radioactive contamination of the environment more than 600 miles away. I also discussed the damage caused by the Chernobyl incident, for years after its occurrence, to all species of life for thousands of square miles in the vicinity, which necessitated the pouring in of medical personnel, supplies and equipment from across the Soviet Union in a manner which strained the resources even of that powerful nation. Smaller states could be completely crippled by such an accident, with a loss of income, loss of life, loss of jobs and loss of resources from which it would take generations to recover. Medical injuries caused included convulsions, vascular damage, cardio vascular collapse, keloids and cancers.

Having discussed these dangers in judgments, publications and lectures worldwide for so many years I have been devastated at the thought that my worst premonitions have come to pass and worse can follow if we continue with our betrayal of trust and abandonment of responsibility towards our children and our children's children.

Any plea for the abolition of nuclear reactors would be incomplete without reference to the problem of disposal of nuclear waste. Nuclear waste carries all the elements of radioactive danger to health and the environment and there is no known means of disposal of these toxic accumulations. Whether they be buried in the depths of the ocean or deep trenches or salt beds, or wherever else, we cannot guarantee for twenty-four thousand years that they will remain safe in their repositories, and we would be inflicting this source of inter-generational, environmental, and physical damage on future generations in a manner which is totally unjustifiable by any standards of morality or law.

Another danger, which by itself is sufficient to justify the total abolition of nuclear reactors, is that nuclear waste from hundreds of reactors cannot possibly be accounted for and it is well known that such records are not maintained, even by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). This material is the raw material needed for the manufacture of nuclear weapons and there is here an open invitation to terrorists across the world to interest themselves in the manufacture of nuclear weapons. This is particularly dangerous in a world in which the necessary knowledge for the construction of a nuclear weapon is available on the internet, as I have been assured by eminent physicists.

In the result, the continuance and proliferation of nuclear reactors violates every principle of humanitarian law, international law, environmental law and international sustainable development law.

The traditional wisdom of ancient peoples such as the Native Americans used to ordain that no serious decision concerning the community should be taken without considering its impact for seven generations to come. Traditional African wisdom has decreed that any major decision affecting a community should bear in mind the three-fold face of humanity – those who went before us, those who are alive here and now, and those who are yet to come – without which the decision taken would be a lopsided one.

Our modern technological civilisation disregards all such traditional wisdom in addition to disregarding the governing principle that we should tread lightly on the earth, which underlies all environmental law (I have expanded on these aspects in *Tread Lightly on the Earth: Religion, the Environment and the Human Future*, Stamford Lake, 2010).

It is not only traditional wisdom we disregard. We disregard also the wisdom of the great religions of the world, which are likewise united in their concern for the people of the future. Jesus Christ warned that it would be better for those who place obstacles in the way of children to have a millstone around their neck and to be drowned in the ocean. The Koran states that the true followers of the Almighty are those who tread lightly on the earth. Buddhism teaches that not even a sovereign is the owner of land, but only a trustee, and Hinduism prescribes detailed duties lying on the sovereign to look after every department of environmental protection.

Judaism likewise, in numerous teachings, elevates protection of the environment to the level of a primary duty.

All these are aspects which must necessarily engage the attention of ministers charged with care of the environment, in an age when the environment is being threatened as never before during the hundreds of thousands of years of humanity's existence on the planet.

I urge on you, as custodians of our environment, the need for immediate action to halt the construction of new reactors, explore alternative energy systems and phase out the existing ones. Populations throughout the world need to be alerted to the dangers we are facing. The one-way flow of information on the benefits of nuclear reactors needs to be reversed.

Failure to take these steps will result in the commission of crimes against future generations and a gross betrayal of the trust which we owe to our children and our children's children. You are in a position to play a leadership role in this crisis. This is an appeal to you, as those primarily responsible for the care of our planet, to do all within your power to avert the catastrophes that loom ahead.

Time is running out. Please act now.