

## THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

► The UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights foresees that the persistent trampling of human rights can lead to violence as is currently happening in Niger. The preamble states “...it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law...”

► The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples states: “Indigenous peoples have the right to the lands, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned, occupied or otherwise used or acquired.” This is clearly being violated in Niger where the Touareg are threatened with removal; in northern Australia where the government is seizing Aboriginal lands to exploit uranium resources; and on American Indian lands threatened with continued uranium mining.

► In the U.S., people who worked in uranium mines before 1971 qualify for federal aid under the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA). However, those who worked after 1971 do not qualify, although they are just as sick as pre '71 workers. The RECA law has prioritized claims of non-Native workers over Native Peoples and the application process is convoluted and exclusionary.



## REGULATORY MALPRACTICE

► The framework for the regulation of uranium mining and recovery is a mishmash of federal and state oversight, with little accountability for lax decisions and an unwillingness to enforce protective standards if these would increase costs to industry.

► Uranium and associated decay products will remain hazardous for thousands of years. Yet regulations in the U.S. cover a period of 1,000 years for mill tailings and at most 500 years for "low-level" radioactive waste. This means that future generations will likely face significant risks from uranium mining, milling, and processing.

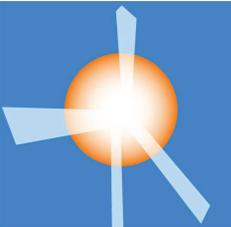
## WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

► Urge your elected officials to support and uphold the Navajo ban on uranium mining.

► Support the Post-71 campaign that works to ensure miners and their families who mined after 1971 are also eligible for compensation.

► Tell Congress to hold hearings about and conduct proper oversight of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission whose lax approach to uranium mining regulation favors industry profit over human and environmental concerns.

► Support the uranium mining opposition group in your area. Go to [www.beyondnuclear.org](http://www.beyondnuclear.org) for links.



**Please Support Beyond Nuclear**

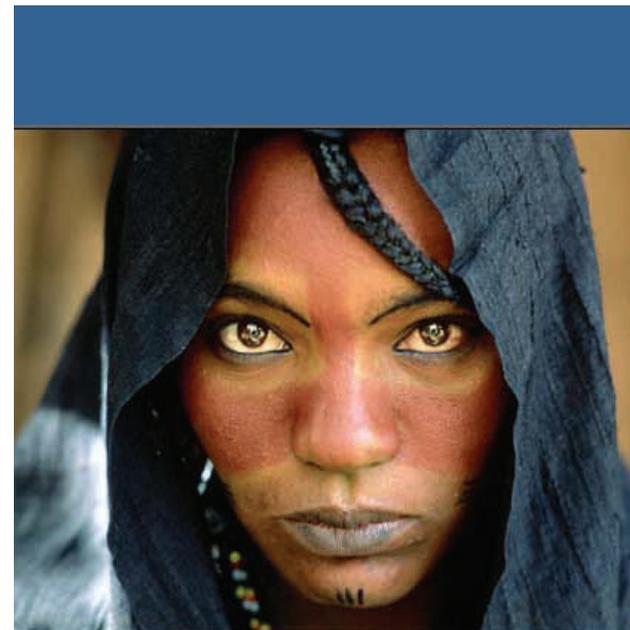
Beyond Nuclear works to educate and activate the public about the connections between nuclear power and nuclear weapons and the need to abandon both to safeguard our future. You can contact Beyond Nuclear or make a donation at:

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Navajo photo courtesy of New Mexico Environmental Law Center 3/15/09

# Uranium Mining and Human Rights



The impact on indigenous peoples, their health and the environment

[www.beyondnuclear.org](http://www.beyondnuclear.org)

# “I believe the powers that be committed genocide on Navajo land by allowing uranium mining.” Navajo president, Joe Shirley

## INTRODUCTION

The current rush to open new uranium mines around the world is prompted by the illusion of a “nuclear renaissance.” But the history of uranium mining represents a consistent violation of environmental justice across the globe and is replete with drastic environmental damage, serious worker safety and health abuses and harm to entire communities—most often those of low-income and indigenous peoples.

## WHAT IS URANIUM MINING?

- ▶ Uranium mining is the process of extracting uranium ore from the ground. Methods include open pit, in situ leach and hard rock mining, all of which cause environmental contamination and depletion of natural resources.
- ▶ Uranium ore was first mined primarily for the production of nuclear weapons and, since the 1960s, for manufacture into nuclear reactor fuel.
- ▶ Uranium mining is carbon-emission intensive. However, data are scarce on the true carbon emissions from the nuclear fuel chain and these emissions are not factored into the nuclear industry’s misleading “clean air” claims.
- ▶ Uranium mining consumes vast quantities of water, severely depleting already arid environments of this essential resource. In situ leach mining, especially, consumes and permanently contaminates important drinking water supplies.

## TOP TEN URANIUM EXPORTING COUNTRIES

2007 figures

Canada  
Australia  
Kazakhstan  
Russia  
Niger

Namibia  
Uzbekistan  
United States  
Ukraine  
China



## HEALTH IMPACTS

- ▶ Uranium is not only radioactive but a toxic heavy metal and, like lead or mercury, can poison air and water.
- ▶ Uranium miners experience high incidences of lung, stomach and skin cancers as well as leukemia, kidney disorders and respiratory illnesses.
- ▶ When mining began, companies and regulators knew of the health dangers but failed to warn workers or provide adequate protection.
- ▶ Families of miners and those living in mining communities have been made sick by radioactive dust brought back on miners’ clothing; from contaminated drinking water; and from exposure to radon gas.

## ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

- ▶ Mining and milling expose workers to radioactive dust and radon gas. Milling leaves behind radioactive tailings. When radon gas is released from a uranium mine, it deposits solid radioactive fallout – including polonium-210 – on the ground for hundreds of miles downwind.
- ▶ Uranium mines can cause ecological disasters. In 1979, the worst nuclear accident in U.S history occurred at Church Rock, New Mexico when 90 million gallons of liquid radioactive uranium mill waste were accidentally released into the Rio Puerco River, which remains contaminated today.
- ▶ Proposed uranium mines threaten precious caribou calving grounds in Nunavut, Inuit territory.
- ▶ Problems persist at uranium mines long after they are shut down. Studies in France have shown high readings of radioactivity at abandoned mines and radioactive tailings have been used for school playgrounds and public parking lots.

## INDIGENOUS DISCRIMINATION

- ▶ Around 70% of the world’s uranium resources are found beneath sovereign indigenous lands. More than 1,300 uranium mines once operated on Navajo land. Dozens of international nuclear corporations have been awarded permits to mine uranium in northern Niger, home to the Touareg.
- ▶ Employment from uranium mining preys upon the lack of resources of indigenous peoples. Forced to develop their natural resources, this places them in direct opposition to traditional beliefs and practices and causes damage and pollution to the land and the people .