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South Africa

Learn from Japan- say no to nuclear power in South Africa

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The unfolding developments in Japan send a strong message to developing countries, in particular, South Africa, not to include nuclear power plants in its future energy plans. More nuclear power must not be included in the Integrated Resource Plan for Electricity (IRP2010). South Africa and Africa as a whole have the best sun in the world to produce solar energy. In addition, South Africa has excellent conditions for developing wind power on a large scale.

The South African government should therefore abandon nuclear power. There is no compelling justification to subject the country to the risks made so agonizingly clear in Japan. In addition, the time has come for starting the decommissioning of the 27 year old Koeberg nuclear power plant. This French power plant was built under apartheid, it is clearly at the end of its life span and it is the only nuclear power station on the entire African continent.

The earthquake in Japan has of course triggered yet more debate over the world future of nuclear power. Tens of thousands of people took to the streets of Stuttgart, Germany, last weekend to protest against plans to extend the life of 17 German nuclear plants for an average 12 extra years. There are clear indications that the rest of the world community objects to the continuation of nuclear power generation in their countries.

Opposition is also strong in South Africa. In the last Department of Energy /Nersa Public Hearings on Integrated Resource Plan (IRP2010) the largest forum of civil society in South Africa ? the broad South African Energy Caucus ? vehemently opposed the inclusion of nuclear in the IRP2. Sadly, during the public hearings senior government officials categorically committed South Africa to nuclear power. In the Engineering News 21 May 2010 DoE's Director General, Nelisiwe Magubane, is quoted as saying: "The nuclear industry is one of the most exciting fields and much needed industry expansion is necessary in the country. However, the importance of industry involvement in expanding South Africa's nuclear programme cannot be overemphasised, since it is industry that will be called upon to develop and deliver in the near future".

This government's stubborn commitment to the inclusion of nuclear power in our electricity mix is alarming.

AIDC's concern is further exacerbated by the recent visit of the President of South Africa, Mr Jacob Zuma to France. Some of agreements signed included the New Partnership Framework Document for 2011 to 2013. France derives over 75% of its electricity from nuclear energy. Reactors and fuel products and services are major French export products

South Africa is, however, not in the world to be a dumping ground for a technology that others are about to abandon. South Africa has already wasted over R10 billion on the pebble bed reactor. Secure Renewable Energy is not only a formidable alternative to nuclear power, it is the only alternative. That an unpredictable natural disaster in Japan is being made even worse by a man-made nuclear disaster makes this blatantly clear.

The COP 17 meeting in Durban on climate change in December will be the next chance for world leaders to undo their mistakes by agreeing on safe and sustainable options.

[<http://www.aidc.org.za/>]

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