

## THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

► The United Nations 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.*” Yet violations are evident across the globe. In Niger, Africa, uranium mines have displaced Tuareg nomads; in Australia the government continues to seize Aboriginal lands to extract uranium; in Nunavut, Canada, proposed mines will harm the caribou herds, an Inuit food source; and in North America and elsewhere the contamination of native lands and essential resources persists. Challenges to proposed mines and licenses can take years to unfold.



Photo by: Dawn Dyer

► The Nuclear-Free Future Award ([www.nuclear-free.com](http://www.nuclear-free.com)) and the Uranium Network ([www.uranium-network.org](http://www.uranium-network.org)) support and recognize indigenous and other activists who draw global attention to the human rights violations caused by uranium mining and every other phase of the nuclear fuel chain. The NFFA honorees are often unsung heroes in the struggle for environmental justice across the globe.

## REGULATORY MALPRACTICE

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

► Uranium and associated decay products will remain hazardous for thousands of years and beyond. Regulations in the US, however, cover a period of only 1,000 years for mill tailings and at most 500 years for “low-level” radioactive waste. Future generations will face significant risks from the contamination resulting from current uranium mining, milling, and processing.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

► Urge your elected officials to: uphold federal, state and tribal moratoria that ban uranium mining; pass legislation that will compensate *all* US uranium miners whose health has been harmed; and vote against planned new uranium mines.

► Tell Congress to hold hearings about, and initiate proper oversight of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, whose approach to uranium mining regulation often favors industry profit over human and environmental welfare.

► Join the Uranium Network to keep informed and to support people worldwide in their opposition to uranium mining.



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*Cover photo of Henry Red Cloud, a 2010 NFFA winner, who installs solar panels on his Pine Ridge Oglala Sioux reservation in South Dakota. © Orla Connolly.*

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# Uranium Mining and Human Rights

The impact on people,  
our health, and  
the environment



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

# “We have seen the heartbreaking effects of those who sacrificed their health and lives by working or living near uranium mines.” Senator Tom Udall

## INTRODUCTION

Uranium mining has consistently violated environmental justice throughout its history and is replete with drastic environmental damage, serious worker safety and health abuses, and harm to entire communities — often those of indigenous peoples.

## WHAT IS URANIUM MINING?

▶ Uranium mining is the process of extracting uranium ore from the ground. Methods include open pit, underground and in situ leach mining, all of which cause environmental contamination.

▶ Uranium ore was first mined primarily for the production of nuclear weapons and since the 1960s, for manufacture into nuclear reactor fuel.

▶ Uranium mining, milling and enrichment, release global warming gases, including carbon dioxide.

▶ Uranium mining consumes vast quantities of water and can contaminate ground water and other drinking and agricultural water sources.

▶ Uranium is both radioactive and a toxic heavy metal and, like lead and mercury, can poison air, soil and water.

▶ About 85% of the radionuclides from uranium mining end up as wastes that are extremely difficult to manage and contain.

## TOP URANIUM-PRODUCING COUNTRIES

Canada  
Kazakhstan  
Niger

Australia  
Russia  
Namibia



*The huge open pit Ranger uranium mine, Australia*

## HEALTH IMPACTS

▶ Uranium miners experience high incidences of lung, stomach and skin cancers as well as leukemia, kidney disorders and respiratory illnesses.

▶ Many family members of uranium miners and other people living in uranium mining communities have become ill by drinking contaminated water, and by inhaling radioactive dust and radon gas.

▶ Many uranium mining communities in the US have received only minimal health care. Less than a third of the illnesses caused by uranium exposure qualify for federal compensation for the sufferers.

## ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

▶ When uranium is mined and milled, massive piles of radioactive rocks and sludges, called tailings, are left behind. Radioactive dust and radon gas are dispersed into the environment and can be carried downwind for hundreds of miles.

▶ In 1993, 500,000 gallons of radioactively and chemically contaminated water spilled from a uranium mine tailings site at Elliot Lake in Canada, contaminating Serpent River indigenous lands. In 1979 a tailings dam at Church Rock, NM broke, releasing 90 million gallons of liquid radioactive waste and 1,100 tons of solid mill wastes into the Rio Puerco, an essential water source.

▶ Contamination persists at and around uranium mines long after they are closed. For example, in France, the radiation levels in sediment samples taken from waterways far downstream from closed uranium mines were so high that the sediment could have been classified as radioactive waste.

## ENVIRONMENTAL INJUSTICE

▶ Historically, and still today all around the world, uranium mines were, and continue to be, disproportionately permitted on lands where indigenous people live. For example, in New Mexico, a majority of unremediated uranium mine sites are on lands traditionally used and occupied by the Pueblo and Navajo. Despite the Navajo ban on uranium mining, licenses continue to be granted for new uranium mines that will contaminate natural resources within the Navajo Nation.