

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

UNITED NATIONS SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE ON THE EFFECTS OF ATOMIC RADIATION
(UNSCEAR)

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Subject: Your email dated 24 October 2013, titled “Japanese civil society requests that the reports of the United Nations Scientific Committee on Fukushima be revised”

Dear Ms. Ito,

Please accept my sincere gratitude on behalf of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR) for contacting its secretariat and sharing your concerns regarding “The Report of the 60th session of UNSCEAR to the General Assembly” with us.

I would like to first recognize and commend the important work done by civil society, and the role of organizations such as yours in raising awareness on issues that touch the rights and concerns of so many.

With this letter, I hope that we could work towards reaching an understanding with you on UNSCEAR’s role and position, as well as respond to some of the issues raised by you.

At the very outset, I would like to recapitulate our mandate. UNSCEAR is a scientific committee of the United Nations and, as is very clearly spelt out in the name, our focus is on the science. UNSCEAR is thus not an international organization, such as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) or the World Health Organization (WHO), but a Committee of 27 Member States which has a mandate to make scientific reports to the General Assembly on the levels and effects of exposure to ionizing radiation. The Committee has been commended over the years for fulfilling its mandate with scientific authority and independence of judgement. The independent role of UNSCEAR means that it does not owe allegiance to any country, organization, commercial enterprise or lobby – thus we are not pro- or anti-nuclear, just experts in our specialized field¹. As you may know, the secretariat of UNSCEAR is administered by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

Delegations to the Committee provided over 80 scientific experts to work on the Report titled “Levels and effects of radiation exposure due to the nuclear accident after the 2011 great east-Japan earthquake and tsunami.” All of them have formally declared any potential conflict of interest. This means that they acted in their professional capacity, not as representatives of their own Governments or other organizations. Their travel to relevant meetings in Vienna or Japan were paid for by voluntary contributions or contributions in kind from Member States.

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¹ UNSCEAR itself has no formal agreements with the IAEA or the WHO, though there are general relationship agreements between those two organizations and the United Nations, established in 1957 and 1948 respectively.

I have carefully reviewed the concerns that you raised in your email dated 24 October 2013 and have two principal responses.

(1) Firstly, my overall understanding is that many of the concerns that you have raised relate specifically to the very important aspect of human rights, and protection policy. However, the Committee's mandate and competence is limited to scientific evaluation and does not extend beyond that to making recommendations on these other issues. It would thus not be appropriate to revise the scientific assessment to address protection criteria or policy, or to specifically reflect a human rights perspective. Within the United Nations, that is a matter for the Human Rights Council – and as you are aware, the issue has been taken up already by Mr. Anand Grover, UN Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health.²

This should not be taken to mean that the scientists involved do not appreciate the human rights elements of their work, but rather that it would not be appropriate that they discuss such matters, because they are not the people in the UN system either granted the authority, or having the necessary competence. In this regard, the scope of the Committee's assessment is clearly spelt out in the Report and its scientific annex that is yet to be published.

(2) Secondly, many of your concerns are based on the findings included in “The Report of the 60th session of UNSCEAR to the General Assembly”³, which is a summary report of the session and is not intended to go into great details. The scientific annex of the Report “Levels and effects of radiation exposure due to the nuclear accident after the 2011 great east-Japan earthquake and tsunami” will address many of your comments on the findings included in the Report of the 60th session of UNSCEAR to the General Assembly. When this is published and available to the wider public, I would welcome the opportunity to discuss and explain the science behind our conclusions.

I realize that this letter may fall short of the level of detailed response you might expect. However, at this time, I would hesitate to get into a point-by-point explanation of some of the scientific aspects raised by you, but kindly request your patience to wait until the report has been issued.

Yours sincerely,



Carl-Magnus Larsson, Chair
United Nations Scientific Committee
on the Effects of Atomic Radiation

² A/HRC/23/41/Add.3

³ A/68/46