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Through the Prism of Nonviolence

Disappeared on the Border: Chased and Scattered to Death

By John Heid

"We recognize the weight that the language of disappearance holds; we use it to call attention to the fact that disappearance is not a natural or inevitable phenomenon but rather a direct consequence of US border-enforcement policies and practices."

—From "Disappeared: How The US Border Enforcement Agencies are Fueling a Missing Persons Crisis," by La Coalitión De Derechos Humanos and No More Deaths

The sunbaked skull seemed to complement the volcanic rocks that lie strewn around it. Haunting in its symmetry. Ivory amidst ebony, splayed across the desert floor. The year-round searing heat of the Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge can do that, bake things into anonymity. Were it not for the vacant eye sockets, we likely would have walked right by these human remains unaware that someone's life ended there, or nearby. Eerily the eyeless skull faced south.

Joel Smith, Director of Operations for Humane Borders, and I were hiking in the Growler Valley region of the Refuge on our annual maintenance check of loosely-scattered water stations. The region's austerity is at once beautiful and perilous. The aptly named El Camino del Diablo (Devil's Highway) cuts a parallel swath across part of the valley. There is little shade anywhere, save the occasional Palo Verde or mesquite tree. Teddy bear cholla, salt and brittlebush, ocotillo and prickly pear cactus provide modest ground cover. The horizon is elusive. One can walk all day and not feel any closer to the mountain just ahead. Time and distance seem like illusions. I have never encountered anyone on my hikes there. Not one.

Joel tried unsuccessfully to summon Border Patrol agents to report the remains. As dusk approached we planted a blue flag on a high pole marking the site for later recovery. Then we returned to our camp miles away.

Prior to the mid 1990s, deaths in the desert were rare and usually attributable to vehicular accidents. Today the Sonoran Desert, 100,000 square miles of Arizona, California and Northern Mexico, particularly its remotest areas, is a veritable death trap. "Exposure" or more frequently "undetermined" is listed as cause of death. In late December 2016, humanitarian aid workers initiated an exploratory effort in the vast reaches of the Refuge. Four sets of skeletal human remains were recovered in the first week, in the Growler Valley. Several more were discovered in the ensuing weeks. The border-hugging refuge is a cemetery of the unknown, and unburied.

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NUKEWATCH QUARTERLY

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Fukushima: Six Years On

By John LaForge

A five-year-old undergoes a thyroid exam in February 2014 at a clinic at a temporary housing complex in Nihonmatsu, about 40 miles from the devastated Fukushima reactor site. Photo: Toru Hanai, Reuters.

March 11 marks the 6th anniversary of the world's worst nuclear reactor disaster: the 2011 meltdown of three large power reactors on the Pacific Coast of Japan—Fukushima Daiichi—following a staggering 9.0 magnitude earthquake—the biggest in recorded Japanese history—and its 50-foot tsunami. The "station blackout" or total loss of electric power and cooling in six reactors, and the consequent hydrogen explosions and uncontrolled overheating and "melt-through" of three reactors, has resulted in the most devastating and complicated radiation catastrophe in history.

Fukushima is regularly misreported as less drastic than the singe-reactor catastrophe at Chernobyl, in Ukraine, in 1986. But France's Institute for Radiological Protection and Nuclear Safety, reported five years ago that Fukushima was already the biggest single spill of man-made radioactive materials into the marine environment ever seen or recorded. At least 300 tons of highly contaminated runoff have poured daily into the Pacific ever since.

In the documentary short film "Fukushima: Beyond Urgent," aired Feb. 13, Dr. Helen Caldicott says, "Japan is by orders of magnitude many times worse than Chernobyl." In Crisis Without End (2014), Caldicott warned: "The Fukushima disaster is not over and will not end for many millennia. The radioactive fallout, which has covered vast swaths of Japan, will remain toxic for hundreds of thousands of years. It cannot simply be 'cleaned up,' and it will continue to contaminate food, humans, and animals."

The disaster of "Fukushima squared" (earthquake + tsunami + station blackout *times* three melted reactor cores) was caused by deliberate decisions made by General Electric, Tokyo Electric Power Co. and the government: to build reactors in earthquake zones; to place emergency back-up generators in flood-prone basements; and to ignore long-standing warnings about inadequate seawall protection.

For these reasons, Nukewatch never calls what's happened at Fukushima an accident. Rather, we believe with Mayor Tamotsu Baba, of the town of Namie, who said in August 2011 that his "people were unnecessarily exposed…." and that the government's withholding of warnings about radioactive fallout was comparable to "murder."

Radiation-caused illnesses, cancers and fatalities that result from reactor disasters (Windscale in England, Three Mile Island in Pennsylvania, Chernobyl in Ukraine, and Fukushima) are scientifically predictable and known in advance. Researcher Arnie Gunderson noted two years ago that "Two reports recently released in Japan, one by Japanese medical professionals and the second from Tokyo Electric Power Corp., acknowledged that there will be numerous cancers in Japan, much greater than normal, due to the radioactive discharges from the triple meltdown at Fukushima Daiichi... I believe, as do many of my colleagues, that there will be at least 100,000 and as many as one million more cancers in Japan's future as

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