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Letter to Ségolène Royal and Marisol Touraine

Shame on You, Ministers of the Republic...

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Publication date: Saturday 1 October 2016

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Madame Ségolène Royal

Minister of the Environment, Energy and the Sea, responsible for international negotiations on climate

Madame Marisol Touraine

Minister of Social Affairs and Health

Shame on you, Ministers of the Republic, if you sign in its current form the Decree n°2017-xxxx du xx/01/2017 « concerning health protection against the dangers resulting from exposure to ionizing radiation and the security of ionizing radiation sources from acts of malevolence ».

This decree, intended to answer an EU request, needs to be signed by January 2017 by the Prime minister "after receipt of a report from the Minister of the Environment, Energy and the Sea, responsible for international negotiations on climate". It modifies the Public Health code - gravely and horribly!

Its length (84 pages) and its technicality make it practically unreadable by the ordinary citizen. To understand something of it, one needs at least to use the light shed by CRIIRAD, [the independent radiation laboratory in Valence]. The draft decree is about as opaque as a certain EU constitution proposal put to the public a decade ago and rejected. It arguably deserves the same fate.

What it decrees is a series of norms which users of nuclear technologies of all kinds will need to observe in order to continue their joyous activities. The nicest of these norms aim to limit - but not suppress - the adverse impact of radon gas in certain public buildings. But beyond these measures intended to protect the population, the heart of the decree is hidden in chapter 1, section 4, entitled: "Management of Radiological Emergencies". Would you be aware of that, dear ministers?

Here are the three key lines:

« Art. R. 1333-55. - I. - To apply the principle of optimization stated in L. 1333-3, a reference level is set of 100 mSv [milliSievert] as effective dose received during the radiological emergency, including all types of explosion »
(draft decree, p. 24.) In passing let us admire the impenetrability of the jargon.

Concretely, the « radiological emergencies » in question here are the effects of a major accident such as occurred at Chernobyl or Fukushima, occurring in one or several nuclear reactors, as a result of human error, material failure, an extreme natural event, an attack or an « act of malevolence ». Or resulting from an atomic explosion.

Thus this decree prepares us for the catastrophe. How? By decreeing that the average dose of exposure to radiation deemed to be acceptable by the administration in the first weeks of the emergency will be 100 times higher than the maximum dose of annual exposure (1mSv) acceptable for a person at normal times. A hundred times, that's it. If the people exposed don't in fact withstand that level and actually die, that's not the administration's problem.

And yet, dear ministers, one might have thought that there would be problems there for a Minister of the Environment and a Minister of Health. There's an anomaly somewhere.

And that's not the end of it. When the situation ceases to be an "emergency" yet people continue to be exposed to contamination or irradiation, the "reference dose" they will reluctantly benefit from (in no way a limiting dose, as CRIIRAD explains) will remain 20 times higher than the current "maximum dose" (which must not be exceeded).

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That's what it says:

« Art. R. 1333-67. - To apply L. 1333-3, the reference level is fixed at 20 mSv as effective dose for all persons exposed to those situations over a year so as to define the initial strategy for the management of polluted zones. »
(draft decree, p. 28)

So the people unfortunate enough to be in the initial explosion zone and to suffer 100 times more ionizing radiation than a normal human being can tolerate will be able to continue, if they are in a "polluted zone" to withstand 20 times more for a year (what happens later is over to the local authorities).

Obviously the "zones" in question are not predictable and have no boundary other than France's national borders, which are well known to block any possible transit of radioactivity.

But how, dear ministers, do you explain that out of the range proposed by the EU circular: from 20 to 100 mSv in "emergencies", then from 1 à 20 mSv in the subsequent year, France has chosen to maximal "reference doses"?

The choice is criminal. It condemns millions of people to live and die in a contaminated zone. If you have the heart to defend health and the environment, even if the unacceptable prospect of a nuclear catastrophe is accepted, then you needed to choose the lowest norm not the highest. Perhaps you are in the pay of the nuclear lobby?

If you don't want to be suspected of that, you have two options: either reject this draft decree and insist on the closure of all the reactors that justify its existence, or else co-sign it and accept the accusation that you are preparing a crime against humanity on the day when the catastrophe arrives, the catastrophe that will make the contaminated blood scandal seem a tiny trifle.

If you fail to persuade the government to adopt a plan for closing the reactors, you could always resign.

Yours respectfully,

Jean-Marie Matagne, Ph.D
Président de l'Action des Citoyens pour le Désarmement Nucléaire (ACDN)