

Fukushima Investigator Kiyoshi Kurokawa Wins AAAS Scientific Freedom and Responsibility Award

Dr. Kiyoshi Kurokawa, M.D., chairman of the Health and Global Policy Institute, academic fellow of National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies, professor emeritus of the University of Tokyo, and former president of the Science Council of Japan, has been named to receive the 2012 AAAS Scientific Freedom and Responsibility Award.

Kurokawa was honored by AAAS "for his contribution to society by his remarkable stewardship of an independent investigation into the causes of the Fukushima nuclear catastrophe" and "for his courage in challenging some of the most ingrained conventions of Japanese governance and society."

His award-winning service followed the 11 March 2011 earthquake that triggered a devastating tsunami. The ensuing crisis included the full meltdown of three reactors at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant as well as several hydrogen-air chemical explosions and releases of radioactive materials into the atmosphere, AAAS noted. As public fears and confusion escalated, the Japanese Parliament appointed an independent commission, directed by Kurokawa, to investigate the causes of the accident.

During 900 hours of hearings, the commission conducted 1167 interviews with sources, including Naoto Kan, who served as Japan's prime minister at the time of the disaster. The hearings were streamed live over the Internet, and presentations were archived online in Japanese and English. Kurokawa also used town hall meetings and social media to engage the public, generating more than 1700 online comments.

The commission's report "was frank in its condemnation of the negligence leading to the accident, the many errors committed following the first signs of trouble at the plants, and the failure to take a range of protective steps at a nuclear facility with known risk factors," AAAS said. The report identified failures resulting from decisions made by the power plant operator (TEPCO), the government, the regulators, and even Japanese society at large. A cultural tendency to dismiss non-Japanese technology contributed to Japan's failure to adopt international safety standards, the commission concluded. In July 2012, the Commission's conclusions were presented to both houses of Parliament.

On 5 July 2012, Kurokawa told a *New York Times* reporter: "It was a profoundly man-made disaster—that could and should have been foreseen and prevented ... And its effects could have been mitigated by a more effective human response." According to a report published in the journal *Science*, the commission exposed "the dangers of 'regulatory capture,' in which an agency acts on behalf of the industry it oversees instead of representing the public interest." The investigation revealed that the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency had allowed TEPCO to ignore problems and delay improvements.

Richard A. Meserve, president of the Carnegie Institution of Washington and former chairman of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, described the commission's report as "nothing short of remarkable." Meserve noted in particular the courage that Kurokawa demonstrated in revealing cultural factors in Japanese society that he concluded had contributed to an array of errors.

Sunil Chacko, an adjunct professor at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, and the Indira Gandhi National University of New Delhi, said: "Such courage with caring scientific accountability had hitherto never been witnessed from anyone of similar stature in Japan, and it has already ensured a safety-first standard for the worldwide nuclear sector. Truly, scientific freedom and responsibility personified."

Kurokawa is a professor emeritus with the University of Tokyo School of Medicine, where he earned his medical degree. He also is the chairman of the Health and Global Policy Institute and former president of the Science Council of Japan. He has also held positions at the University of Pennsylvania, the University of Southern California, and the University of California at Los Angeles. He is an academic fellow of National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies. He was a special advisor to the Japanese Cabinet and commissioner on the World Health Organization's Commission for Social Determinants of Health.

His awards have included the Order of the Purple and the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold and Silver Star from the Japanese government; the Order Legion de Honour of the French government; the Person of the Year 2010 Award of the American Chamber of Commerce of Japan; and the [100 Top Global Thinkers 2012](#) by *Foreign Policy* magazine.





The Scientific Freedom and Responsibility Award is presented annually by AAAS to honor individual scientists and engineers or their organizations for exemplary actions that help foster scientific freedom and responsibility. The award recognizes outstanding efforts to protect the public's health, safety, or welfare; to focus public attention on potential impacts of science and technology; to establish new precedents in carrying out social responsibilities; or to defend the professional freedom of scientists and engineers. The award was established in 1980 and is approved by the AAAS Board of Directors.

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Kiyoshi Kurokawa

FOREIGN POLICY

100 TOP GLOBAL THINKERS 2012

63 KIYOSHI KUROKAWA

For daring to tell a complacent country that groupthink can kill.

Doctor | Japan

On March 11, 2011, tsunami waves from the worst earthquake Japan had ever seen slammed the island country. Some 15,872 people died; 129,577 buildings collapsed; and three reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station in eastern Japan suffered a full meltdown, spewing radiation into the air and tainting a 50-mile radius of surrounding area. In the national debate that followed, the Japanese government commissioned three major reports to determine what happened. The most searing one was chaired by the outspoken Kiyoshi Kurokawa, a medical doctor and emeritus professor who blasted "collusion" between government regulators and Tokyo Electric Power Co., which runs the plant, for causing the disaster.

In Japan's opaque political system, Kurokawa's report amounted to a bombshell. Following a six-month investigation, including interviews with more than 1,100 people, he concluded not only that the Fukushima disaster was "man-made" but also that it resulted more fundamentally from the "ingrained conventions of Japanese culture: our reflexive obedience; our reluctance to question authority; our devotion to 'sticking with the program'; our groupism; and our insularity." Critics have argued that even Kurokawa didn't go far enough; the report names no names, and critical elements that appear in the English-language report didn't make it into the Japanese. But his rare willingness to point fingers is exactly what may be needed to shake the world's third-biggest economy out of its dangerous complacency.