Arctic Climate Expert: Gore's Film Is 'Science Fiction'

Ian Overton interviewed Dr. Syun-Ichi Akasofu, former Director of the International Arctic Research Center, on April 23, 2007. The interview was conducted by telephone. Dr. Akasofu appeared in the British Channel 4-TV documentary, "The Great Global Warming Swindle," aired March 8.

EIR: Can you describe why the International Arctic Research Center was founded and what its purpose is?

Dr. Akasofu: Okay, the International Arctic Research Center (IARC) of the University of Alaska was established by the government of Japan and the government of the United States, under what is called the U.S.-Japan Common Agenda [for Cooperation in Global Perspective]. The idea is that all the projects under the Common Agenda are those which the research has taught us cannot be worked on by a single country—either the U.S or Japan—alone. So, some of the problems, like global warming, we work on together. That is the spirit of the Common Agenda, and that's why it's published. The Act was signed by President Clinton and the Prime Minister of Japan, Hashimoto [in 1993].

EIR: What sort of unique dynamical factors exist in the way that an arctic climate zone, such as Alaska, interacts with human industrial and commercial activities, compared to the actions of man and climate in a temperate or tropical climate zone?

Dr. Akasofu: One of the reasons that IARC is established in Alaska, the University of Alaska, is that we can observe climate change much more prominently than the rest of the world. The arctic is very sensitive to climate change because we have so many kinds of ice—glaciers, sea ice, permafrost—so they are sensitive to a climate change, and they're changing. So I think it's the best place to study climate change, much more so than in the tropics.

Okay, your question—of course, we concentrate mostly on science. We begin to work on the adaptation of climate change, and so on and so forth. And so far, we're concentrating on causes of climate change.

EIR: Many people in Alaska and elsewhere are saying that local and global warming are the result of increased local and global anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions, such as carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, and so on, because the winters are warmer, permafrost is melting, and so on. I've noticed that newspapers are warning this will cause serious problems for Alaska's economy. And a number of people are becoming quite worried about this. Does the warming in Alaska actually have anything to do with local or global industrial emissions?

Dr. Akasofu: Not locally, of course. The weather is the source of CO2, and CO2

spreads very quickly. So, in about two months, it spreads all around the Earth. So any local industrial activity, which we don't have much of in Alaska, is not affecting this. But the more important thing is, we're interested in causes of climate change. And any serious climatologist will agree, there are two components: one is natural components, the other is man-made components. Our main effort here, is to identify natural components. How much [are] natural components [involved] in natural climate change? My point, my position is, that until we identify natural components, and subtract that from present temperature rise, for example, we cannot tell very much, how much the man-made effects will be.

This is my own finding—we can go back to about 1650: All the data, and all the way to the present, we are assembling this, if you look at all the data, there is almost a linear change, a linear increase in temperature, about 0.5° Centigrade, about 1° Fahrenheit, per hundred years. It's continuous all the way to the present. And the IPCC says that over the last 100 years, the temperature increase is about 0.6° C; it's almost comparable. That is to say, temperature has been increasing, from up and down of course, but, as far as we can go back, to about 1700. This has been happening well before the Industrial Revolution, so we have to consider that natural change.

EIR: So, why would you say Alaska is warming?

Dr. Akasofu: We are trying to find out. One idea I have about that, is we have not recovered really from the Little Ice Age. There was a warmer period around 1200, and then, around 1400, a colder period began. And it was cold until about 1800, when it started to recover. Most people assume that period called the Little Ice Age is over, but what I can see, is that temperature has been increasing almost linearly at a constant rate of about 0.5° C, by 100 years, continuously; to the present. So I doubt that much of the increase over the last 100 years the IPCC says, of about 0.6°, is due to the greenhouse effect—that's what they say. Well, they assume. They have not taken the natural component; we don't know what they did!

So, definitely climate change, or temperature, has been rising. Somehow the IPCC decided that the increase in the last 100 years is due to the greenhouse effect; however, a significant part of that would be just due to natural change. So, even if we spend lots of money on suppressing CO2 release, it wouldn't do any good, because it's a natural change.

But changes are still going on. There are all kinds of ideas as to why this is happening, but we still do not know the cause of this Little Ice Age to begin with, so this is something we have to investigate. Even just in the last 100 years there was a large increase in temperature from 1910 to 1940. It's comparable to the range of increase of about the same as what we have today. That is to say, there was an increase from 1910 to 1940; then temperature began to decrease from

1940 to 1975, when CO2 began to increase in 1940! Then temperature began to increase again from 1975. And no one can explain the temperature rise from 1910 to 1940, or explain the decrease from 1940 to 1975. My point is, that until we understand the increase from 1910 to 1940, we just cannot say the increase from 1975 to the present is entirely from the greenhouse effect.

EIR: In the IPCC's February 2007 "Summary for Policy Makers" report, an estimate was made that the projected increase in global temperatures through the 21st Century, caused by anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions, will result in—

Dr. Akasofu: That's a hypothesis, okay?

EIR: Right. Well, the hypothesis was, that it will result in a total melting of the Arctic Basin, as well as the ice sheet of Greenland, etc., leading to an ocean level rise of about seven meters. Do you think these projections reflect an accurate modeling of climate change?

Dr. Akasofu: Okay, let me put it this way. The IPCC's report, on page 10, states that, "most of the present temperature increase during the last 100 years, from 1975, is due to a magnified greenhouse effect. But there is no basis for them to say "most," for they have not examined the natural component. So it's an assumption. Then, they say, computer models conforms to that, but that's not true. What's happening is that computers try to simulate the present increase, but computers can't do that. So it's not confirming anything; their computers are just trying to simulate the initial assumption.

Now also, let me remind you, that even yesterday I saw on television, on global warming, I think on NBC evening news, all the worldwide television shows, when they start talking about global warming, they show the tongues of the glaciers, a big chunk of ice falling into the water. That has nothing to do—nothing to do—with global warming. People forget that a glacier is a piece of ice! It has to move! Okay, that's number one. Number two, they say, permafrost is melting, and houses are collapsing. What happens is that, when permafrost is in the area, housing is cheap and the land is cheap. When people build a house directly over the permafrost, and then warm the house in the Wintertime, and the ice underneath melts and the house collapses, that's a man-made effect! It has nothing to do with the greenhouse effect! There are so many mistakes like that.

And of course, they show some of the Spring breakup, in Alaska, or some place. That's nothing new, that happens every year. It's terrible that [there's] so much misunderstanding. One thing is, for example, that ice will disappear by 2040 in the Summertime. Just one researcher got a result like that. But here at IARC, we work with 14 groups, together, and we see that, of the variety of results, some of them show that in the year 2050 there is lots of ice still. So, you know, 2040 is very misleading. Only one extreme case of science, and, unfortunately, the press

take that kind of thing because they think it is much more interesting to report. So that's causing some more problems. But we have done good work with the 14 groups around the world, and some of this shows that even in 2100, lots of ice will remain.

Now, I don't know if you know this, but people are trying to say that now Polar bears will be in trouble. So now they are trying to put polar bears up as an endangered species?

EIR: Yeah. [laughs] I read the letter by Mitchell Taylor [Director of Natural Resources; Nunavut, Canada], where he essentially said that all Polar bear groups are thriving except for one, and that has nothing to do with global warming at all.

Dr. Akasofu: And they don't have to live on the ice, you know?

EIR: Yeah!

Dr. Akasofu: We have a report that they're living on land, they're eating grasses. I mean, you know, here maybe a tenderloin, but they don't have to eat tenderloin all the time! [laughs]

I mean, I don't know, this whole thing is very strange. I can't stop it. Everybody's believing Al Gore's movie, which is nothing but science fiction. But people think that that's right though. But we'll see.

EIR: On April 14, Yuri Izrael, the Russian vice chair of the IPCC, wrote in RIA Novosti that, "I think the panic over global warming is totally unjustified. There is no serious threat to the climate. There is no need to dramatize the anthropogenic impact, because the climate has always been subject to change under nature's influence, even when humanity did not even exist." What do you think about that?

Dr. Akasofu: Ahh, I agree with him. Because, you know, this Little Ice Age, and before that, the Medieval Warming, which I understand [was] as normal as now. That's why I'm saying that the satellite data over the last 25 years is not good enough. I call it "instant climatology." You've got to go back and look at all the data. How has the Earth's temperature been changing? My criticism of the IPCC's report is simply that I do not know how 2,500 scientists can agree that the present 100 years is almost entirely due to the greenhouse effect. There is no evidence for that! There is no paper that studies the natural components of the retraction of the present ice. No paper! So they have no basis to say "most"; it's an assumption!

EIR: So why, do you think, then, is there all this talk in political circles about "consensus" regarding man-made global warming when there is clearly a large number of scientists who, in this country, with the 17,800 signers of the Global

Warming Petition Project, also within the IPCC organization itself, and around the planet, are arguing against that premise?

Dr. Akasofu: Okay, you have not read my article then, so I'll send it to you. I went back, all the way back to the establishment of the IPCC, and what's happened since then. I'll send that to you. Also, the top level, the very top-level climatologists or meteorologists, they don't join the IPCC, because the IPCC is too political. They stay away. So there's lots of—Idon't know if it's the majority or not—but there's lots of silent people there. What I told you, that I wrote something on that, people have to be careful, you could be assassinated. That's where we are now.

EIR: So you think the "consensus" exists because people are more scared for their lives and their careers?

Dr. Akasofu: I think many people, in spite of all that, including Gore, have to change their lifestyle. Many people are still driving SUVs. So there is little conscience about that. Amazingly, in spite of such a cry, no one has done anything on it. You know, some newspaper says Al Gore's energy expenditure is ten times more than for ordinary people. It's called the inconvenient truth.

EIR: Yeah, he has a big swimming pool, and a zinc mine on his property.

Dr. Akasofu: Is that so? [laughs]

EIR: Yep, it's one of the dirtiest zinc mines in the country!

Dr. Akasofu: Oh. Well, no one is doing anything, right? Even some of the environmental groups, I mean they are still driving. Each family has about three or four cars. Nothing is happening. It's a kind of luxurious program!

EIR: Does it seem more likely that a warming of the Arctic areas would harm or help the liveliness of the ecosystem there (including Man as part of the ecosystem)?

Dr. Akasofu: There are always good things and bad things. For Alaskans, what's wrong with having palm trees grow in the Arctic? There's nothing wrong with that! I mean, this is a joke of course, but, warmer is better; that much is sure for anybody. But, seriously, if the permafrost which is present starts to melt, there will be all sorts of problems. So, no matter what, the natural changes are going on. So we have to adapt to that in every possible way. But just suppressing CO2 doesn't do any good, that's what I'm saying! If we have to spend so much money on greenhouse gas, it's better to spend money on adopting changes.

EIR: As I have been investigating more and more of the available literature on the causes of climate change, I personally have come to think of "weather" or

"climate" as more of an effect of different potentials, which are bounded by these longer term geologic, orbital, and celestial phenomena, like the shifting of tectonic plates, or Milankovitch cycles, sunspot activity, or the influx and muting of cosmic rays from other star systems in the Milky Way. And these I've found are bounded by the natural laws of physics, like magnetism, gravitation, and things like that, rather than some sort of self-evident phenomenon of climate, determined primarily by the activities taking place on the crust of the Earth.

So, I would ask, what are your thoughts about this? How much of our overall climate would you attribute to actually on-Earth factors, as compared to off-Earth factors?

Dr. Akasofu: Okay, here I told you that when temperature decreases from 1940 to 1975, there in that time, many scientists said, "A new Ice Age is coming, you better be prepared!" Some of the same scientists now are saying that global warming is coming. If you look at the frequency of years of Earth's changes, in the past, we've had about three or four ice ages. Here, in what we call, an "interglacial period," which usually lasts, if you look at the past data, about 20,000 years. We are perhaps near the end of one, an interglacial. Even elementary school children, if we show the temperature changes over the last 100,000 years, they'll say, eventually a new ice age is coming. Of course, this will be 10,000 years away.

I think a much more important thing, is, this climate change is going on, but it's rather vague. We have so many visitors, television, newspapers, coming to visit Alaska, because they can't find any environmental global warming disasters in the lower '48. So they just ask me, everyday somebody comes: "Where should I go to take a picture?"

So there are natural changes going on, we have to adjust to that. But the big thing compared with that, is the environmental destruction which is much more serious, and happening before your eyes. So I think we'd better take care of that, rather than run screaming about the CO2 effect. I mean, environmental destruction is terrible.

Another thing you mentioned in the sea-level rise. The most accurate data, which even the IPCC uses, is about 1.7mm per year. About a tenth of one inch. So ten years, is 17 cm, and 100 years is about 170 cm, or about one foot. Furthermore, actually, sea-level rise: the rate has been decreasing, not increasing, despite the melting of the glaciers and all that. So, already the prediction of about three meters and all that, I think we exaggerated. So, the IPCC tried to correct that, and some of the people are screaming about the effects, saying the "IPCC is too conservative"—that the accurate measurement is less than an inch per year.

EIR: I remember that, in Alaska, since the winters can be very cold, there is a law which prohibits shutting off the heating systems in people's homes, even if the

family is too poor to pay the bill that month. So, in your view, if the United States were to implement carbon emission reduction policies, such as what the Kyoto Protocol suggests, what would be the effect of that policy, on people who are living with these kinds of economic hardships?

Dr. Akasofu: I think that obviously it depends on where you are. The situation is quite different in Alaska. I understand the producing of so much CO2 per capita is higher than in other states, but that's natural. They can't freeze to death. So I don't see any problem in that. But, I think the much more important thing is that the environmental destruction is fixed, rather than CO2 effects.

EIR: Can you say a little bit about your career and how you became interested in this field of study?

Dr. Akasofu: I came to Alaska in 1958 as a student of the aurora. I became a graduate student of the Geophysical Institute. And then, I guess I became the director of the Geophysical Institute, in 1986. And I was the director for 13 years. During that period, I thought that after 1988—I thought that global warming was an interesting science, very important, so I talked to both the Japanese government, the U.S. government, that the Arctic is the best place to study climate change. So I sought to establish an institution which specializes in studying these issues. So it took about ten years to establish IARC, and I have been the director for about, let's see, this institute opened about 1999, and last Jan. 31, I retired, and we have a new director, Larry Hinzman.

Whenever I say something about climate change, they say, "Oh, Dr. Akasofu is an ordinary scientist, but he is not a climatologist." But I worked in climatology for about 20 years, as the director of GI, the Geophysical Institute, so I have some experience.