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MEDIA RELEASE:

MEDICAL SPECIALISTS URGE FULL INFORMATION ON JAPAN HEALTH RISKS

Specialists from the Medical Association for Prevention of War today lamented the lack of accurate information about the continuing nuclear crisis in Japan. It is deeply concerning that our government has now advised that Australian citizens should evacuate 80 km from Fukushima, having only yesterday reassured Australians that the 30km Japanese evacuation zone was adequate. '

'We call on the Australian Government to seek and distribute comprehensive information from Japanese authorities about radiation releases from the ailing Fukushima reactors,' said MAPW President Dr Bill Williams.

'We are gravely concerned for those emergency workers on-site at Fukushima, and the hundreds of thousands of desperate people now sheltering or fleeing from radioactive fallout. Without accurate data, it is impossible to accurately assess risk levels.

MAPW notes that the lack of detailed data has already led to mischievous claims from industry representatives that people are at no risk. Equally disturbing has been the trend in some official statements trivialising the risks associated with lower level exposures.

'The current scientific understanding of the health risks from ionising radiation exposures are based on decades of research', said Dr Williams. 'The worldwide expert consensus conforms with the so-called 'Linear No Threshold' model: this means there is no safe dose of ionising radiation.'

While it is essential that a calm and rational approach is adopted in advising the public, it is equally important not to give false assurance or to trivialise the dangers. Because of the chromosomal disruption caused by the radioactive matter being released from the damaged reactors and spent fuel ponds, inhalation or ingestion can lead – even at low doses – to cancers. This is particularly so for children, babies and of course developing embryos. Many of the cancers caused by radioactive fallout from the Chernobyl accident were due to relatively low levels of radiation in the form of ingested I-131 in children drinking milk from cows which ate contaminated grass.

'We hope and pray that the Japanese emergency response averts the danger of larger releases over the coming days,' said Dr Williams, 'but the environment has already been contaminated, and people will be at risk of exposure to radioactive agents like iodine-131 and caesium-137 for many years to come.'

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Call MAPW Executive Officer Nancy Atkin, 03 9023 1958 or 0431 475 465 for further contacts.

Other MAPW members available for expert comment are Dr Peter Karamoskos, nuclear radiologist; Dr Sue Wareham OAM; and Associate Professor Tilman Ruff.

For more resources and speaker profiles see our website www.mapw.org.au



Australian affiliate of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW)