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Hon. Colin Powell
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We are writing to encourage the Department of State to take a leading role in ensuring that nuclear power is rejected as a “sustainable technology” in the upcoming talks of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD 9) in February and April. While CSD handles many sustainability issues, this year’s talks will focus on sustainable energy technologies. Since the mandate of CSD is sustainable development, we feel that the Commission should discuss only truly sustainable energy technologies, and that the final recommendations of CSD 9 should reflect the fact that nuclear energy is non-sustainable.

The Brundtland Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development defines sustainable development as follows: “Humanity has the ability to make development sustainable - to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.” (WCED 1987) While every energy technology has some environmental ramification, nuclear power is particularly non-sustainable, even by this very broad and non-specific definition. Rather than use sustainability principles to promote technology and capital intensive, exclusive projects through the United Nations, CSD should ensure that they support economic development which benefits a broad base, especially small business. Nuclear technology compromises the ability of future generations to meet their needs for numerous reasons, among them:

Cost and scarcity of uranium

Nuclear power’s fuel—uranium—is not sustainable. The more reactors that are in operation, the more uranium used. As is the case with other polluting fuels, such as oil and coal, the more uranium used, the less remains and the more expensive it becomes to obtain; eventually it runs out. The large amount of money invested in nuclear energy technology would be wasted because of the inevitable and not-so-distant exhaustion of its uranium fuel source. Reprocessing of atomic fuel has been rejected by the U.S. on both economic and proliferation grounds. Solar, wind and energy-efficiency investments would not waste money on fuel that will inevitably disappear. Instead, the more money invested in these technologies, the cheaper they become.

Proliferation concerns

Each year every 1000-megawatt reactor produces 40 bombs worth of plutonium, adding to the threat of nuclear proliferation. This is a critical concern given many countries’ close links between the military and civil nuclear fuel cycle. We do not understand how a technology whose radioactive waste could be used to build a weapon of unthinkable destruction could be considered sustainable under any definition. Nuclear proliferation is destabilizing and threatens our national security.

Cross-boundary issues and radiation contamination

When one country chooses a nuclear reactor, it chooses it for the countries around it as well. Radioactive contamination from the Chernobyl nuclear power reactor explosion reached as far as

California. Contamination also traveled over most of Europe, resulting in food restrictions and the wasteful slaughter of animals.

It doesn't take an accident to spread radioactive pollution. As a matter of normal operation, reactors release radioactive substances to the air and water. Many human population studies demonstrate that additional, low, constant levels of radiation can cause cancer and genetic mutations in this and future generations. Subjects of these studies, often nuclear facility workers and communities, suffer higher rates of diseases than non-nuclear communities, even with apparent normal operation of these facilities.

The operation of nuclear power reactors currently is causing civil and national unrest between non-nuclear Austria and its nuclear neighbors, such as Czech Republic and Slovakia. The Austrian government and NGOs are rightly concerned that a nuclear accident outside Austria could pollute their country. A push for nuclear power in other countries in Africa or Asia for instance, may provoke hostilities in fragile political and economic systems already fraught with tension. This situation could draw the world into unnecessary conflict.

The nuclear industry argues that defining sustainability is a sovereign issue. But with nuclear power, everyone's sovereignty is at risk and the potential for national conflict increases.

Waste isolation

Nuclear power creates atomic waste. This radioactive waste cannot be isolated from the environment for its entire hazardous life (from thousands to millions of years). Consequently, and rightly so, no community (domestic or international) is willing to sacrifice itself for a waste dump—nor should they have to. Hence we are left with an intractable radioactive waste problem that gets larger the longer reactors operate.

Nuclear power not only compromises the ability of future generations to meet their needs, it does not even “meet the needs of the present” for the following reasons:

Enforcement of nuclear regulations

Effectively and responsibly enforcing regulation of nuclear power is costly and meets with limited success even in countries able to pay for it. Atomic power regulation and enforcement continues to be a controversial issue in terms of public safety margins versus corporate profit margins in a deregulating electricity market. The fact is, nuclear power cannot exist without heavy and continued subsidies from tax and ratepayers. It cannot survive on its own in a free market economy and must rely on subsidy to guarantee its existence. Meanwhile, the money invested in sustaining a profit for nuclear power generators could be invested in other societal needs; yet another reason why nuclear power could compromise the ability of future generations to meet their own needs while not giving the current generation what it needs: clean power that can eventually support itself without constant, exorbitant subsidies.

Generation costs and deregulation bail-outs

Nuclear power is the most expensive of all conventional energy sources and more expensive than almost all renewable energy. As proof of nuclear power's economic failure, no successful nuclear power reactor order has been placed in the U.S. since 1973. Ratepayers in the United

States are bailing out nuclear reactors to the approximate tune of \$200 billion dollars in the face of a deregulated market. Nuclear energy costs an average of 12 cents/kWh compared with 7.6-9.1 cents/kWh for solar thermal and 4-6 cents/kWh for wind. According to the Renewable Energy Policy Project, U.S. government subsidies have been highest for the nuclear power industry. It has received the majority (96.3%) of \$150 billion in investments since 1947 when compared with wind and solar; that's \$145 billion for nuclear reactors and \$5 billion for wind and solar combined. Nuclear subsidies have cost the average household a total amount of \$1,411 [1998 dollars] compared to \$11 for wind.

Nuclear power is implicated in the deregulation boondoggle and rolling blackouts in California. Two California utilities on the verge of bankruptcy operate four large reactors in the state. Additionally, they are part-owners of three units outside the state. Under the 1996 deregulation agreement, these utilities can receive 28.5 billion dollars in stranded cost recovery. The largest part of this will most likely support their nuclear reactors which they felt could not survive in a deregulated market. The money that has been paid to the utilities so far was invested in a questionable fashion. Recently FERC ruled that this money is untouchable by the utilities' creditors.

Nuclear power, because of its failed and dangerous track record also faces deserved public and government opposition. Countries including Greece, Sweden, Austria, Nauru, and Ireland, conclude that nuclear power is not sustainable. Some nuclear countries, such as Germany, have begun nuclear phase-out programs, while some non-nuclear countries, such as Turkey, recently have decided they are better off not joining the nuclear club.

Nuclear Power and Kyoto

Other countries have also expressed dislike of nuclear power in international fora. Both the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) and 12 Central and South American countries opposed giving nuclear power clean air credits under the Kyoto Protocol saying "...it is simple colonialism to push nuclear power onto developing countries, leaving them with all the burdens that come with it..." and "...nuclear power" does not match "the environmental integrity principles that guide this group..."

Additionally, Klaus Toepfer, the director of the United Nations Environment Programme is "utterly convinced that [nuclear energy] should not be included in any type of [global warming agreement]."

Finally, international banking institutions such as the World Bank and IMF do not officially subsidize nuclear projects.

Even though the Kyoto COP 6 talks concluded without a written and signed agreement, all countries—including the United States—with the exception of India, China and Japan agreed to language that would exclude nuclear power from receiving credit for reducing greenhouse gases through the Protocol.

CSD 9 should emphasize truly sustainable energy

Nuclear power does not contribute to the economic development of industrializing nations—indeed it is a drain on their resources while posing a risk of spillover from civilian to military use. In common with many heads of Government, citizens, and national delegations, we want to emphasize the reasons (radioactive pollution, lack of radioactive waste storage and nuclear weapons proliferation, among others) why nuclear power should never be considered sustainable. We expect any documents from the CSD 9 meetings to reflect this reality.

Sincerely,

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