

Plutonium, Ethics and the Big Picture: Rethinking "Security" in Human and Ecological Terms

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She is a leading voice for nuclear weapons abolition, speaking at events across North America, Europe, and Asia. Locally, Ms. Cabasso chairs the Coordinating Committee of the Peoples NonViolent Response Coalition. At the national level, she convenes the Nuclear Disarmament/Redefining Security working group of United for Peace and Justice. Since 1994, Ms. Cabasso has represented WSLF at negotiating and review sessions of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. In 1995, she co-founded the Abolition 2000 Global Network to Eliminate Nuclear Weapons, which has grown to include more than 2000 organizations in over 90 countries. Ms. Cabasso is the co-author, with Susan Moon, of *Risking Peace: Why We Sat in the Road* (Open Books, 1985), an account of the huge 1983 nonviolent protest at the Livermore Nuclear Weapons Laboratory and the subsequent mass trial conducted by WSLF. She has written and co-authored numerous articles for publications including the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* and the journal *Social Justice*. For more information and WSLF publications, visit: <http://www.wslfweb.org>

Abstract: In every community that houses a nuclear weapons research, testing or production facility, in every nation that has a nuclear weapons program, workers and neighbors are exposed to the health and environmental risks posed by sustained exposure to radiation and other toxic substances over many years' time. These deadly toxins are the unavoidable byproducts of nuclear weapons work. Even if nuclear weapons are never again used in war, in the United States, radioactive and toxic contamination has already damaged the health of thousands of Department of Energy workers and people living near its facilities, and has put at risk crucial natural resources, including water. Since the nuclear age was born, in secret, some 60 years ago, workers at nuclear facilities and populations living outside their fence lines, have borne a disproportionate share of the risks associated with nuclear weapons, often without their knowledge, and always without their consent. When accidental or otherwise unintentional radiation releases occur, if information becomes publicly available at all, potential health consequences generally are minimized by government officials who state: "there is no danger to the public." When community members raise questions about the justification for nuclear weapons programs or activities in public forums such as hearings and comments on environmental impact statements, they are silenced with one response: "national security."

But do nuclear weapons and the inherently dangerous activities needed to maintain them, really make us more secure? Ms. Cabasso will challenge the concept of "national security," premised on the threatened first use of nuclear weapons, costing billions of taxpayer dollars, and causing massive and irreversible ecological destruction. Instead, she will posit an alternative concept of "human security," premised on meeting basic human needs and protecting our fragile global environment, consistent with the tenets of the Precautionary Principle. This kind of security, which is universal, cannot be brought about through nuclear weapons and military might. It can only be ensured through the equitable distribution of adequate food, shelter, clean water and air, health care, and education.

Finally, if funding was shifted from armaments to fulfilling these basic human needs, some of the root causes of violence such as poverty and injustice, would at the same time be addressed, reducing international tensions and increasing regional security.