



PRESS RELEASE

Nuuk and Copenhagen, 10 July 2014

Uranium in Greenland: The government aims at undermining environmental rights

In Mid-June, the government, Naalakkersuisut, proposed amendments to the Mineral Resources Act that do not only lower the environmental standards for uranium mining, but for all mining in Greenland [1]. The amendments aim at abolishing the right of public access to documents that constitute the basis for decisions on issuance of mining permits, before they are given, and repeal of access to justice. If the amendments are adopted, the three pillars which according to the Aarhus Convention are essential in good environmental governance - timely access for the public to environmental information, meaningful participation in environmental matters and access to administrative or judicial review proceedings - no longer exist in Greenland. The amendments will be introduced in the Greenlandic Parliament, Inatsisartut, during its autumn session.

Avataq, The Ecological Council, NOAH Friends of the Earth Denmark and SustainableEnergy strongly condemn this proposal because it undermines environmental standards and civil rights.

“Politicians in Greenland and Denmark have defended the repeal of the uranium ban by claiming that Greenland will have the highest environmental standards for uranium mining in the world”, says Mikkel Myrup, chairman of Avataq. “This has a hollow ring to it, when Naalakkersuisut now relinquishes the Aarhus Convention”.

The proposal to limit the public’s access to environmental information and justice in environmental matters was tabled at the same time as an expert workshop was held in Nuuk to lay down the groundwork for future legislation on extraction, production and exportation of uranium in Greenland [2]. The identity of the participants has so far been kept a secret, but it now appears that representatives of the Australian company, Greenland Minerals and Energy, GME, that owns the enormous Kuannersuit/Kvanefjeld uranium project, participated [3]. The workshop, which was hermetically closed to the public, was organised by the Danish Institute for International Studies, DIIS, a Danish government funded research organisation.

“It is unprecedented that a controversial mining company like GME actively participates in secret preparations for legislative proceedings, to which representatives of civil society are not invited”, says Bo Normander, chairman of the Ecological Council. “It would become the Greenlandic government to involve independent experts and people from civil society in the planning process. We also wonder why DIIS – an independent research organisation – is organising this seminar without sufficiently broad stakeholder representation”.

Recently, it was documented that the ore concentrator of the Kuannersuit/Kvanefjeld mine will produce almost nine hundred million tons of tailings containing a series of toxic chemicals and furthermore, tens of millions of cubic meters highly radioactive tailings will be produced by the refinery [4]. This is highlighted by the fact that no uranium mining and processing site in the world has ever been rehabilitated in an acceptable way.

“It is crucial for the impacts of a large scale project on health and the environment that all the risks are disclosed to the public in a timely manner”, says Palle Bendsen from NOAH Friends of the Earth Denmark’s uranium group. “Sufficient institutional capacity has to be developed and a solid legal framework that enables the government to evaluate, monitor and reduce the negative consequences of the projects. Legislating on the terms of the mining industry is not the way ahead”.

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Notes:

[1] Forslag til ændring af Inatsisartut-lov nr. 7 af 7. december 2009 om mineralske råstoffer og aktiviteter af betydning herfor (råstofloven), 12. juni 2014: http://naalakkersuisut.gl/~media/Nanoq/Files/Hearings/2014/Forslag_aendring_raastofloven/Documents/Pktxx_EM2014_Rstoflov_BEM28_DK.pdf

[2] Kalaallit Nunaata Radio (KNR): <http://www.knr.gl/da/nyheder/vi-starter-fra-nul-med-uran>

[3] GME Company Announcement, 23rd June, 2014: http://www.ggg.gl/docs/ASX-announcements/Developments-in-Greenland-June-2014.pdf?utm_source=Developments+in+Greenland+Firm+Permitting+Timeline+for+Kvanefjeld&utm_campaign=Developments+in+Greenland+Firm+Permitting+Timeline+for+Kvanefjeld&utm_medium=email

For further information on GME, see: Antony Loewenstein, The Guardian: Australian uranium mining in Greenland is tearing the country in half, 15th May 2014: <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/may/15/australian-uranium-mining-in-greenland-is-tearing-the-country-in-half>

[4] Summary, 28th March 2014: International conferences in Nuuk and Copenhagen document that uranium mining is not sustainable: <http://www.ecocouncil.dk/en/releases/articles-pressreleases/chemicals-and-climate/2332-international-conference-uranium-mining-is-not-sustainable>