

Invisible No More

Indigenous Peoples Were Disposables to Nuclear Industry

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WINDOW ROCK, ARIZONA, USA – Arriving from every region of the earth, their stories are the same. They tell of the machinations of the global nuclear industries, corporations leaving behind trails of radiation, cancer, birth defects and death for Indigenous villagers.

Stolen as an infant from her birth family, one Australian Aboriginal woman now speaks out against the massive expansion of a uranium mine that threatens her people with more misery in South Australia. She has received death threats for speaking out, as the mining industry promises tens of thousands of jobs. Money buys silence from others.

Arriving from the other side of the world, villagers from India working in and living near the uranium mines tell how unborn children die before they are born and others are born with birth defects. One breaks into tears as he remembers his family members who have died from cancer after working in the mines.

Here, on the Navajo Nation, many of those who worked in the mines are now dead from cancer and respiratory disease. Many of their children are dead. Still, at least 1,200 radioactive sites have not been reclaimed. Radioactive rocks and waste remain strewn where children play and sheep graze.

Nearby, on Acoma Pueblo and Laguna Pueblo, Pueblos worked in the uranium mines. Like Navajos, they worked without protective clothing. Those who did not work in the mines ate the food dried in the sun, fresh food covered with blowing, radioactive dust.

Far to the north, the Dineh of Canada, like their Dine' relatives to the south on Navajoland, were the uranium industry's canaries in the mines. The governments of the United States and Canada watched and studied Native uranium miners in order to determine the health effects of radiation, long after scientists warned of the deadly consequences.

No where has the impact been greater than in Western Shoshone country, where the Nevada Test Site and the nuclear industry proliferate and elongate their scar on the earth.

These are the stories of the people at the Indigenous World Uranium Summit on the Navajo Nation, Nov. 29 – Dec. 2. Regardless of the Navajo Nation's new law which forbids more uranium mining, corporations now plan uranium mining near Crownpoint, N.M. It is the same area where the nation's deadliest uranium mill tailings spill occurred in Church Rock, N.M., in 1979. The radiation then flowed downstream in the Rio Puerco, to the relocation homes of Navajos at New Lands and elsewhere in Arizona.

From every region of the world, the people have arrived, not just with their stories, but also with a new resolve to fight uranium mining on Indigenous lands by every means necessary. They resolve to act, with the guidance of their elders, with prayer, direct action, lawsuits, information campaigns to stockholders and education campaigns.

Through sovereignty and global networking, after watching too many relatives die of cancer and other diseases, a new campaign is launched to protect their homelands.

Indigenous Nations -- Acoma, Laguna and Zuni Pueblo, Navajo, Hopi, Pawnee, Western Shoshone, Pima, Choctaw and First Nations from Canada -- joined with their allies from Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Germany, India, Japan and Vanuatu in the South Pacific.

Speaking of respect and living in harmony with Mother Earth, while warning of the consequences for those who violate the natural laws of the universe, their message was the same: "Leave the uranium in the ground."

The Declaration of the summit demands a worldwide ban on uranium mining and processing on Native lands around the world.

"We reaffirm the Declaration of the World Uranium Hearing in Salzburg, Austria, in 1992, that 'uranium and other radioactive minerals must remain in their natural location.' Further, we stand in solidarity with the Navajo Nation for enacting the Diné Natural Resources Protection Act of 2005, which bans uranium mining and processing and is based on the Fundamental Laws of the Dine. And we dedicate ourselves to a nuclear-free future," states the proclamation.