

# How the UN works:

“know thine enemy” or at least who it is.

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## **Some important properties of the United Nations**

It has two “arms” under which its member organisations and agencies fall:

1. Security Council (includes the IAEA)
2. Economic and Social Council (includes WHO)

**The organisations and agencies under the first are more influential and powerful than those falling under the second.**

UN organizations and agencies are **OWNED** by their Member States; they pay for them with your money – taxes.

The UN views itself as a **family** and each organisation and agency sees itself as having a loyalty to that family.

All organisations and agencies with overlapping responsibilities have bilateral agreements; in the WHO they are incorporated into what are called the **BASIC DOCUMENTS** – almost a bible.

There is therefore an agreement between IAEA and WHO. It covers much more than issues to do with nuclear power. Many of the aspects are important for WHO.

**Nuclear power** is the most important area where there are problems and it is important to analyse carefully exactly what those problems are.

WHO has the remit to **PROTECT public health** and ensure quality in health care – their “health for all” policy:

IAEA has the remit to ensure that nuclear technology is used safely because they have the mandate to **PROMOTE the peaceful use of atomic energy**:

As radiation is a very powerful tool in diagnosing and treating disease the two organisations could be seen as working in harmony, each supporting the other.

The problem arises when the nuclear technology is **NUCLEAR POWER**.

## Clearly there are benefits of the two organisations working together:

Take radio-therapeutic equipment - charged particle generators - delivered to less well developed countries: who looks after the interests of the operators and the patients, who ensures that the equipment is not misused? Expertise in dosimetry is essential – who should provide that – IAEA or WHO?

Take small radioactive sources for treatment and diagnosis, again in the less well developed world: who should advise on the correct storage, use and disposal of redundant sources? – they are used for medical purposes but should WHO have the sole responsibility for them?

It is for these areas that IAEA has the mandate – the safe use of the technology they promote and from which WHO's mandate is undeniably advanced – and for which the WHO has little or no expertise.

## Now to NUCLEAR POWER:

IAEA claim, disingenuously, that they do not promote nuclear power but only assist where it is wanted **and ensure that use is not being made use of the technology to produce weapons.** This latter point is why they fall under the Security Council arm of the UN.

I say “disingenuously” because the kind of people that are attracted to work in IAEA are pro-nuclear in outlook and that inevitably skews the views of the organisation as a whole, without there being any tangible indication.

We now need to take a short digression to discuss the brain:

For evolutionary reasons the brain handles “memory” in terms of **structure** rather than **function**. **Brains are hard-wired structures rather than soft-ware.**

If something useful is discovered then survival is enhanced by “**wiring it into the system**” so it does not get lost or rather FORGOTTEN.

In the 1950s nuclear energy was seen as the answer to just about everything; energy would be so cheap in the coming golden nuclear age we would not need to meter it (that was the case in the FSSU). A whole generation was sold the belief and for some it is hard-wired into their brains and it seems cannot be changed.

Of course this was over-sell and that was deliberate because some UN Member States wanted to develop nuclear weapons and needed Pu. In the UK, despite the denials at the time, it subsequently transpired that the civil nuclear programme was run to generate Pu and now the UK has 100 tons of the stuff and wants to incorporate into nuclear fuel (MOX fuel) to get rid of it. (This resulted in **Generation A**, the pro-nuclear generation)

In 1979 and 1986 we had two major and alarming nuclear accidents and a generation of people who sincerely (and rationally) believe that nuclear power is too dangerous (**Generation B**). Survival was at stake.

As a consequence nuclear power went into decline almost globally and numbers of competent nuclear engineers and physicists declined as the employment prospects were not there – nuclear became a sunset industry. That I believe has had its impact at Fukushima in the past few weeks.

Around 2000 the political importance of **global climate change** was ascendant and nuclear power (according to Generation A) was the answer; **not any longer cheap energy but carbon low energy**. By downplaying the consequences of the two accidents that view has achieved considerable traction and a renaissance of NP is (or was) envisaged, even converting some of **generation B** over to the **generation A** standpoint, most notably Mombiot and Lovelock.

Thus today we have two sides to the argument of the utility of nuclear but no common ground between them – each thinks the other's ideas are irrational or ridiculous.

There was however an enlightening event around 1980. At that time the future of nuclear power was going to be in “fast breeder reactors”. These did not require enriched U but could burn Pu and the reactor would “breed” fuel from natural U.

In about 1980 Gian-Carlo Pinchera, an Italian nuclear physicist, showed that fast reactors were inherently unsafe. That single conference paper led to the almost total abandonment of the fast breeder programme. I met Pinchera in the early 1990s and he warned “beware the dying kick of the nuclear advocates.”

This is what we see today but maybe they are not dying!

Fukushima: it is too early to see what impact this accident will have on the politics of nuclear power.

The point in this digression is to explain why we have the situation we face between WHO and IAEA today:

**We have two resolutely opposed views, one predominantly in one camp and the other in the other camp.**



## How do UN agencies work?

I will start at the bottom (with the technical people) except to remind you of one thing:

**The Member States pay for the UN and therefore expect to get what they want.**

I will use the example of the preparation of the Guidelines for Iodine Prophylaxis commenced as a joint project at the **technical level** with Malcolm Crick of the IAEA and two colleagues recruited by the WHO/EURO, Wendla Paile and Leif Blomqvist in 1997.

By mid 1998 first draft of the Guidelines was circulating between IAEA and WHO at the **management level**.

Although there had been a clear agreement between the two organisations at the management level and the work had taken place openly the IAEA withdrew at that stage strongly advising that the whole issue should either be dropped or revised. The issue was the proposal to lower the action level for implementation from **100mGy** to **10mGy** dose to the thyroid's of children.

In 1999 EURO convinced WHO/Geneva that WHO should go ahead with publication.

IAEA responded by repeatedly referring to the Guidelines as **draft** and for consultation only. This meant that they were treated with suspicion by the MS and **mostly not implemented by the Member States**.

**According to IAEA many of their Member States regarded the Guidelines as “scientifically flawed” in relation to the new action level.**

WHO/Geneva then refused to defend the Guidelines but EURO maintained its position.

The matter was resolved in 2001 with a technical meeting in Vienna at which the so called scientific flaws were discussed over 4 days.

**It finally emerged that France had objected on the grounds of cost and IAEA was acting in their interests.**

Political level (Member States) put pressure on IAEA

France

Managerial level of IAEA refuses to endorse the report and refuses to endorse the report but WHO publishes Guidelines in 1999 but IAEA describes them as “DRAFT” and WHO Geneva agrees.

Abel Gonzales of the IAEA; Richard Helmer, Michael Repacholi and Ann Kern of WHO

Joint WHO/IAEA technical collaboration to produce Guidelines for iodine prophylaxis (1997/99)

Malcolm Crick from IAEA and 2 consultants, Wendla Paile and Leif Blomqvist.

**The agreement between WHO and IAEA did not enter this matter at all: IAEA acted on the behalf of one of their Member States.**

**What is needed now is a strategy for learning the full public health impact of the accident. Only when it can be shown that there is damage to health beyond what is generally accepted by governments will it be possible to have a proper debate on the nuclear issues, weapons as well as power, because the two are linked.**

For the past two years a group funded by the European Union has been reviewing the health research priorities.

The “Agenda for Research on Chernobyl Health” (ARCH) project is now completed and the “strategic research agenda” is published (<http://arch.iarc.fr>).

**ARCH recommends the European Union to collaborate with the three affected countries to fund a Life Span Study (LSS) based on some existing study cohorts much along the lines of the studies on the survivors of the atomic bombings in Japan.**

**Support at the political level is required to persuade the EU to act. This is now the priority and it needs pressure from interested NGOs like IPPNW to be directed at the EU.**

**I think we can be confident that the IAEA will not do this study and even if WHO did IAEA could interfere.**