

# **Appeal to the Greenlandic and Danish governments not to abolish the uranium zero tolerance policy in the Danish realm<sup>1</sup>**

Nuuk and Copenhagen, 26 April 2013

*The following statement has been signed by 48 NGOs*

The newly elected Greenlandic government and the Danish government have given notice that they intend to abolish the uranium zero tolerance policy which has been in effect in the Danish realm for twenty-five years and was carried unanimously in the Greenlandic parliament. Hence, there could be several uranium mining projects underway in Greenland in the near future. The mining project in Kuannersuit at Narsaq in Southern Greenland could alone make Greenland the fifth largest uranium exporter in the world. In addition, there are uranium deposits at Illorsuit, Puissattaq, Ivittuut and Motzfeldt Lake in Southern Greenland, Sarfartoq, Nassuttooq, Qaqaarsuk and Attu in Western Greenland and Randbøldal and Milne Land in Eastern Greenland, and there might be deposits that have not yet been discovered.

WE APPEAL to the Greenlandic and the Danish governments not to abolish the uranium zero tolerance policy, because uranium mining could contaminate the vulnerable Arctic environment and lead to nuclear proliferation.

WE APPEAL to the Greenlandic and the Danish governments to prevent the combination of rare earth elements and uranium mining and to work proactively to promote renewable energies and energy efficiency in the Danish realm, the European Union and the rest of the world.

WE ALSO APPEAL to the Greenlandic and the Danish governments to discourage nuclear proliferation and promote global nuclear disarmament.

THE REASONS FOR OUR APPEAL ARE THE FOLLOWING:

In addition to substantial chemical pollution from sulphuric acid, uranium mining leaves behind millions of tonnes of tailings containing radioactive materials. These radioactive tailings contain thorium, radium, radon and polonium – among the most radiotoxic substances known to man.

The waste from uranium mining remains dangerously radioactive, as well as chemically toxic, for hundreds of thousands of years.

The US National Academy of Sciences concluded in 2011 that there is still no proven technology to ensure the safe long term storage of radioactive uranium mine residues.

The Arctic environment is particularly vulnerable to pollution, since it recovers very slowly.

Up to 85 percent of the radioactivity from the uranium mining will remain in the tailings. Furthermore, Kuannersuit contains the largest thorium deposit in the world – by some estimates up to two million tonnes – which the licensee, *Greenland Minerals and Energy Ltd.*, has no plans to

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<sup>1</sup> The Realm consists of Southern Denmark and the two autonomous regions Greenland and the Faroe Islands.

extract. Much of the radioactivity from this thorium – nobody knows how much – could remain in the tailings.

The radioactive substances from the open uranium mine at Kuannersuit - which would be the second largest open pit uranium mine in the world - could be washed out from the tailings and absorbed in land vegetation and marine organisms.

The Greenlandic marine areas contain some of the planet's cleanest waters and make an important contribution to the reproduction capacity of the marine biodiversity and the ecosystems in the Northern part of the Atlantic Ocean. These areas will be threatened by a lift on the ban on uranium mining.

The radioactive compounds are accumulated in the food chains and could harm humans and animals by inflicting disease, genetic damage and mutations.

In the long term, the environmental impacts from uranium mining could constitute comprehensive radioactive contamination, which – because of the health risks – would make it dangerous to live in and make it necessary to ban fishing, hunting, agriculture and animal husbandry in significant parts of Southern Greenland.

The clean-up of residues from uranium mining e.g. in Germany of a scale, corresponding to the one projected at Kuannersuit, has so far cost the German tax payers more than seven billion euros and the total costs could be even higher. At the earliest, it is expected to be completed in 2020, after which the contaminated areas must be monitored closely and maintained for a very long time.

The private company, *Greenland Minerals and Energy Ltd.*, which is licensed to mine at Kuannersuit, does not have sufficient economic resources to restore ecological damage from millions of tons of waste that remain radioactive for thousands of years.

Nor does Greenland have sufficient resources to restore ecological damage from uranium mining at Kuannersuit or elsewhere in Greenland.

The Danish government, the only stakeholder that possesses sufficient economic resources, has not yet given a guarantee to mitigate ecological damage from uranium mining at Kuannersuit. This is despite the fact that it will benefit financially from extraction – block grants from Denmark to Greenland will be reduced according to future income from company taxes and mining company royalties.

The long-term economic costs of radioactive pollution in Greenland could be so high that they by far exceed the short-term economic benefits of uranium mining.

In the short term, an improvement of Greenland's economy is not dependent on an abolishment of the uranium zero tolerance policy. E.g. rare earth elements (REEs) can be mined southwest of Kangerlussuaq, in Nuup Kangerlua, at Killavaat Alannguat between Narsaq and Qaqortoq and near Narsarsuaq. The REEs-deposit at Killavaat Alannguat is described by the licensee, the Australian mining company *Tanbreez Mining Greenland*, as the probably largest deposit in the world. In addition, there are advanced exploration and mining projects in Greenland focusing on iron, lead, zinc, molybdenum, rubies, diamonds and platinum as well as on many other minerals.

The only civilian industry requiring large quantities of uranium is the nuclear industry, which neither Greenland nor Denmark have any incentive to support.

The only non-civilian technology requiring large quantities of uranium is nuclear armaments, which neither Greenland nor Denmark have any incentive to promote.

Plutonium – one of the many uranium fission byproducts, produced in all nuclear reactors – facilitates the construction of nuclear weapons and contributes to the proliferation of such weapons everywhere in the world, thereby constituting a permanent threat to millions of people.



**THE DANISH  
ECOLOGICAL  
COUNCIL**

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**THE APPEAL HAS BEEN SIGNED BY THE FOLLOWING NGOs:**

atomstopp\_atomkraftfrei leben!, Austria (AUT)

Australian Conservation Foundation (AUS)

Avataq (GRL)

Bellona (NOR)

Centre for Environmental Justice/Friends of the Earth Sri Lanka (LNK)

Climate & Energy Group, Beyond Copenhagen collective (BCPH), India (IND)

COECOCEIBA- Friends of the Earth Costa Rica (CRI)

Det Økologiske Råd / The Ecological Council (DNK)

Ecodefense (RUS)

ECOMUNIDADES, Red Ecologista Autónoma de la Cuenca de México (MEX)

Focus on the Global South

Friends of the Earth Australia (AUS)  
Friends of the Earth Canada (CAN)  
Friends of the Earth Europe  
Friends of the Earth International  
Friends of the Earth (England, Wales and Northern Ireland) (GBR)  
Friends of the Earth Malta (MLT)  
Friends of the Earth US (USA)  
Greenpeace Nordic  
Haburas Foundation/Friends of the Earth Timor-Leste (TLS)  
Iceland Nature Conservation Association, (INCA) (ISL)  
Inuit Circumpolar Council, Greenland (ICC-Greenland) (GRL)  
International Network for Sustainable Energy – INFORSE-Europe  
JA!Justiça Ambiental / Friends of the Earth Mozambique (MOZ)  
Jordens Vänner - Friends of the Earth Sweden (SWE)  
Korean Federation for Environmental Movement (KFEM) / Friends of the Earth Korea (KOR)  
Magyar Természetvédők Szövetsége / Friends of the Earth Hungary (HUN)  
MAUDESCO - Friends of the Earth Mauritius (MUS)  
Milieudefensie - Friends of the Earth Netherlands (NLD)  
Mouvement Ecologique / Friends of the Earth Luxembourg (LUX)  
NOAH Friends of the Earth Denmark (DNK)  
Norwegian Society for the Conservation of Nature - Friends of the Earth Norway (NOR)  
Nuclear Information and Resource Service – NIRS (USA)  
Réseau "Sortir du nucléaire" (FRA)  
Sahabat Alam Malaysia - Friends of the Earth Malaysia (MYS)  
The Salzburg Platform Against Nuclear Dangers (AUT)  
The Swedish Anti-nuclear Movement (SWE)  
The Swedish Environmental Movement's Nuclear Waste Secretariat (SWE)  
uranium-network.org, Germany (DEU)  
VedvarendeEnergi / SustainableEnergy (DNK)  
WISE (World information Service on Energy) International  
Women Against Nuclear Power – Finland (FIN)  
Women for Peace – Finland (FIN)  
Women in Europe for a Common Future - WECF France (FRA)  
Women in Europe for a Common Future - WECF Germany (DEU)  
Women in Europe for a Common Future - WECF International  
Women in Europe for a Common Future - WECF Netherlands (NL)  
WWF Verdensnaturfonden - WWF Denmark (DNK)