

# PRESS STATEMENT

## MMA Statement on Lynas Rare Earth Plant

20<sup>th</sup> July 2011

The Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) is concerned that the report of the of the IAEA expert panel on the Lynas Rare Earth Plant in Gebeng, Pahang "...did not find any instances of non-compliance with international radiation safety standards." (The Star, 1<sup>st</sup> July 2011). This statement is misleading as the same report has stated, in the first of its 11 recommendations, that "... the AELB should require Lynas to submit, before the start of operations, a plan setting out its intended approach to the *long term waste management* ... together with a safety case in support of such a plan." – as such a plan is still not in existence, the "compliance with international radiation safety standards" cannot be guaranteed.

In relation to this, we welcome the joint statement by International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Mustapa Mohamed and Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Datuk Seri Dr Maximus Ongkili that the government "will ensure that Lynas comply with all recommendations of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) panel" and that "Until this is done .... there will be no importation of raw materials into the country and no operational activities will be allowed on site" (NST 6<sup>th</sup> July 2011). In the same statement, the two ministers also said that Lynas had to provide a comprehensive long-term plan for waste management, including at the decommissioning and remediation level, before further licensing could be considered by the government. We hope that the government will hold to this and not allow the plant to start operating as planned.

MMA members have had several meetings on this issue, and at our 51<sup>st</sup> AGM in Ipoh Perak on 27<sup>th</sup> May 2011, the house unanimously adopted a resolution to look into the health implications of the Lynas Rare Earth Plant and to stop the project if possible, as it will be harmful to our people.

During a closed forum by MMA Pahang with Lynas on 22<sup>nd</sup> of May 2011, representatives of Lynas Corp insisted that NUF and FGD are 100% free of radioactive material but this was invalidated by IAEA expert panel during the representation to the panel by members of the MMA Pahang branch on 31<sup>st</sup> May 2011. Our research has shown that there is not a single safe rare earth plant in the world with long term safety profile supported by environmental and epidemiological studies; on the contrary, many plants – in Malaysia, Russia, China and the USA - have been closed due to the hazardous effects on the environment.

Furthermore, during the same meeting with the IAEA expert panel, the panel members agreed that the monitoring and enforcement of laws and regulations in developing country may not be as good as in developed countries. If a plant such as the one in Gebeng were to operate the most stringent measures would be required to prevent environmental contamination – and, unfortunately, this cannot be guaranteed in Malaysia.

The long-term management of the enormous quantity of radioactive waste is the major factor concerning environmental and public safety which was not addressed in RIA report. The method of storage of solid wastes in open air predispose to air-borne radioactive particles dusting the environment, thus increasing the chances of inhalation of such particles by the surrounding community.

The possibility of contamination of surface water and atmosphere by the traces of radionuclides in the waste water and gaseous waste is not addressed. The present regulating standards are not tailored to monitor wastes containing radioactive elements. This has been hinted by the IAEA report but the AELB has not addressed its weaknesses till today. Additionally, the RIA report did not include the assessment on internal radiation, which is very crucial as radioactive waste products are mainly alpha emitters.

The IAEA mentioned that internal exposure of workers via the inhalation of radionuclides in air-borne dust may be 0.3mSv per year—not expected to be significant! They have conveniently left out the fact that such radionuclides will accumulate in the body releasing radiation constantly next to the cells which may result to cancer. The IAEA report recommended to consult the public where issues concern them.

These omissions in the assessment reports are all the more worrying in the light of the report from the New York Times (Keith Bradsier, 29<sup>th</sup> June 2011) that the construction and design of the plant may have serious flaws, including structural cracks, air pockets and leaks in concrete shells for containment tanks, and that the steel piping for the plant, made from standard steel, is unsuited for the corrosive, abrasive slurry - if these reports are true, there is the potential for toxic, corrosive and radioactive materials causing contamination of the environment and a dangerous health hazard which will persist for billions of years.

The MMA believes that there remain many unanswered and unresolved questions and concerns regarding the safety and the implementation of the Lynas rare earth refinery plant in Gebeng, despite reassurances by Lynas Corp and the IAEA expert panel and we remain deeply concerned that public safety and health concerns have not been adequately met and could not be guaranteed, by whatever reassurances, that have been given by the Lynas management and the IAEA panel of experts.

We need evidence that the plant will be totally failsafe and a guarantee that no harm will be caused to our people before this plant is allowed to operate. As this is totally lacking at this point, the MMA joins the numerous individuals, community groups and NGOs in urging the government to stop the Lynas project in order to ensure the protection of our citizens' health and the safety of our environment.



Dr Mary Suma Cardosa  
President  
Malaysian Medical Association