



Australian Government
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade



The Japan Nuclear Crisis: International Responses

A Public Lecture presented by Professor Kenneth Chern
East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Murdoch University

The level-9 earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear crisis that have overwhelmed Japan since mid-March have also prompted renewed anxiety about nuclear power around the world. Although Tokyo Electric Power and Japan's regulatory body, the Nuclear Industrial Safety Agency, have been correctly faulted for lax safety standards and post-tsunami information mismanagement, the truth is that Japan was unlucky: nuclear plants operating in any nation could be threatened by human error, natural disaster, sabotage, or theft of nuclear materials. The Japanese disaster has prompted reviews of nuclear power safety in China, India, several European countries, the United States, and elsewhere. However, experts like Matthew Bunn of Harvard call for urgent reviews by independent international teams of risk reduction – including against terrorist threats – in all countries running nuclear plants.

For the longer term, experts also envision global projects like fuel banks and binding safety-standard agreements to attenuate risks such as waste leakage into water systems and diversion of materials to weapons programs. Governments also need to balance nuclear power development with sweeter incentives for corporate research and development in solar, wind, wave and geothermal energy, since we will not know how much nuclear power the world can generate until nuclear costs and benefits are reassessed and incorporated into national policies. Trans-national measures to cope with issues from seismic safety to safe nuclear waste disposal and non-proliferation will be vital to persuade citizens and governments that nuclear power is safe, secure and cost-effective enough to take on much of the energy load now shouldered by fossil fuels and protect the environment.

Wednesday 18th May 2011

12:30 pm

8th Floor Conference Room, Exchange Plaza

All Welcome

Professor Chern has returned to academia as Professorial Research Fellow at Murdoch University following a 27-year career in the US Foreign Service. He served as US Consul General in Perth, as Deputy Consul General in Ho Chi Minh City, and as Deputy Director of the Office of Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, and Singapore Affairs at the US Department of State. Professor Chern was also posted to Beijing, Taipei, Hong Kong, Manila, and Cebu; and to the State Department's China Desk, Japan Desk, and Australia/New Zealand Desk. Serving at the White House as Director of Asian Affairs at the National Security Council, he helped to organise the first APEC leaders meeting hosted by President Bill Clinton in Seattle.

Professor Chern holds a PhD in the history of US-East Asian relations from the University of Chicago. Before joining government, he taught for two years at the University of Rochester and for ten years at the University of Hong Kong. He has published a book, numerous scholarly articles and op-eds on U.S.-East Asian relations, and researched and presented a seven-week television series on 20th Century China.

No charge for attendance but RSVP required by 14th May to Tamara Dent, Asia Research Centre at t.dent@murdoch.edu.au