



PRESS RELEASE

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Greenlandic-Danish uranium agreement threatens public health and the environment

At the end of January, the Greenlandic and the Danish governments signed an agreement on security matters pertaining to extraction and export of uranium from Greenland. It has resulted in two bills that will soon be introduced in the Danish and Greenlandic parliaments [1]. The agreement is based on the misguided assumption that if only Greenland ratifies a series of international conventions and submits to the regime of The International Atomic Energy Agency, extraction, production and exportation uranium will be safe and secure. How short-sighted the agreement is, is evident from the fact that it was made at a time, where 15 members of Greenland's Parliament, Inatsisartut, support a national referendum on reinstatement of the uranium ban and 16 members are against.

Among others, the bills refer to the European Euratom Treaty, but ignore the fact that the Kvanefjeld uranium mining project does not live up to the basic environmental requirements of the European Mining Waste Directive. The mining project is the main cause for the agreement. According to the Directive, the mining wastes should be sustainably long-term isolated by enclosing their toxic and radioactive constituents as long and complete as possible [2]. Hence, both the Danish and the Greenlandic governments accept that environmental standards, which are too low to be implemented in Denmark, because they violate European law, will be in force in Greenland.

Furthermore, the agreement is made before the ownership of Kvanefjeld's licensee, the Australian company *Greenland Minerals and Energy Ltd.*, has been thoroughly investigated [3]. This is remarkable, considering that the products that the company will export are "dual-use" products, i.e. have both civilian and military functions.

"This promotion of uranium mining will probably have an impact on the whole oil and minerals sector in Greenland", says Mikkel Myrup, chairman of Avataq, Greenland's Nature & Environment Association. "When the pro-uranium majority in Inatsisartut disappears, it very likely that uranium projects are closed down because they threaten public health and the environment. That means that disproportionate investor protection is out of the question not only for uranium mining projects but for the whole oil and minerals sector, because it is not possible to discriminate between the individual projects".

The result is that Greenland will suffer substantial economic losses, if the Greenlandic government e.g. ratifies The Energy Charter Treaty or other investment protection treaties. By ratifying them, there is a risk that disputes will be settled in arbitration courts through expensive civil action behind closed doors, on a legal basis that does not necessarily include Greenlandic legislation, and which cannot be appealed.

“When Greenland soon gets its own constitution, hopefully it will contain environmental provisions establishing that no damages are paid, when large scale projects are closed down, because they threaten public health or the environment”, says Niels Henrik Hooge from NOAH Friends of the Earth Denmark’s Uranium Group. “The necessity of environmental provisions is evident from the fact that at least 140 of all constitutions in the world contain provisions on environmental protection, 86 recognises the right to a healthy environment and 97 refer to a government responsibility to prevent environmental damage. This trend started in the 1970ies and since then almost every new or amended constitution have had an environmental dimension”. [4]

For further information, please contact:

Avataq (www.avataq.gl): Mikkel Myrup, Tel.: +299 22 84 23, E-mail: mikkelmyrup@post.com

The URANI NAAMIK/NO TO URANIUM Society in Narsaq: Mariane Paviassen, Tel.: +299 25 01 69, E-mail: uraninaamik@outlook.dk

Nuup Kangerluata Ikinngutai /Friends of Nuuk Fiord: Piitannguaq Tittussen, Tel.: +299 52 06 57, E-mail: polt@greennet.gl

The Danish Ecological Council (www.ecocouncil.dk): Christian Ege, Tel.: +45 33 18 19 33, (Mob.) +45 28 58 06 98, E-mail: christian@ecocouncil.dk

NOAH Friends of the Earth Denmark (<http://noah.dk/urangruppe/>): Niels Henrik Hooge, Tel.: +45 21 83 79 94, E-mail: nielshenrikhooge@yahoo.dk and Palle Bendsen, Tel.: +45 30 13 76 95, e-mail: pnb@ydun.net

SustainableEnergy (www.ve.dk): Hans Pedersen, Tel.: +45 51 92 24 14, E-mail: pedersen@ve.dk

Notes:

[1] Press release, Naalakkersuisut: Agreement with the Danish government on uranium, 1 February 2016: http://naalakkersuisut.gl/da/Naalakkersuisut/Nyheder/2016/02/010216_samarbejde

Hearing on bill for Greenland on control with export of dual use products:

<https://hoeringsportalen.dk/Hearing/Details/59243>

Hearing on bill for Greenland on control with the peaceful use of nuclear materials:

<https://hoeringsportalen.dk/Hearing/Details/59244>

[2] The reason that the Kvanefjeld project violates the Mining Waste Directive is the planned deposition of the waste in the Taseq Lake, which is located uphill in the fluvial system. Here, it is impossible to isolate the toxic and radioactive substances in the waste from the surrounding environment

Link to The European Mining Waste Directive: http://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:c370006a-063e-4dc7-9b05-52c37720740c.0005.02/DOC_1&format=PDF

See also interview with senior researcher Gerhard Schmidt from Öko-Institut on the mining project:
http://atomposten.blogspot.dk/2015/06/uranmineprojektet-i-kvanefjeld_25.html

[3] Johan Lund Olsen, Finn Sørensen, Mikkel Myrup, Niels Henrik Hooge, Palle Bendsen and Hans Pedersen, feature article in Information, 28 November 2013: No control with Greenlandic uranium:
<http://www.information.dk/480186>

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

[4] David Richard Boyd: The Environmental Rights Revolution, Constitutions, Human Rights, and the Environment, The University of British Columbia, Vancouver, 2010:
<https://circle.ubc.ca/handle/2429/23334>