



Media centre

WHO Director-General meets with advocates for people affected by radiation

Note for the media

4 May 2011 - WHO Director-General Dr Margaret Chan met with representatives of the group "Independent WHO" today to listen to their concerns and discuss common interests on radiation and health.

"Independent WHO" is a civil society group advocating for people who have been affected by radiation exposure as a result of the nuclear accident at Chernobyl.

Dr Chan stressed that the mandate of WHO is to protect the health of people and the Organization works independently to fulfill this role while cooperating with other organizations in the UN system and other partners. She underlined that WHO takes its mandate to protect and advocate for the health of populations all over the world very seriously and does not compromise with the integrity of its functions.

In answer to their concerns, Dr Chan explained the following.

- WHO develops guidelines and standards, and although the Organization can advocate for Member States to follow them, WHO cannot take the place of a national government and implement standards in a country or force a Government to do so.
- WHO's responsibilities in these situations are mandated primarily by the International Health Regulations.
- Otherwise, WHO cooperates with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) on issues of common concern, in a spirit of mutual respect and independence in the light of their respective mandates.
- WHO works closely with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to ensure food contaminated with radiation does not come to countries and will continue in that role;
- WHO agrees in principle that research should continue on the health effects of radiation and the research should not be influenced by industry. WHO will look into why the proceedings of a 2001 meeting on radiation and health were not published.

The Director-General clarified that the legal basis for WHO's cooperation with the IAEA lies in the 1959 agreement between the two agencies, the two international conventions adopted in 1986 after the Chernobyl accident, and the International Health Regulations (2005). Their application allow a balance between cooperation and coordination without interfering with the independent pursuit by WHO of its public health mandate.

Six representatives of the Independent WHO group met with the Director-General for more than two hours. Dr Chan praised the representatives for the group's passion and persistence and promised to keep the lines of dialogue open on the issues within WHO's area of jurisdiction.

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