

## Annexe 10 for ISDE DB of 17.12.2002

### EMF debate – the role of ICNIRP and possible alternatives

(ISDE internal briefing note by Gaudenz Silberschmidt)

There is no scientific consensus on whether and how much there are relevant health effects of EMF.

The International Commission for Non-Ionising Radiation Protection (ICNIRP) <http://www.icnirp.org> establishes guidelines on EMF emissions and exposure. ICNIRP is an NGO (in official relation with WHO, but no official international body). In order to be independent ICNIRP has in its statutes a mechanism of co-option of its 16 individual members. This is based on the assumption that there can be scientific objectivity and therefore the best scientists should decide who else are amongst the best and then together decide on guidelines. However if one assumes that there cannot be pure objectivity without any value judgement any co-option mechanism will tend to reinforce an existing tendency amongst the membership (a progressive body will become more and more progressive, a conservative body more and more conservative).

The head of the WHO EMF project Michael Repacholi was the founder and is still one of the members of ICNIRP. WHO's evaluation of country legislation on EMF protection asks explicitly if this legislation is based on ICNIRP's guidelines. This same website <http://www.who.int/peh-emf/en/> also contains a publication called establishing a dialogue on risks from electromagnetic fields. This publication looks like an instruction to communicate to the public despite its unfounded fears that EMF does not have any relevant health effect. Members of ICNIRP have defended in a WHO seminar and in an article in science that ICNIRP can only base guidelines on evidence that is shown beyond 95% of certainty and that the precautionary approach should mainly be used towards the application of the precautionary principle. They now want to develop in a EMF seminar in February 2003 recommendations on the precautionary principle as WHO policy.

In view of the closed circle ICNIRP represents and the fact that several other scientists do not agree with its approach a process was started by scientists including some members of ISDE affiliates to create a separate scientific body given a different advice on EMF protection, more based on the precautionary principle.

I was proposing to avoid a separate body similar to ICNIRP for the following reasons:

- ICNIRP has a longstanding history and is in official relations with WHO (which takes 3 years to get)
- There is no mechanism to force WHO into looking at the separate body as it looks to ICNIRP
- A separate body giving a different advice might add to the confusion of policy makers and the public.

Alternatively (or if this separate body is created anyhow as addition) I would propose the following:

- Open the ISDE structure (e-mail listserver) for these scientists to discuss positions and present them to WHO
- Lobby WHO at high level to establish a formal scientific panel (similar but much smaller as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change). This would

force to have political bargaining and compromising leading to a composition of this body including current ICNIRP members and those scientists behind the creation of the alternative body.

- Avoid to have discussions on the precautionary principle mainly focusing on EMF, but rather on health issues in general. In the context of the Budapest conference preparations we propose that WHO elaborates guidelines on the presentation of scientific data under uncertainty and leaves the discussion on whether or not to apply the precautionary principle to the political field (since there cannot be an objective scientific method on how to make policy)