

Civil Society Institute

1 Bridge Street, Suite 200, Newton, MA 02458; 672-928-3408; psolotls@gmail.com

Nuclear Information and Resource Service

6930 Carroll Avenue, Suite 3440, Takoma Park, MD 20912; 301-270-6477; nirsnet@nirs.org

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Gentlemen,

Although we greatly respect your work on climate and lending it a much higher profile in public dialogue than would otherwise be the case, we read your letter of November 3, 2013 urging the environmental community to support nuclear power as a solution to climate change with concern. We respectfully disagree with your analysis that nuclear power can safely and affordably mitigate climate change.

Nuclear power is not a financially viable option. Since its inception it has required taxpayer subsidies and publically financed indemnity against accidents. New construction requires billions in public subsidies to attract private capital and, once under construction, severe cost overruns are all but inevitable. As for operational safety, the history of nuclear power plants in the US is fraught with near misses, as documented by the Union of Concerned Scientists, and creates another financial and safety quagmire – high-level nuclear waste. Internationally, we've experienced two catastrophic accidents for a technology deemed to be virtually 'failsafe'.

As for "advanced" nuclear designs endorsed in your letter, they have been tried and failed or are mere blueprints without realistic hope, in the near term, if ever, to be commercialized. The promise and potential impact you lend breeder reactor technology in your letter is misplaced. Globally, \$100 billion over sixty years have been squandered to bring the technology to commercialization without success. The liquid sodium-based cooling system is highly dangerous as proven in Japan and the US. And the technology has proven to be highly unreliable.

Equally detrimental in cost and environmental impact is reprocessing of nuclear waste. In France, the poster child for nuclear energy, reprocessing results in a marginal increase in energetic use of uranium while largely increasing the volume of all levels of radioactive waste. Indeed, the process generates large volumes of radioactive liquid waste annually that is dumped into the English Channel and has increased electric costs to consumers significantly. Not to mention the well-recognized proliferation risks of adopting a plutonium-based energy system.

We disagree with your assessment of renewable power and energy efficiency. They can and are being brought to scale globally. Moreover, they can be deployed much more quickly than nuclear power. For instance, in the US from 2002 to 2012 over 50,000 megawatts of wind were deployed. Not one megawatt of power from new nuclear reactors was deployed, despite subsidies estimated to be worth more than the value of the power new reactors would have produced. Similarly, it took 40 years globally to deploy 50,000 megawatts of solar PV and, recently, only 2 ½ years to deploy an equal amount. By some estimates, another 100,000 MW will be built by the end of 2015. Already, renewables and distributed power have overtaken nuclear power in terms of megawatt hour generation worldwide.

The fact of the matter is, many Wall Street analysts predict that solar PV and wind will have reached grid parity by the end of the decade. Wind in certain parts of the Midwest is already cheaper than natural gas on the wholesale level. Energy efficiency continues to outperform all technologies on a cost basis. While the cost of these technologies continues to decline and enjoy further technological advancement, the cost of nuclear power continues to increase and construction timeframes remain excessive. And we emphasize again that no technological breakthrough to reduce its costs or enhance its operation will occur in the foreseeable future.

Moreover, due to the glacial pace of deployment, the absence of any possibility of strategic technological breakthroughs, and the necessity, as you correctly say, of mitigating climate risks in the near term, nuclear technology is ill-suited to provide any real impact on greenhouse gas emissions in that timeframe. On the contrary, the technologies perfectly positioned now, due to their cost and level of commercialization, to attain decisive reductions in greenhouse gas emissions in the near term are renewable, energy efficiency, distributed power, demand response, and storage technologies.

Instead of embracing nuclear power, we request that you join us in supporting an electric grid dominated by energy efficiency, renewable, distributed power and storage technologies. We ask you to join us in supporting the phase-out of nuclear power as Germany and other countries are pursuing.

It is simply not feasible for nuclear power to be a part of a sustainable, safe and affordable future for humankind.

We would be pleased to meet with you directly to further discuss these issues, to bring the relevant research on renewable energy and grid integration to a dialog with you. Again, we thank you for your service and contribution to our country's understanding about climate change.

The energy choices we make going forward must also take into account the financial, air and water impacts and public health and safety. There are alternatives to fossil fuels and nuclear power and we welcome a chance to a dialog and debate with each of you.

Sincerely,

Initiators

Pam Solo
President and CEO
Civil Society Institute
Newton, MA

Michael Mariotte
President
Nuclear Information and Resource Service
Takoma Park, MD

United States signers

Gary Gover
Chairman and President
Earth Day Mobile Bay, Inc.
Fairhope, AL

Carl Wassilie
Yupiaq Biologist
Alaska's Big Village Network
Anchorage, AK

Hal Shepherd
Director
Center for Water Advocacy
Seward, AK

David Druding
Peoples' Action for a Safe Environment
Parthenon, AR

Stephen Brittle
Don't Waste Arizona
Phoenix, AZ

Dave Parrish
CEO
Operation Save the Earth
Phoenix, AZ

Hailey Sherwood
NAU Against Uranium
Flagstaff, AZ

Linda Seeley
Spokesperson
San Luis Obispo Mothers for Peace
San Luis Obispo, CA

Carolyn Scarr
Program Coordinator
Ecumenical Peace Institute/CALC
Berkeley, CA

David Hartsough
Executive Director
Peaceworkers
San Francisco, CA

Michael Welch
Redwood Alliance
Arcata, CA

Gene Stone
Residents Organized For a Safe Environment (ROSE)
San Clemente, CA

Phoebe Sorgen
Fukushima Response Bay Area
Berkeley, CA

John Thielking (member of Santa Clara County Green Party County Council)
Green Party Of Santa Clara County
San Jose, CA

Gar Smith
Co-founder, Environmentalists Against War
Author, Nuclear Roulette
Berkeley, CA

Earl Katz
Founder and President Emeritus
Public Interest Pictures
Los Angeles, CA

James R. Monroe
Earth, Planetary & Environmental Educator
Monroe Science Educational Services
Concord, CA

Todd Steiner
Executive Director
Turtle Island Restoration Network
Forest Knolls, CA

Marylia Kelley
Executive Director,
Tri-Valley CAREs (Communities Against a Radioactive Environment)
Livermore, CA

Claire Greensfelder
INOCHI / Plutonium Free Future
USA / Japan
Berkeley, CA

Philip Tymon
Administrative Director
Occidental Arts and Ecology Center
Occidental, CA

Randall Hartman
President
South Bay Greens
Torrance, CA

Mark Schroeder, O.F.M.
Animator
Franciscans for Justice
Sacramento, CA

Jim Littlefield
West Coast Director
Surfers' Environmental Alliance
Aptos, CA

Catherine Mullin
President
The Other Americas Radio
Santa Barbara, CA

Marilyn Chilcote
Beacon Presbyterian Fellowship
Oakland, CA

Mary Beth Brangan
James Heddle
Co-Directors, EON
The Ecological Options Network
Bollinas, CA

Robert Dodge, MD
Director
Citizens for Peaceful Resolutions
Ventura, CA

Rev. T. H. Fernandez
President
Church of All
Burbank, CA

David Seaborg
President
World Rainforest Fund
Walnut Creek, CA

Ed Oberweiser
Chair
Ocean Protection Coalition
Fort Bragg, CA

Aletha
Co-Founder
Free Soil Party USA
Los Angeles, CA

Wendy Oser
Nuclear Guardianship Project
Berkeley, CA

Gary Headrick
Co-founder
San Clemente Green
San Clemente, CA

Laurie Litman
350 Sacramento
Sacramento, CA

Jerry B. Brown, Ph.D.
Director, Safe Energy Project
World Business Academy
Santa Barbara, CA

John C. Leddy
President
U.S. Water and Power
Los Angeles, CA

Sister Santussika Bhikkhuni
Director
Karuna Buddhist Vihara
Mountain View, CA

Carol Etoile, Roger Batchelder
Co-Directors
Organizing for Political and Economic Rights
San Diego, CA

Mike Caggiano
President
Peace Action of San Mateo County
San Mateo, CA

Michael Saftler
President
Advocacy Coalition of Telluride
Telluride, CO

Dan Randolph
Executive Director
San Juan Citizens Alliance
Durango, CO

Pete Dronkers
Southwest Circuit Rider
Earthworks
Durango, CO

Bob Kinsey
Board Co-Chairperson
The Colorado Coalition for the Prevention of Nuclear War
Denver, CO

RJ Harrington, Jr.
Executive Director
Clean Energy Action
Boulder, CO

Jennifer Thurston
Information Network for Responsible Mining
Norwood, CO

Sharyn Cunningham
Co-Chair
Colorado Citizens Against Toxic Waste, Inc.
Canon City, CO

Lee Grimes Evans
Chair
CT Sierra Club's Nuclear-Free Committee
New Canaan, CT

Starling W Childs, MFS
President
Berkshire Litchfield Environmental Council
Lakeville, CT

Nancy Burton
Director
Connecticut Coalition Against Millstone
Redding, CT

Enid Breakstone
Founder and Executive Director
The Queenie Foundation, Inc.
Manchester, CT

Judi Friedman
Chair
PACE (Peoples Action for Clean Energy, Inc.)
Canton, CT

Heather White
Executive Director
Environmental Working Group
Washington, D.C.

Lois Gibbs
Executive Director
Center for Health, Environment & Justice
Washington, DC

Jim Riccio
Nuclear Policy Analyst
Greenpeace
Washington, DC

Jan BenDor
National Board Chair
Gray Panthers
Washington, DC

Gerry G. Lee
Director
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
Washington, DC

Alan Muller
Executive Director
Green Delaware
Port Penn, DE

Lynn Ringenberg, M.D.
Emeritus Professor Pediatrics
University of South Florida
President
Physicians for Social Responsibility/Florida
Tampa, FL

Cara Campbell
Ecology Party of Florida
Fort Lauderdale, FL

Diane Carr
Secretary
Transition Venice
Venice, FL

Barry J. White
President
Citizens Allied For Safe Energy, Inc.
Miami, FL

Valerie J. Amor, LEED AP BD+C, Assoc. AIA, Lic. RE Broker
Drawing Conclusions LLC
Eco Logical Real Estate + Community Builder LLC
Fort Lauderdale, FL

Glenn Carroll
Nuclear Watch South
Atlanta, GA

Judith Gordon
Co-Chair
Savannah River Group, Georgia Sierra Club
Augusta, GA

Dan Kelly
Kulike Farm
Hakalau, HI

Joseph Kohn, MD
Medical Director
www.WeAreOne.cc
Wailuku, HI

Patrick Bosold
Chair and Conservation Chair
Leopold Group, S.E. Iowa chapter of Iowa Sierra Club
Fairfield, IA

Liz Woodruff
Executive Director
Snake River Alliance
Boise, ID

David A. Kraft
Director
Nuclear Energy Information Service
Chicago, IL

Linda Lewison
Core Team Sierra Club Nuclear Free Campaign
Board Member
Citizens Advocating to Protect Our Water
CAPOW
Chicago IL

Carolyn Treadway
No New Nukes
Normal, IL

Maureen K. Headington
President
Stand Up/Save Lives Campaign
Burr Ridge, IL

Stanley Campbell
Sinnissippi Alliance for the Environment
Rockford, IL

Sharon Smith
National Organizer
International Socialist Organization
Chicago, IL

Kerwin Olson
Executive Director
Citizens Action Coalition
Indianapolis, IN

John Blair
Valley Watch
Evansville, IN

Kristin Shrader-Frechette, Ph.D.
O'Neill Family Endowed Professor
Department of Philosophy and Department of Biological Sciences
University of Notre Dame
Notre Dame, IN

Leslie Perrigo
Executive Director
Independent Environmental Conservation & Activism Network
Muncie, IN

Kristin Shrader-Frechette, Ph.D.
University of Notre Dame Center for Environmental Justice and Children's Health
Notre Dame, IN

Suzanne Tallichet
Chairperson
Kentuckians For The Commonwealth
London, KY

Sister Mary Schmuck RSM
Peace Through Justice Newsletter
Nazareth, KY

Deb Katz,
Executive Director
Citizens Awareness Network
Shelburne Falls, MA

Diane Turco
Cape Downwinders
Cape Cod, MA

Karen Vale
Campaign Manager
Cape Cod Bay Watch
Plymouth, MA

Hattie Nestel
Coordinator
Nuclear Free Future Coalition of Western Massachusetts

Mary Lampert
Director
Pilgrim Watch
Duxbury, MA

Sheila Parks, Ed.D
Convener
On Behalf of Mother Earth
Boston, MA

Sandra Gavutis
Executive Director
C-10 Foundation
Newburyport, MA

Meg Rayne
Clamshell Alliance
Newburyport, MA

Christine Bostek
Founder & President
Sands of White Horse Beach Association
White Horse Beach, MA

Laura H. Roskos
President
Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, U.S. Section
Boston, MA

Joanna Hammond & Bruce Skud
Co-founders
No More Fukushimas
Newburyport, MA

Lillia Frantin
Pilgrim Anti-Nuclear Action
Falmouth, MA

Brian Quirk
President
Merrimack Valley People for Peace
North Andover, MA

Janice Kurkoski
North Quabbin Energy
North Quabbin Region, MA

Steve Comley
We The People
Rowley, MA

Ken Bossong
Executive Director
SUN DAY Campaign
Takoma Park, MD

Kevin Kamps
Beyond Nuclear
Takoma Park, MD

Albert Nunez
Capital Sun Group, Ltd.
Cabin John, MD

Dagmar Fabian
Crabshell Alliance
Baltimore, MD

Patricia T. Birnie
Chair
GE Stockholders' Alliance
Sandy Spring, MD

Jay Levy
Nuclear Free Takoma Park Committee
Takoma Park, MD

Max Obuszewski
Baltimore Nonviolence Center
Baltimore, MD

Dennis Nelson
Director
SERV (Support and Education for Radiation Victims)
Kensington, MD

K. Gagnon
Coordinator
Global Network Against Weapons & Nuclear Power in Space
Brunswick, ME

Natasha Mayers
Founder and Coordinator
ARRT!, the Artists' Rapid Response Team
Whitefield, ME

John Burke
Secretary, Board of Directors
Maine Solar Energy Association
Jonesport, ME

Eric Justian
Executive Director
West Michigan Jobs Group
Muskegon, MI

Michael J. Keegan
Coalition for a Nuclear Free Great Lakes
Monroe, MI

Alice Hirt
Don't Waste Michigan
Holland, MI

Michael Potter
Chairman & President
Eden Foods
Clinton, MI

Russell Greene
Co-Chair, Stop Global Warming, Environmental Issues
Progressive Democrats of America
Grand Rapids, MI

Keith Gunter, Carol Izant
Co-Chairs
Alliance To Halt Fermi-3
Livonia, MI

Connie Beauvais
Director
Citizens for Alternatives to Chemical Contamination
Lake Station, MI

Tom Goldtooth
Indigenous Environmental Network
Bemidji, MN

Lea Foushee
Environmental Justice Director
North American Water Office
Lake Elmo, MN

Kristen Eide-Tollefson and
Sigurd Anderson
CURE - Communities United for Responsible Energy
Frontenac, MN

Judi Poulson
Chair
Fairmont, MN Peace Group
Fairmont, MN

Mary Hahn
Kruger Lake Nature Preserve, (Woodland Culture)
Stearns County, MN

Matthew Schaut
President
Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter (MRVAC)
Bloomington, MN

Rev. Shodo Spring
Founder
Compassionate Earth Walk
Northfield, MN

Mark Haim
Chair
Missourians for Safe Energy
Columbia, MO

Ed Smith
Safe Energy Director
Missouri Coalition for the Environment
St. Louis, MO

Chris Daum
Oasis Montana Inc.
Renewable Energy Supply & Design
Stevensville, MT

Buffalo Bruce
Staff Ecologist
Western Nebraska Resources Council
Chadron, NE

Judy Treichel
Nevada Nuclear Waste Task Force
Las Vegas, NV

Doug Bogen
Executive Director
Seacoast Anti-Pollution League
Exeter, NH

Katherine Mendez
Occupy Seacoast New Hampshire
NH

Sister Miriam MacGillis OP
Director
Genesis Farm
Blairstown, NJ

Richard P. Fuller
Coordinator
Green Party of Monmouth County, NJ
Oakhurst, NJ

Wanda Knapik
President of the Board of Trustees
CommunityEarth
Morristown, NJ

Greg Mello
Los Alamos Study Group
Albuquerque, NM

Janet Greenwald
Co-coordinator
Citizens for Alternatives to Radioactive Dumping
Albuquerque, NM

David B. McCoy, Esq.
Executive Director
Citizen Action New Mexico
Albuquerque, NM

Professor S. Daniel Schwartz
(Environmental Sociology, University of New Mexico)
Co-coordinator
Committee for a Non-nuclear Future
Albuquerque, NM

Thomas Jagers
Nuke Free Now
Santa Fe, NM

Jessica Azulay
Alliance for a Green Economy
Syracuse, NY

Michel Lee, Esq.
Steering Committee
Indian Point Safe Energy Coalition
Ossining, NY

Alice Slater
Shut Down Indian Point Now
New York, NY

A. R. Ingraffea, Ph.D., P.E.
Dwight C. Baum Professor of Engineering and Weiss Presidential Teaching Fellow
Cornell University
Ithaca, NY

Paul Connett, PhD
Director
Fluoride Action Network
Binghamton, NY

Robert Keilbach
Secretary
NYC Chapter 34
Veterans For Peace
New York, NY

Tom Siracuse
Chair of "Shut Down Indian Point Now!"
Chair of the NY County Green Party
New York, NY

Gordian Raacke
Executive Director
Renewable Energy Long Island (reLI)
NY

Alicia Godsberg
Executive Director
Peace Action New York State
New York, NY

Priscilla Star
Executive Director
Coalition Against Nukes
New York, NY

Rona Fried, Ph.D.
CEO
SustainableBusiness.com
Huntington, NY

Trish Corbett and Michael Mannion
Co-Founders
The Mindshift Institute
New York, NY

Margaret DiBenedeto
Fleischmanns United Methodist Church
Fleischmanns, NY

Ken Gale
Producer
Eco-Logic, WBAI-FM
New York, NY

Connie Hogarth
Connie Hogarth Center for Social Action
Manhattanville College
Purchase, NY

Conrad Miller, M.D.
Physicians for Life
Watermill, NY

Melissa Jacobs
Founder and President
Regional Action Group for the Environment, Inc.
Nunda, NY

Peter E. Swords, LMSW
Peace Action of Central New York
Syracuse, NY

Thomas V. Connor OFS
Fraternity Chair: Solanus Casey Region Work and Peace and Justice Commissions
Saint Peter Damian Fraternity
Saint Joseph Church
New Paltz, NY

Judy Braiman
Empire State Consumer Project
Rochester, NY

Donna Stein
President
NYC Friends of Clearwater
New York, NY

Dr. Don Richardson
Western North Carolina Physicians For Social Responsibility
Brevard, NC

Mali Lightfoot
Executive Director
The Helen Caldicott Foundation
Asheville, NC

Louis A. Zeller
Executive Director
Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League
Glendale Springs, NC

Sally Morgan
Energy and Water Justice Researcher/ Organizer
Clean Water for North Carolina
Asheville, NC

Emma Bogdan
Officer
UNCW Environmental Concerns Organization
Wilmington, NC

Harvey Wasserman
Editor
www.nukefree.org
Columbus, OH

Chris Borello
President
Concerned Citizens of Lake Twp./ Uniontown IEL Superfund Site, Ohio
Canton, OH

Vanessa Pesec
President
NEOGAP (Network for Oil and Gas Accountability and Protection)
Concord Township, OH

Governing Board
Ohio Valley Peace
Barnesville, OH

Michael Leonardi
Coordinator
Toledo Coalition for Safe Energy
Coalition Against Nukes
Toledo, OH

Connie Kline
Director
Ohio CARE - Citizens Against a Radioactive Environment
Willoughby Hills, OH

Connie Hammond
Co-Chair
Franklin County Greens Central Committee
Columbus, OH

Gwen Ranbir Ingram
Vice President
Carrie Dickerson Foundation
Tulsa, OK

Nina Bell, J.D.
Executive Director
Northwest Environmental Advocates
Portland, OR

Susan Katz, MD
President
Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility
Portland, OR

Lloyd K. Marbet
Executive Director
Oregon Conservancy Foundation
Boring, OR

Lynn Sims
Don't Waste Oregon
Portland, OR

Charles K. Johnson
Director, Joint Task Force on Nuclear Power
Oregon and Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility
Portland, OR

Satya Vayu
Spiritual Director
Touching Earth Sangha
Portland, OR

Paige Knight
Hanford Watch
Portland, OR

Irene Keim
Chair, Board of Directors
Unitarian Universalist Ministry for Earth
Portland, OR

Marcia Denison
Trust Director
Pacific Rainforest Wildlife Guardians
Rainier, OR

Maya K. van Rossum
The Delaware Riverkeeper
Delaware Riverkeeper Network
Bristol, PA

Joseph Otis Minott, Esq.
Executive Director
Clean Air Council
Philadelphia, PA

David Hughes
President
Citizen Power
Pittsburgh, PA

Ernest Fuller
Concerned Citizens for SNEC Safety
Six Mile Run, PA

Karen Barton
Coordinator
Bryn Mawr Peace Coalition
Bryn Mawr, PA

Gene Stilp
Coordinator
No Nukes Pennsylvania
Harrisburg, PA

Diane Bardol, GNSH
Social Justice Coordinator
Grey Nuns of the Sacred Heart
Yardley, PA

Wm. Wharton Smith III
President
U.S.A. Nica Windpower, Inc.
Jamestown, RI

Liberty Goodwin
Director
Toxics Information Project (TIP)
Providence, RI

James Lazell
President
The Conservation Agency
Jamestown, RI

Finian Taylor
Hilton Head for Peace
Hilton Head Island, SC

Connie Young
Administrator
Don't Waste Aiken
Aiken, SC

Joanne Williams
Columbia Society of Friends
Columbia, SC

Charmaine White Face
Coordinator
Defenders of the Black Hills
Rapid City, SD

Lilias Jarding
Clean Water Alliance
Rapid City, SD

Debra White Plume
Owe Aku, Bring Back the Way
Manderson, SD

Thomas K Cook
Field Director
American Indian Youth Running Strong
Pine Ridge, SD

Frank James
Director
Dakota Rural Action
Brookings, SD

Stephen A. Smith, DVM
Executive Director
Southern Alliance for Clean Energy
Knoxville, TN

Kathleen Ferris
Co-Founder
Citizens to End Nuclear Dumping in Tennessee
Murfreesboro, TN

Scott Banbury
Conservation Chair
Tennessee Chapter of the Sierra Club
Memphis, TN

Karen Hadden
Executive Director
Sustainable Energy & Economic Development (SEED) Coalition
Austin, TX

Jerry Stein
Convener
The Peace Farm
Amarillo, TX

Nancy Edwards
Treasurer
Houston Climate Protection Alliance
Houston, TX

Margaret Day
Chair
Alamo Sierra Club
San Antonio, TX

Sarah M. Fields
Program Director
Uranium Watch
Moab, UT

Matt Pacenza
HEAL Utah
Salt Lake City, UT

John Weisheit
Conservation Director
Living Rivers
Moab, UT

Scott Sklar
Executive Director
Center for Small Business and the Environment
Arlington, VA

Chris Williams
President
Vermont Citizens Action Network
Hancock, VT

Brian Tokar
Institute for Social Ecology
Plainfield, VT

Debra Stoleroff
The Vermont Yankee Decommissioning Alliance
Montpelier, VT

Will Bennington
Campaigner
Global Justice Ecology Project
Burlington, VT

Jennifer O Viereck
Executive Director
HOME: Healing Ourselves & Mother Earth
N. Bennington VT

Roy Taylor
Clerk
Quaker Earthcare Witness
Burlington, VT

Mary Hanson
Co-Chair
Ground Zero Center for Non-violent Action
Poulsbo, WA

Greg Wingard
Executive Director
Waste Action Project
Seattle, WA

Doris Fulton
Peace Action
Lynnwood, WA

Mary Hanson
Chair
Seattle Fellowship of Reconciliation
Seattle, WA

Mike Nuess
President
Teleologics
Spokane WA

Chris Herman
President
Edmonds Community Solar Co-op
Edmonds, WA

Janet Keating
Executive Director
Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition
Huntington, WV

Allen Johnson
Coordinator
Christians For The Mountains
Dunmore, WV

Vernon Haltom
Executive Director
Coal River Mountain Watch
Naoma, WV

Katie Nekola
General Counsel
Clean Wisconsin
Madison, WI

Al Gedicks
Executive Secretary
Wisconsin Resources Protection Council
Tomahawk, WI

John LaForge
Co-Director
Nukewatch/The Progressive Foundation
Luck, WI

Patricia J. Popple
Frac Sand Sentinel
Concerned Chippewa Citizens
Chippewa Falls, WI

Forest Jahnke
Co-Coordinator of Crawford Stewardship Project
Gays Mills, WI

Carl Sack
Wisconsin Network for Peace and Justice
Madison, WI

Christopher LaForge
Great Northern Solar
Port Wing, WI

Daniel Pneuman
President
Peace Action Wisconsin
Milwaukee, WI

Greg Banks
Cospokesperson
Helfenstein Soup Council, Inc.
Green Bay, WI

Rob Danielson
Secretary
SOUL of Wisconsin
La Farge, WI

Gillian Malone
Chair
Powder River Basin Resource Council
Sheridan, WY

International Signers

Jim Green
National Nuclear Campaigner
Friends of the Earth, Australia
Melbourne, Australia

Abigail Jabines
Climate Change Campaigner
Australian Conservation Foundation
Carlton Vic, Australia

Aslan Avdi
Suzanne Daley
Founders
SDVMA.COM
Brisbane, Australia

Harry Kerr
Chair Pax Christi Victoria (International Christian Peace Movement)
Carlton South
Victoria, Australia

Father Claude Mostowik msc
President
Pax Christi Australia
Sydney, New Souths Wales, Australia

Father Claude Mostowik msc
National Director
Missionaries of the Sacred Heart Justice and Peace Centre (Australian Province)
Sydney, New South Wales, Australia

Cameron Power
Chair
Sustainable Energy Now Inc.
Perth, Australia

Janet Marsh
Anti Nuclear Alliance of West Australia
Perth, Western Australia

Dr. Reinhard Uhrig
GLOBAL 2000/Friends of the Earth Austria
Vienna, Austria

Matthias Reichl
Center for Encounter and Active Non-Violence
Bad Ischl, Austria

Bernhard Riepl,
www.sonneundfreiheit.eu
Sandl, Austria

Heinz Stockinger
Chair
Salzburg Platform Against Nuclear Dangers (PLAGE)
Salzburg, Austria

Roland Egger
Atomstopp_Atomkraftfrei Leben!
Linz, Austria

Angela Bischoff
Greenspiration
Toronto, Ontario
Canada

Joan Russow PhD
Coordinator
Global Compliance Research Project
Victoria, Canada

Victor Lau
Leader
Green Party of Saskatchewan
Regina, Saskatchewan
Canada

Marcella Pedersen
North Saskatchewan River Environmental Society
Cut Knife, Saskatchewan
Canada

Marc Fafard
Spokesperson Sept-Ils sans Uranium (SISUR)
Quebec, Canada

Karen Weingeist
Coalition for a Clean Green Saskatchewan
Saskatchewan, Canada

Janet McNeill
Spokesperson
Durham Nuclear Awareness (DNA)
Whitby, Ontario
Canada

Dave Greenfield
Chairperson
Mother Earth Action Co-operative Ltd
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada

Jo Hayward-Haines
Safe And Green Energy (SAGE)
Peterborough, Ontario
Canada

Florence Stratton
Making Peace Vigil
Regina, Saskatchewan
Canada

Linda Murphy
Inter-Church Uranium Committee Educational Co-operative
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
Canada

Jessica Gordon,
Idle No More
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
Canada

Mark Bigland-Pritchard
Climate Justice Saskatoon
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
Canada

Palle Bendsen
NOAH Energy and Climate Group
NOAH Friends of the Earth Denmark
Copenhagen, Denmark

Camilla Berens
Stop New Nuclear Alliance
London, England

Malcolm Margolis
Harrogate Friends of the Earth
Yorkshire, England

Dr. Richard Anthony Smith
Institute for Policy Research and Development
London, England

David Armitage
CND Norwich
England

Nigel Day
Oxford Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND)
Oxford, England
U.K.

Peter Lanyon
The Shut Down Sizewell Campaign
Ipswich, UK

André Larivière
Réseau Sortir du Nucléaire
Lyon, France

Beate Gersbeck
Spokesperson
Initiative Atomausstieg Gross-Gerau
Germany

Jochen Stay
Spokesman
Ausgestrahlt - together against nuclear energy
Hamburg, Germany

David Krieger
Chair of the Executive Committee
International Network of Engineers and Scientists for Global Responsibility (INES)
Berlin, Germany

Srinivas Krishnaswamy
CEO
Vasudha Foundation
New Delhi, India

Soumya Dutta
Convener
Climate & Energy Group, Beyond Copenhagen Collective (BCPH)
Delhi, India

Vijay Pratap
Convenor
South Asian Dialogues on Ecological Democracy (SADED)
India

Nityanand Jayaraman
Chennai Solidarity Group for Koodankulam Struggle, Chennai, India
The Other Media, Bangalore, India

Aruna Rodrigues
Sunray Harvesters
India

V.S. Roy David
National Convener
National Adivasi Alliance
India

Santanu Chacraverti
President
Society for Direct Initiative for Social and Health Action (DISHA)
Kolkata, India

Ms. Sudha.S
Director
Eco Foundation for Sustainable Alternatives (EFSA)
Asia Coordinator,
Forum of Ethics & Responsibilities
Rights & Responsibility Collective
Bangalore, India

Dr. Ashok Kundapur
Core Committee Member
Opposing Coal Power Group
India

Dr Joseph Xavier
Executive Director
Indian Social Institute
New Delhi, India

Praful Bidwai
Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament & Peace (CNDP)
India

Saraswati Kavula
Movement Against Uranium Projects
Andhra Pradesh, India,

Sudhir Gondotra
General Secretary
Humanist Party of India,

Sukla Sen
Konkan Bachao Samity
Mumbai, India

Willy
Alliances Linkages Convenor
Indian Social Action Forum - INSAF
New Delhi, India

Antony Arulraj
Advocacy Officer
Hotline Delhi,
New Delhi, India

P.P. Verma
Convenor
Jharkhand Alternative Development Forum
Ranchi, Jharkhand, India

Sudhir Gandotra
General Secretary
Humanist Party of India

Pradip Chatterjee
President,
Dakshinbanga Matsyajibi Forum (DMF).
Kolkata, West Bengal, India.

Dian Abraham
MANUSIA (Indonesian Antinukes Society)
Jakarta, Indonesia

Aileen Mioko Smith
Executive Director
Green Action
Kyoto, Japan

Ban Hideyuki
Co-Director
Citizens' Nuclear Information Center
Tokyo, Japan

Uno Saeko
Executive Committee Chairperson
Hairo Action Fukushima
Fukushima, Japan

Iseko Shirai
Director
Japan Solar Energy Education Association
Tokyo, Japan

SATO Daisuke
Secretary General
No Nukes Asia Forum Japan
Osaka, Japan

Bertchen Kohrs
Director
Earthlife Namibia
Windhoek, Namibia

Peer De Rijk
WISE International
Amsterdam, Netherlands

Caroline Usikpedo-Omoniye
Niger Delta Women's Movement for Peace & Development.
Niger Delta Women Resource Center Building
Ughelli, Delta State, Nigeria

Paul L Johnson
General Manager
Love & Trust Hospital
Chhachhro, Sindh
Pakistan

Marcin Harembski
Civil Nuclear Monitor
Warsaw, Poland

Susana Fonseca
Quercus – ANCN
Lisboa, Portugal

Ana Vorovenci
President
Rural Women National Association
Arges, Romania

Alexey Yablokov
Program of Nuclear and Radiation Safety
International Social Ecological Union
Moscow, Russia

Lidija Zivcic
Senior expert
Focus Association for Sustainable Development
Ljubljana, Slovenia

Christine Garbett
Treasurer
CANE (Coalition Against Nuclear Energy)
South Africa

Pep Puig i Boix
Group of Scientists and Technicians for a Non-Nuclear Future
Barcelona, Catalonia
Spain

Gloria Kuang-Jung HSU
Academic Coordinator
Taiwan Environmental Protection Union
Taipei, Taiwan