

A STATEMENT

from Clergy, Religious and Laity Concerned About Indian Point

to

THE NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

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Note: Clergy, Religious and Laity Concerned About Indian Point is an organization of religious leaders from Rockland, Westchester and Putnam Counties in the State of New York.

On April 26, 1983, Clergy, Religious and Laity Concerned About Indian Point held an alternate hearing on Indian Point at the White Plains Library, open to all.

This initiative reflected a deepening conviction that the question of Indian Point's continued operation is one of profound seriousness. Its implications extend to the continued safety and well-being of life as we know it in the greater metropolitan area.

This unprecedented move was intended as a statement by members of the religious communities in this area rejecting the premise of far-removed officials that they alone are qualified to decide the fate of masses of citizens. Their actions have fostered a sense of powerlessness, frustration, and manipulated passivity.

A question so profound deserves the widest possible examination. We hoped to provide a forum for facets of the truth that might otherwise have been stifled. Historically official studies regarding Indian Point have been severely narrowed in scope and citizen input into the official decision-making process has been discouraged and impeded every step of the way. Events surrounding evacuation planning and the safety hearings bear this out.

The emergency evacuation plans were developed with no meaningful input from local officials, transportation officers, emergency workers, teachers, medical personnel, bus drivers, etc. --all who would be directly involved in the evacuation process. The Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) most recent evaluation has narrowed its objections to only two deficiencies, downgrading or ignoring many others which would just as seriously prevent successful evacuation.

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The Atomic and Safety Licensing Board (ASLB) severely curtailed the scope of its hearing. These were almost terminated last summer due to the Nuclear Regulatory Agency's (NRC) attempts to rule out further testimony by citizen groups. Judge Carter resigned as chairman of the hearings because it offended his "basic sense of fairness."

The immediate catalyst for the alternate hearings run by Clergy, Religious and Laity Concerned About Indian Point was the manner in which the testimony of dozens of local citizens from all walks of life was summarily and brusquely dismissed by the ASLB judges on technical legal grounds.

One critical element that theologians point out about the decision-making process itself is hubris, over-reaching human pride, the tendency to do whatever is necessary to get our own way, to play god, to save face. Such pride leads scientists to suppress unwelcome data; it leads workers to cover-up mistakes and managers to leave out the bad news in their stockholder reports. It caused government officials to ignore those who have given them the authority of government.

In reaching a position on Indian Point, the problem of hubris must not be forgotten if each community involved is to make the best decision it can. It must face the truth squarely, putting aside any cover up or attempt to twist the data. The best safeguard against such distortion is to make sure that all the facts are available. "The truth shall set you free."

From a theological standpoint, life is an elaborately interwoven organic unity. There is always inter-relatedness and inter-dependence. A decision about Indian Point is not just a political decision, or a scientific one. It is also a business decision, an environmental decision, a health decision. As it touches the very question of life itself, the quality of life, and the manner in which we manage the works of creation, it becomes a moral decision as well.

The alternate hearing was intended to avoid being restrictive and legalistic, providing instead a climate conducive to allowing people to affirm the deepest, yet often more intangible values that shape life at its best.

The hearing, which ran from 9:00 am to 9:00 pm, was chaired by members of Clergy, Religious and Laity Concerned About Indian Point. Participants included both average citizens, lay and religious, and distinguished individuals. Rockland and Westchester county legislators spoke, as did Episcopal Bishop Moore of the New York diocese.

Several key messages emerged during the course of the proceeding.

1. The common citizens reject the notion that their "expertise" is irrelevant. This was most evident regarding the evacuation plans. There is absolutely no evidence of credence by the average person (Indian Point supporters and opponents alike) that a real-life evacuation can be accomplished.

Evacuation planning was condemned in testimony as a lie, a palliative, a deception, a paper plan, a sham. The carefully rehearsed, skeletal drills were seen as tests of little more than sirens and inadequate communication systems. It was noted that the utilities promise evacuation in 8 to 10 hours--unrealistic in a worst case situation and far short of the speed a fast-developing accident might necessitate. Local officials have informally admitted that sheltering would be their only alternative under such circumstances and have considered designating church basements for sheltering. The arbitrary ten-mile limit was repeatedly condemned, as was the glossing over of inadequate roads, both busing procedures for Westchester school children, and the desperately inadequate health care capability in our area.

2. Remarks by many witnesses reflected a lack of confidence in the constant reassurances of the utilities about the very low probability of an accident ever occurring. Recurring accidents, malfunctions, and repairs that cause constant shutdowns at Indian Point are reminders that major accidents have occurred and can again. Scientists and engineers, government officials, and technical studies, including NRC studies, have established how catastrophic such an accident could be at this site.

3. The gravity of such an event is so enormous that it places this problem into a unique category. That is why people refuse to allow evacuation to be reduced to a paper exercise. For many such tremendous risks are close to impossible to justify.

Bishop Moore stated: "Given the plant and its history; given the area for evacuation; given the persons and values at risk in the continued operation of the plant; I for one feel I would be derelict in my duty if I did not urge the NRC to shut down Indian Point."

Clergy, Religious and Laity Concerned About Indian Point espouse and support of the following principles by religious communities and bodies:

1. The value of human life is the supreme value and should be given the highest consideration in weighing the future of Indian Point.

2. Humankind has been placed on this earth as a steward of God's creation. The Hudson River Valley is an irreplaceable and unique world treasure which economic profits no matter how great cannot justify putting at serious risk of longterm radiological contamination.

3. Because a responsive government in a democracy depends on active involvement of its citizens and because there are serious moral considerations in this matter, all men of good faith, and especially members of religious communities and their leaders, should seriously evaluate this question in the light of sound moral principles.

4. There should be an immediate temporary shutdown of Indian Point II and III and they should only be allowed to reopen if and when the following conditions have been met:

a. A realistic, workable evacuation plan shall be developed and fully tested--one which is free of all serious deficiencies, including those now being ignored by FEMA;

b. Both reactors shall meet all the same upgraded standards of safety, design, and equipment that are currently required of new plants for licensing and operation;

c. All of the several dozen generic safety problems already identified by the NRC shall have been tested and resolved in both reactors;

d. The results of the ASLB hearing shall be compiled and published, and all significant safety problems identified in them shall be resolved.

e. A safe disposition of all nuclear waste products of the plants shall be found.