



PRESS RELEASE

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Breach of faith regarding referendum on the Kvanefjeld mining project

On several occasions, the Greenlandic government, Naalakkersuisut, has promised a referendum in Southern Greenland on the controversial uranium/rare earth elements mining project at Kvanefjeld. The promise has now been withdrawn without prior public debate. This happened shortly before the owner, the Australian mining company *Greenland Minerals and Energy Ltd. (GMEL)*, sent an application to Naalakkersuisut for an exploitation license[1].

Recently, GMEL published a white book [2] containing the government's answers to questions from the public during the pre-hearing phase to the environmental and social impact assessments of the mining project. Here, it is briefly mentioned that Naalakkersuisut neither expects to have a nation-wide referendum on the reinstatement of the uranium ban, nor a regional referendum on the Kvanefjeld project.

"In her inaugural address in 2013, the then Prime Minister, Aleqa Hammond, promised a consultative referendum in Southern Greenland on the Kvanefjeld project", says Mikkel Myrup, chairman of Avataq, Greenland's Nature and Environmental Association, and continues: "The promise was repeated in the last speech she held in Parliament in November 2014, the day before a new general election was called and subsequently won by the government. The reason that was given for the referendum was the close proximity of the open pit mine to the town of Narsaq. Even though the referendum would only be consultative, the Prime Minister promised that the government would respect its result" [3].

The retraction of the promise represents the culmination of a pro-uranium campaign that has lasted several years. Among others, the campaign involved three uranium information tours by lecturers from Danish research institutions. The lecturers were supposed to be neutral, but systematically played down or ignored the health and environmental impacts of uranium mining. Furthermore, much of the tours were dedicated to a rebuttal of the findings of an independent Dutch expert report on the environmental impacts of the Kvanefjeld project, which was commissioned by Avataq, The Danish Ecological Council, NOAH Friend of the Earth Denmark and Sustainable Energy[5]. Among others, the report concluded that the project is not environmentally sustainable and threatens the health of the local population.

"Naalakkersuisut has used the uranium informations tours as a pretext for claiming that the people in Southern Greenland are now sufficiently informed on the environmental and health impacts of the

Kvanefjeld project”, says Mariane Paviassen, Chairwoman of The URANI NAAMIK/NO TO URANIUM Society in Narsaq. Recently, the Minister for Industry, Labour and Trade, Randi Vestergaard Evaldsen, promoted this view [6]. “However, just how little the lecturers have analysed the project can be seen from the fact that they never became aware of the fact that GMEL consistently has stated the distance from the open pit mine to be 10 km from Narsaq. The distance is in reality 6-7 km”.

This was pointed out by Kommuneqarfik Sermersooqin in the recently published white book. The distance is important, because the open pit mine is located on top of a mountain at 1 km’s altitude and affected by heavy Arctic sea winds. A report from Risø National Laboratory has concluded that up to thousand of tons of dust could blow away from the mining area annually [7]. Furthermore, GMEL states two different operational life times for the mining project: In the part of the white book that deals with the social sustainability of the project and where the object is to demonstrate how economically viable it is for Greenland and the Municipality of Kujalleq, GMEL talks of a hundred years operational life time. However, in the book’s environmental section, where it makes sense to play down the mine’s environmental impacts, GMEL only uses a 37 years life time.

“GMEL contradicts itself and states two different operational life times for the mining project dependent on, whether the mining company focuses on the economy or the environment”, says Niels Henrik Hooge from NOAH Friends of the Earth Denmark’s Uranium Group. “It is evident, that the longer a mine operates, the more it pollutes. GMEL has submitted its application for a mining license at the same time as one of the worst mining accidents in modern time takes place – the tailings dam failure in Bento Rodrigues in Brazil. It itself plans to store hundreds of millions of tons of toxic and radioactive mining waste in the Taseq Lake, a few kilometers from Narsaq. The difference in altitude of Taseq and Narsaq is large, so a mudslide there would gain a very big momentum. One has to ask oneself, if a major dam failure could make the Narsaq valley uninhabitable” [8].

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Notes:

[1] Homepage, Naalakkersuisut: <http://naalakkersuisut.gl/da/H%c3%b8ringer/Arkiv-over-h%c3%b8ringer/2014/Kuannersuit-forhoering>

[2] GME Announcement: Kvanefjeld Update: Mining License Application Guidance Phase to Commence, December 2nd, 2015: http://www.ggg.gl/docs/ASX-announcements/progressing-to-permitting_1504869.pdf

[3] Prime Minister Aleqa Hammond's inaugural address in Greenland's Parliament, Inatsisartut , 13 October 2013, p. 22-24: <http://kortlink.dk/naalakkersuisut/k5v9>
Prime Minister Aleqa Hammond's opening speech in Greenland's Parliament, Inatsisartut , 30 September 2014, p. 28-29: <http://kortlink.dk/naalakkersuisut/k5u9>

[4] Press release from Avataq, The Danish Ecological Council, NOAH Friends of the Earth Denmark, SustainableEnergy and The Sheep Farmers Group in Narsaq and Qassiarsuk, 26 June 2015: Uranium information tour in Southern Greenland was not neutral: <http://noah.dk/sydgroenlandsk-informationsturne-om-uran-var-ikke-neutral/>

[5] 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://www.ecocouncil.dk/en/releases/articles-pressreleases/chemicals-and-climate/2348-new-report-confirms-that-the-kvanefjeld-mining-project-is-not-sustainable>

Storm van Leeuwen interview on the update of the mining project:

<http://atomposten.blogspot.dk/2015/06/uranmineprojektet-i-kvanefjeld.html>

Helen Caldicott interview on the mining project: <http://atomposten.blogspot.dk/2015/06/interview-med-lge-og-forfatter-helen.html>

[6] Kalaallit Nunaata Radioa: Uranium debate: The Kvanefjeld mine must not damage business life, 28 November 2015: <http://knr.gl/da/nyheder/kvanefjeld-minen-m%C3%A5-ikke-skade-erhvervet>

[7] Kim Pilegaard: Preliminary environmental impact statement for the Kvanefjeld uranium mine, Risø National Laboratory, 1990, p. 44: <http://kortlink.dk/dtu/k5vh>

[8] The Bento Rodrigues tailings dam failure took place on 5 November 2015 and caused widespread flooding and at least 13 fatalities. Approximately 60 million cubic meters of iron waste flew into the Doce River, whereafter toxic mudflows reached the Atlantic Ocean 17 days later. The river covers 230 municipalities that use its bed for subsistence. It is expected that the waste will take at least 100 years to dilute to levels anywhere near previous levels. The total impact and environmental consequences to the river and its wildlife is still unclear. The incident has been described as the worst environmental disaster in

Brazil's history. The Brazil government is about to sue the owner of the mine, BHP and Vale, for \$5bn over the dam disaster.

E.g., see: The Guardian: Mud from Brazil dam disaster is toxic, UN says, despite mine operator denials, 26 November 2015: <http://www.theguardian.com/business/2015/nov/26/mud-from-brazil-dam-disaster-is-toxic-un-says-despite-mine-operator-denials>

The Guardian: Brazil to sue mining companies BHP and Vale for \$5bn over dam disaster, 28 November 2015: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/28/brazil-to-sue-mining-companies-bhp-and-vale-for-5bn-over-dam-disaster>

Wikipedia, Bento Rodrigues dam disaster: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bento_Rodrigues_dam_disaster

See also the following chronology of major tailings dam failures: <http://www.wise-uranium.org/mdaf.html>