

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

Zurich / Tokyo, 8 August 2013

Green Cross Study Trip to Japan, 4 -11 August 2013

### **Green Cross Switzerland Calls for Worldwide Withdrawal from Power Generation by Nuclear Power Plants**

As an environmental organisation that has focused on the long-term consequences of the Chernobyl reactor disaster for almost two decades, Green Cross Switzerland is profoundly concerned about the extent of land contaminated by radioactivity in Japan in the wake of the Fukushima reactor accident on 11 March 2011. Like Chernobyl, this tragic event in Japan shows that there is no such thing as "zero risk". Where nuclear power is involved, an accident has far-reaching consequences that will last centuries – both for the economy, and for society in the affected region. Nuclear power plants also represent an economic cluster risk on account of the vast quantities of energy that they produce.

#### *Interventions undertaken and measures implemented in the contaminated regions of Fukushima*

Since the reactor accident at Fukushima, eight per cent of Japan's land area has been contaminated by radioactivity, and 160,000 people have been evacuated or moved into emergency accommodation. The social and medical care programme – designed to help people living in the contaminated regions to help themselves – has been developed since spring 2011. Based on experience gained and assistance given in the Chernobyl region, Green Cross Switzerland focuses in the initial phase on imparting basic knowledge about dealing with radiation exposure and radioactively contaminated food, by setting up family clubs and organising summer camps for children and young people; in the second phase, these will be developed into therapy camps offering medical care and psychological support. To anchor the camps more effectively in the local context, they take place in uncontaminated areas of Japan's natural environment. On this basis, healthy nutrition helps children and young people to strengthen their immune systems during their four-week stay, and their radioactive contamination levels can be reduced by 30 to 80 per cent.

Uncertainty often causes affected individuals to behave incorrectly, or to exercise insufficient – or excessive – caution. Maria Vitagliano, Director of the International Social and Medical Care Programme, emphasises: "I can understand every mother who will not allow her children to play outside on contaminated ground, or who is concerned about them swimming in lakes and rivers. But exercise combined with the right food – for example, citrus fruits with pectin that binds strontium and caesium 137 – are highly important factors as regards lowering radioactive contamination levels in children's bodies." Another crucial aspect is imparting knowledge about the cultivation and preparation of garden-grown fruit and vegetables in contaminated areas. The Green Cross study trip will include a visit to the city of Tomioka, which since April 2013 has been divided into three zones based on contamination by the annual radiation dose: zone 3, with more than 50 millisievert, zone 2: between 20 and 50 millisievert, and zone 1 with less than 20 millisievert. Radiobiologist Dr Marina Khvostova will take on-site measurements to obtain more data about the effective extent of radioactive contamination in the various affected zones. This data will be evaluated and used for guideline recommendations on cultivating crops, among other purposes.

#### *Call to withdraw from nuclear energy*

The radioactive contamination unleashed by the Chernobyl and Fukushima reactor disasters will persist for centuries to come, affecting millions of people. In view of these facts, therefore, Green Cross Switzerland is calling for worldwide withdrawal from nuclear energy. Given the global impact of climate change and nuclear disasters, it is absolutely essential for

the international community to work together in order to develop and utilise renewable energy, to boost energy efficiency and to implement a controlled withdrawal from nuclear power throughout the world. According to Nathalie Gysi, Executive Director of Green Cross Switzerland, what is needed is a new energy policy that can meet society's needs without such a negative impact on the prospects of life for millions of people and for future generations. "Lessons must be learned, and the conversion of energy supplies to renewable energy sources and energy efficiency must be driven ahead in every respect – to the benefit of the climate, the environment and the economy, and to ensure reliable supplies," Ms Gysi stresses.

Through its social and medical and legacy of the Cold War programme, Green Cross Switzerland is continuing to provide urgently needed medical, social and technical support in areas of the world where serious nuclear disasters have already occurred (Chernobyl, Mayak, Fukushima, and the Kyrgyzstan uranium mines). Because of its project experience and specialist expertise in this field, the environmental organisation is able to offer safe and politically viable technical solutions – for people and the environment – in order to dismantle decommissioned nuclear power plants, and to provide assistance and support with the transport of nuclear materials and the storage of radioactive waste.

Green Cross Switzerland advocates measures to deal with the consequential damage caused by industrial and military disasters, and to implement the remediation of contamination dating back to the cold war era. The focus is on improving the quality of life for people affected by chemical, radioactive and other types of contamination, and on encouraging sustainable development in a spirit of cooperation rather than confrontation. This environmental organisation has the Zewo seal of approval (awarded to non-profit organisations that manage the funds entrusted to them in a conscientious manner), and its objectives are supported by the Green Cross Parliamentary Group. This is a cross-party grouping of 32 Council of States members and 104 National Council members.

Green Cross International (GCI), founded by Mikhail Gorbachev, is an independent charitable non-governmental organisation that represents its interests at the highest level and carries out local projects in order to tackle the interlinked global challenges of safety and security, combating poverty and the destruction of the environment. Headquartered in Geneva, GCI maintains a growing network of national organisations in over 30 countries.

*For further information, please contact Nathalie Gysi, Executive Director, Green Cross Switzerland, mobile phone: +41 79 620 18 14.*