

ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL ATOMIC ENERGY AGENCY

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I wish to express my appreciation for the invitation to participate in this conference which was extended by the American Medical Association to the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Dr. Hans Blix. I represent him here; I am also here in my capacity as a physician responsible for the medical and biological aspects of radiation overexposures.

It is appropriate that I present my remarks at the end of this meeting. I am privileged to hear what was reported by the other speakers and can offer a summary and draw some conclusions from an international vantage point. I also hope I can contribute some constructive, concrete proposals for the future. I am aware that you may hear some unpleasant truths about physicians and their lack of involvement in planning for radiation emergencies. I too am a physician and I take my share of responsibility. I am also aware of the small number of knowledgeable physicians in this country who are true apostles preaching in the desert. This meeting will give them better visibility.

RESPONSE TO CHERNOBYL

What has been said in these two and a half days is valid for all nuclear energy and radiological emergencies--present, past, and future. But it is unavoidable that we make reference primarily to the most recent and serious one, Chernobyl. Reconstruction of the Chernobyl accident is a matter for specialists. I am no specialist in reactor technology and criticality accidents. The Soviets presented an excellent report in Vienna in August 1986, and IAEA produced in record time a document (Summary Report on the Post Accident Review Meeting on the Chernobyl Accident, Safety Series No. 75-INSAG-1) that contains a report on the emergency with observations, comments, and interpretations by international experts. Included is a list of recommendations for follow-up activities for the IAEA and other international organizations.

Chernobyl was a test, not only in the trivial sense that Soviet scientists were conducting an experiment at Unit 4, which failed, but also in the sense that it was a test for society. It has revealed how much improvisation, incompetence, arrogance, exhibitionism, protagonism, conflicting situations, disinformation or partisan use of information, and hysteria is intrinsic in our societal structure and ready to explode. Chernobyl has detonated this social bomb and all of these components, plus a touch of soap opera here and there, have come to light.

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