

Support an International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA): Time to ban the bomb and the reactor

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With the world's hopes newly raised by inspiring statements from prominent leaders urging the elimination of nuclear weapons, including pledges by Presidents Obama and Medvedev, to work for "a nuclear free world", the recent establishment of the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) could actually enable us to realistically fulfill the Non-Proliferation Treaty's mission for nuclear disarmament. In January, Germany, together with Denmark and Spain, launched IRENA in Bonn with 75 nations who signed its founding statute.ⁱ Since IRENA is the Greek word for peace, this auspicious initiative is particularly well-named as the Agency is designed to spread the fruits of clean, safe sustainable energy, enabling the planet to avoid nuclear proliferation and catastrophic climate change and assist developing countries to access the abundant free energy resources provided by our Mother Earth.

IRENA precludes reliance on fossil, nuclear and inefficient traditional biomass energy. With an International Atomic Energy Agency, promoting dangerous and toxic nuclear power technology, and an International Energy Agency, founded during the 1970s oil crisis to manage the fossil fuel supply, IRENA's launch could not have been timelier as the world wrestles with the twin crises of nuclear proliferation and global warming. We urge every nation to join IRENA by signing its founding statute and to forego or phase out deadly nuclear technology, whether for war or for peace.

Throughout the years of this NPT process, we NGOs have warned states parties that the spread of nuclear energy spells disaster for efforts to control the proliferation of nuclear weapons or to mitigate the impacts of climate change, threatening the very future of humanity's existence. Distinguished physicians at these meetings have described for you the awful physical effects of carcinogenic pollution from nuclear power with increased cancer, leukemia, and birth defects in every community where nuclear reactors spew their lethal poisons into the air, water and soil.ⁱⁱ Since we last spoke to you, new German studies show a 60% increase in solid cancers and a 117% increase in leukemia among young children living near German nuclear facilities between 1980 and 2003.ⁱⁱⁱ

Indigenous leaders from around the planet have stood here and told you about the awful horrors wreaked on their communities from uranium mining. We reminded you of the creation story of the Rainbow Serpent, asleep in the earth, guarding over those elemental powers which lie outside of humankind's control and how any attempt to seize those underworld elements will disturb the sleep of the serpent, provoking its vengeance: a terrible deluge of destruction and death.^{iv} At the World Uranium Hearing, the world was warned that:

The Rainbow Serpent has been wakened. Men turned into shadows, cancer, women giving birth to jellyfish babies, leukemia - since the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945,

since the Bravo test in the Bikini Islands, and since the Chernobyl catastrophe in April of 1986, we know that the Rainbow Serpent doesn't differentiate between uranium's military and peaceful uses. Death is everywhere it touches. But what we perhaps don't realize is that the destructive properties of uranium are unleashed the moment it's mined from the ground. ^v

We have told you there is no known solution to the storage of nuclear waste which lasts for hundreds of thousands of years, spewing its silent poisons into our air, earth and soil, injuring not only the living, but unborn generations to come—our very genetic heritage. The United States, in 2009, ^{vi} cancelled 30 year-old plans to bury nuclear waste at Yucca Mountain Nevada because it cannot safely contain the long-lived poisons that the nuclear industry lobbied to bury there for eons. After more than 60 years of ignorantly and mindlessly amassing huge quantities of toxic radioactive poisons, heedless of the consequences to earth's biosphere, yet another Commission is to be appointed to yet again “study the issue”. We don't have a clue! Rational behavior would demand we should stop making any more nuclear waste until, and if ever, we can figure it out!! In France, held up as the exemplar of a country enjoying the “benefits” of nuclear power, its nationally owned Areva, the largest nuclear corporation in the world, is plunged into debt. Its reprocessing center at La Hague has produced massive discharges of radiation into the English Channel and has over nine thousand containers of radioactive wastes with no safe place to go. In Japan, the costs from the earthquake last year that crippled seven reactors at Kashwazaki are still rising. ^{vii} In the UK, the Sellafield nuclear recycling plant is mired in debt and costly breakdowns. ^{viii}

We have explained to you how the nuclear industry promotes false information about nuclear power's ability to mitigate the effects of catastrophic climate disasters. Millions of dollars are spent in marketing campaigns to manipulate public opinion to believe that nuclear power will prevent global warming. ^{ix} But the evidence is incontrovertible that nuclear power is the slowest and costliest way to reduce CO2 emissions. Financing nuclear power diverts scarce resources from investments in renewable energy and energy efficiency. Enormous sums spent for nuclear power would worsen the effects of global warming by buying less carbon-free energy per dollar, compared to investing those sums in sun, wind or efficiency. ^x Nor is nuclear power carbon free. ^{xi} It uses fossil fuels for the mining, milling and processing of uranium, as well as for reactor decommissioning and waste disposition and depends on a grid usually powered by coal. It is unreliable in extreme weather conditions and needs back up power to prevent meltdown. In the summer of 2004, France had to shut down a number of reactors during an extreme heat wave. ^{xii} We have spoken to you of the folly of lusting for mastery of nuclear technology as a matter of “national pride”. This is holdover thinking from the 1960s when nuclear power developed in industrialized nations. Many scientists in developing countries were trained in nuclear technology as part of the Atoms for Peace programs in the US, Russia and Europe during the late 1950s and in the 1960s. ^{xiii} Nuclear power growth stalled in the industrialized countries by the late 1980s, especially after the tragedies of Three Mile Island and Chernobyl, and as its economic burdens became clear. But by then the former young scientists were entrenched in running the industry and like their nuclear reactors were now middle aged and unwilling to let go of their positions of power.

The nuclear renaissance was to be a passing on of the inheritance to the next generation but real world constraints are making this generation of new reactors even more problematic than the last

and the nuclear baton is not likely to pass out of the existing “club”. The enormous cost and safety problems are still here. In the industrialized nations, the nuclear industry has great difficulty in recruiting nuclear engineers.^{xiv} Due to global shortages in nuclear reactor components it’s not possible for the world nuclear industry to build more than 10 reactors a year at most for the next decade.^{xv} Because all of the operating reactors will have to be retired in that time, 1070 reactors would have to be built in 42 years, or about 25 reactors per year, in order for nuclear technology to lower carbon emissions of even one billion tons per year.

In a “wedge” model which assumes that nuclear power could replace a portion of the energy used by coal fired plants, the effort expended would be insufficient to have even the smallest impact on climate change.^{xvi} And because the limited supply of production capacity to produce new reactors creates a seller's market, the industry is much more likely to sell to countries with nuclear experience. This is due to the risks associated with inordinately long lead times for new construction, security and liability issues, and already existing infrastructure. Thus developing countries or countries with no nuclear industry will probably be rebuffed and are well advised to put their energy investments into much more reliable renewable sources

Nevertheless, proposals to try to control civilian nuclear fuel production have sparked new interest in acquiring nuclear technology by countries that never wanted such technology before. A top-down, hierarchical, centrally controlled nuclear apartheid fuel cycle is being planned, creating a whole new class of nuclear “have nots” who can’t be trusted not to turn their “peaceful” nuclear reactors into bomb factories. It’s just so 20th century! These discriminatory proposals are doomed to fail. With the growing chorus of promising new calls for a nuclear free world, there is no need for any nation to have a virtual bomb in the basement. Far better to leap frog over this antiquated, poisonous 20th century technology and expend your financial and intellectual treasure on clean, safe renewable energy, averting the twin catastrophes of nuclear proliferation and radical climate change, while adding your nation’s voice to the growing numbers of world leaders demanding that negotiations for nuclear weapons abolition move forward.

Critical energy investment choices must be made now if we are to prevent the looming climate calamity. Every thirty minutes, enough of the sun’s energy reaches the earth’s surface to meet global energy demand for an entire year. Wind has the potential to satisfy the world’s electricity needs 40 times over and could meet all global energy demand five times over. The geothermal energy stored in the top six miles of the earth’s crust contains an estimated 50,000 times the energy of the world’s known oil and gas resources. Global wave power, tidal and river power are vast untapped stores of clean energy.^{xvii} IRENA is dedicated to supporting nations to develop and share the research and technology that will enable us to harness that abundant, free energy to secure the future of our planet.

While the NPT guarantees to States which agree to abide by its terms an inalienable right to so-called peaceful nuclear technology, it is highly questionable whether such a right can ever be appropriately conferred on a State.^{xviii} During the Age of Enlightenment natural law theory challenged the divine right of kings. The United States’ Declaration of Independence spoke of “self-evident truth” that all men are “endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights ... to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” **Where does “peaceful nuclear technology” fit in**

this picture?!? Just as the signing of the Comprehensive Test Ban abrogated the right to peaceful nuclear explosions in Article V of the NPT, we urge you to adopt a protocol to the NPT mandating participation in the newly launched International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) which would supersede the Article IV right to “peaceful” nuclear technology.

Civil Society’s Model Nuclear Weapons Convention, now an official UN document, includes an Optional Protocol Concerning Energy Assistance which would phase out nuclear power and provide funding and assist nations to shift to non-nuclear sustainable energy sources.^{xix}

Universal enrollment in IRENA, coupled with a moratorium on new reactors and fuel production, while phasing out nuclear power by relying on safe, renewable energy, must become an integral part of the good faith negotiations required to eliminate nuclear weapons. We urge your enrollment and participation with IRENA. Since IRENA was launched in January with 75 countries, three new countries, Belarus, India and Guinea have signed its Statute. NGOs will campaign for 100% universal participation in IRENA by the 2010 Review Conference. Please join us!! Add your nation to the list!! It’s time to give peace a chance!

ⁱ www.irena.org

ⁱⁱ See generally, “Reasonable Doubt, New Scientist, apr. 26, 2008, p.18

ⁱⁱⁱ Childhood Cancer in the Vicinity of Nuclear Power Plants, International Journal of Cancer, vol.122, p.721; European Journal of Cancer, vol.44.p.275

^{iv} <http://archive.greenpeace.org/comms/no.nukes/minfabmi.html>

^v <http://www.ratical.org/radiation/WorldUraniumHearing/>

^{vi} France’s nuke power poster child has a money melt-down, Harvey Wasserman, Free Press, March 19, 2009, <http://www.freepress.org/columns/display/7/2009/1732>

^{vii} *ibid*

^{viii} A One Billion Pound Nuclear White Elephant, Michael Savage,

<http://www.independent.co.uk/environment/green-living/a-1631bn-nuclear-white-elephant-1664427.ht>

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Moore Spin: Or, How Reporters Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Nuclear Front Groups <http://www.prwatch.org/node/5833>

^x Nuclear Power: Climate Fix or Folly?, Amory Lovins, Imran Sheikh, Alex Markovich, http://www.rmi.org/images/PDFs/Energy/E09-01_NuclPwrClimFixFolly1i09.pdf

^{xi} Nuclear Power: The Energy Balance, John Willem Storm van Leuwen, 2008 <http://www.stormsmith.nl/>

^{xii} European Heat Wave Shows Limits of Nuclear Energy, Julio Godoy, <http://www.commondreams.org/headlines06/0728-06.htm>

^{xiii} For 50 Years, 'Atoms for Peace' has Spawned Nuclear Fears , James Sterngold <http://www.commondreams.org/headlines03/1209-08.htm>

^{xiv} <http://www.ne.doe.gov/neac/neacPDFs/finalblue.pdf>

^{xv} <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=22748&prog=zgp&proj=znpp> , chap.3, p. 85

^{xvi} http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/3-12-08_squassoni_testimony1.pdf

^{xvii} See generally, A Sustainable Energy Future is Possible Now, <http://www.abolition2000.org/a2000-files/sustainable-now.pdf> , 2006

^{xviii} Judge Weeramantry, Christopher G (1997) Justice Without Frontiers, Brill Publishers, pp.8, 132, 134, 139-40.

Inalienable rights are distinguished from legal rights established by a State as moral or natural rights, inherent in the very essence of an individual. The concept first appeared in Islamic law and jurisprudence which denied a ruler “the right to take away from his subjects certain rights which inhere in his or her person as a human being” and “become rights by reason of the fact that they are given to a subject by a law and from a source which no ruler can question or alter”. John Locke, the enlightenment philosopher who coined the phrase “inalienable rights”, was thought to be influenced in his thinking by his exposure to Arabic law.

^{xix} http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A%2F62%2F650&Submit=Search&Lang=E , p. 72