

# AAAS NEWS AND NOTES

edited by Tiffany Ayers

## AWARDS

### Nikitin Recognized by AAAS for Efforts to Protect Environment

Few scientists have paid a heavier price to protect the environment than Aleksandr Nikitin has. Nikitin was arrested in 1996 and held for 10 months in a former KGB prison. Today he faces the threat of long-term imprisonment. While his wife and daughter have moved to Canada, his international passport has been confiscated.

Nikitin's troubles began when he co-authored a report for the Norwegian environmental group Bellona that exposed the poor condition of nuclear facilities on the Kola Peninsula, 45 kilometers from the Norwegian border. During the Cold War, the area was considered a prime target for Western attack, and the Murmansk area was fortified with more than 150 atomic submarines. Today, the region is thought to have the highest concentration of nuclear materials stored in deteriorating conditions in the world.



Aleksandr Nikitin

Nikitin was honored for his contribution to human health and to the environment in February at the AAAS Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C. AAAS granted Nikitin the AAAS Award for Scientific Freedom and Responsibility, which honors scientists and engineers whose exemplary actions, often taken at significant personal cost, have served to foster scientific freedom and responsibility.

Nikitin, a former captain of the Russian navy who served with the Russian Northern Fleet until 1991, has been under investigation by the Russian Federal Security Services (FSB), formerly the KGB, on charges of treason and espionage. The FSB claims the report Nikitin helped write contains state secrets, but Nikitin and Bellona say the report is based on publicly available information.

The Northern Fleet has a total of 270 nuclear reactors in service or in storage. The region where the Northern Fleet is stationed houses 18 percent of the world's nuclear reactors. According to the Bellona report, 90 reactors are stored under unsafe conditions and 18 reactor cores are stored under similar conditions on board storage ships and barges. Some

of the ships are nothing but rusting hulks. The report also documents that without international cooperation and financing, a catastrophe could emerge, which could be described as "Chernobyl in slow motion."

In 1998, the St. Petersburg City Court rejected the charges against Nikitin because they were based on secret and retroactive decrees. The ruling was confirmed by the Russian Supreme Court and the case was referred back to the FSB. In 1999, the FSB charged Nikitin with high treason for the eighth time. At that

Dear Friends,

Thank you so much for all the support and recognition that's been given to me. It's important now as much as it was during the long investigation process....

Everybody understands that the problem of nuclear waste dumping has to be solved. We're trying to find the best ways to do it. And it's not easy, because, unfortunately, the opinions and intentions of non-governmental organizations and official authorities are not always the same. We see the solution in the agreement between politicians, scientists, and society. People can't be divided when it comes to the problems that have such a great impact on the entire environment.

Our goal is...to improve the nuclear waste dumping and used nuclear fuel situations step by step. The difficulty is that apart from strictly engineering, technical problems, this involves complex legal, financial, and political questions. There is no political decision yet regarding where and how to build regional storages for the used nuclear fuel in the North of Russia.... If we do not decrease the radioactive loading for the region, we'll get an environmental catastrophe.

To my greatest regret, we have so many ecological problems, yet we are forced to spend time, health, and money to resist those who don't care about the environment and the future. But they are a minority. And it means that we will win.

With my best wishes,  
Aleksandr Nikitin

point, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe voted to condemn Russia. Nikitin was acquitted by the City Court on 29 December 1999, but now the Supreme Court has decided to hear the prosecution's appeal on 29 March 2000. In addition to the ongoing court struggle, the Russian tax police are now investigating whether Nikitin should pay income tax on money paid by his employer, Bellona, to his lawyers.

Although Nikitin has been offered asylum by Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien, he has chosen to remain in Russia and continue his fight for environmental safety and health. Nikitin was not granted permission to travel to the United States to receive the AAAS award, but his daughter Julia delivered his acceptance speech, a portion of which is reprinted above.

## MEETINGS

### Calendar of Events

- 10-11 April** *The Role and Activities of Scientific Societies in Promoting Research Integrity.* Sponsored by AAAS and the U.S. Office of Research Integrity and held in Washington, DC. Contact Sanyin Siang at [ssiang@aaas.org](mailto:ssiang@aaas.org) or 202-326-6218.
- 11-13 April** *The 25th Anniversary AAAS Colloquium on Science and Technology Policy.* Sponsored by the AAAS R&D Budget and Policy Program and held in Washington, DC. Contact Steve Nelson at [snelson@aaas.org](mailto:snelson@aaas.org) or 202-326-6617.
- 14-15 April** *Kansas Teach-In on "Science, Teaching and the Search for Origins."* Sponsored by the AAAS Dialogue on Science, Ethics, and Religion in collaboration with the University of Kansas and held at the University of Kansas. Contact Jim Miller at [jmiller@aaas.org](mailto:jmiller@aaas.org) or 202-326-7044.
- 4-5 June** *A practicum on "Responding to Allegations of Research Misconduct: Inquiry, Investigation, and Outcomes."* Sponsored by AAAS and the U.S. Office of Research Integrity and held in St. Charles, IL. Contact Rachel Gray at [rgray@aaas.org](mailto:rgray@aaas.org) or 202-326-7016.