



PRESS RELEASE

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## Greenland's Parliament votes down referendum on uranium mining

On May 20<sup>th</sup>, with a small majority, Greenland's Parliament, Inatsisartut, rejected a proposal by the opposition party, Inuit Ataqatigiit (IA), to have a referendum on reinstatement of the uranium ban. The proposal would have given the electorate an opportunity to stop the huge Kvanefjeld uranium mining project near the town of Narsaq in Southern Greenland. It is now expected that the preliminary application to mine uranium, which the owner of the project, the Australian company *Greenland Minerals and Energy Ltd. (GMEL)*, has submitted to the authorities, will be further processed. The company awaits guidance from the regulatory bodies before it submits the final application. It will then be sent to the public for consideration.

*"Even before the first ounce of uranium has been extracted, Greenland's population is more divided than ever before", says Mikkel Myrup, chairman of Avataq, Greenland's Nature & Environment Association. "Inatsisartut's rejection of a referendum does not solve any problems, they only get worse. It is just the latest example in a long series of breach of promises by the government to be open, transparent and involve the public in the decision-making process. Polls have shown that only one out of ten is satisfied with public participation in this field and after the voting down of the referendum, one might expect that this figure will drop even more". [1]*

One of the main arguments of the government coalition against the referendum was that damages would have to be paid to GMEL, if the uranium ban was reinstated. However, shortly before the proposal was voted down, this argument was disproved: In a written answer to a question put forward by IA, The Minister of Finances and Mineral Resources, Randi Vestergaard Evaldsen, admitted that the authorities could turn down an exploitation application from GMEL for almost any reason they perceived to be proper, without being liable to pay damages [2].

*"One has to ask, how the politicians in the government coalition can go out say that compensation has to be paid, if the Kvanefjeld project is stopped by a referendum, and then – after being presented with the annex to the GMEL standard contract – suddenly reach the opposite conclusion", says Mariane Paviassen, Chairwoman of The URANI NAAMIK/NO TO URANIUM Society in Narsaq. "The good news is that we now know for a fact that damages will not have to be paid, if GMEL's application for an exploitation license is turned down for public health or environmental reasons".*

It is well-known that GMEL intends to deposit almost a billion tons of toxic and radioactive waste in the Taseq Lake, high up in the Taseq Valley's river system [3]. According to some international experts, this means that the mining project does not live up to the environmental requirements in the European Union's Mining Waste Directive. The Directive requires that the wastes should be sustainably isolated by enclosing their toxic and radioactive constituents for as long and as completely as possible [4].

*"The Danish government has always insisted that it remains neutral in Greenland's uranium question", says Hans Pedersen from RenewableEnergy. "In spite of that, research institutions such as the Geological Survey of Denmark and Greenland and DCE – the Danish Centre for Environment and Energy at Aarhus University, whose activities are financed by the Danish government, have consistently been allowed to promote the Kvanefjeld mining project. Their researchers will now determine, whether the project is sufficiently safe with respect to public health and the environment. One must expect that they are going to reject the project, if it does not meet European and thereby Danish environmental requirements. If not, it would mean that Danish government-funded research institutions proactively promote environmental standards in Greenland that are too low to apply in Denmark".*

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**Notes:**

[1] An opinion poll carried out by HS Analyse for ICC Greenland and WWF shows that only one out of ten thinks that public participation has been satisfactory, whereas approximately 60 percent estimates that it is not very good or even particularly bad, cf. <http://www.wwf.dk/rss.cfm?uNewsID=10820>

[2] The Minister of Finances and Mineral Resources, Randi Vestergaard Evaldsen: Answer to § 37 question 2016-115 regarding damages, from member of Inatsisartut, Aqqaaluaq B. Egede, Inuit Ataqatigiit: [http://ia.gl/bcknd/wp-content/uploads/115\\_erstatningskrav\\_agge\\_svar.pdf](http://ia.gl/bcknd/wp-content/uploads/115_erstatningskrav_agge_svar.pdf)

[3] Press release from Avataq, The Danish Ecological Council, NOAH Friends of the Earth Denmark and SustainableEnergy, 28 April 2014: New report confirms that the Kvanefjeld mining project is not sustainable: <http://kortlink.dk/ecocouncil/mbhn>

[4] Former Öko-Institut Senior Researcher, Gerhard Schmidt: Environmental and health impacts of uranium mining in Greenland, March 2016, p. 6: <http://noah.dk/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Gerhard-Schmidt-presentation-2016-3-16.pdf>

Link to The European Mining Waste Directive: [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:c37006a-063e-4dc7-9b05-52c37720740c.0005.02/DOC\\_1&format=PDF](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:c37006a-063e-4dc7-9b05-52c37720740c.0005.02/DOC_1&format=PDF)