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BEGINS/...

SA and US Presidents urged to urgently Stop Nuclear Radiation Poison in our Homes!

South Africa's nuclear executive, Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe, and United States' President Barak Obama have been urged to urgently ensure both governments will keep nuclear materials and wastes under radioactive controls and thereby set an example for global nuclear safety and security efforts.

Letters of appeal are being sent to the presidents from all over South Africa and the US that state "In any just or democratic society, when industry requires government approval to undertake activities that have the potential to harm public or worker health, consideration of alternatives should be mandatory".

Several South African non-government and community-based organisations, and the US-based Nuclear Information and Resource Service (NIRS) have jointly called on the two Presidents to ensure atomic weapons waste and proliferation technology is safely encapsulated and isolated from people and the environment. If radioactive metal is allowed to be deliberately dumped onto the public via recycling streams, it will contaminate common market items, export goods, the environment, as well as metal workers, and spread radioactive poisons to ordinary citizens in everyday household goods.

"The fact that the waste could be smelted in a few short years in one smelter makes one suspects the REAL plan is for South Africa to be an importer of radioactive waste from the world, and turn our country into a nuclear dumping ground," said Muna Lakhani of Earthlife Africa's Cape Town Branch. If so, it would undermine the African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty – known as the Pelindaba Treaty – which South Africa ratified agreed *'not to take any action to assist or encourage the dumping of radioactive wastes and other radioactive matter anywhere within Africa.'*

Despite flawed and faulty environmental impact analysis approval and a public outcry during the public hearings of the National Nuclear Regulator (NNR) in October 2012, the South African Nuclear Energy Corporation (NECSA) applied to license three radioactive metal smelter plants at Pelindaba. In the US, the Department of Energy (DOE) and National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) intend to lift its ban on the release of metal from radioactive areas of atomic weapons sites. However, as early as June 1997, a database maintained by the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission showed over 2,300 reports of radioactive materials were found in recycled metal – leading to halted operations and losses of earnings for affected businesses, radioactively contaminated areas and also deaths due to radioactive exposure. In 2005, a blast ripped through a Russian radioactive metal scrap operation and caused molten metal to burst out of the smelter. This raised questions after the event about safety, violations, and radioactive gas leaks into the air with likely impacts on 5 million people in the region. In 2011 in France, an explosion at a nuclear metal scrap smelter triggered a fire, and killed a worker. The chance of this being repeated in South Africa is not worth the risk.

By smelting radioactive metal scrap NECSA will be absolved from responsibility, liability and thus costs of storing the radioactive material on site. Instead it will rake in profits from selling recycled radioactive metal scrap as a "resource." It will unfairly shift the atomic waste burden to metal recyclers and the general public. This deregulated metal will end up in household goods. NECSA has already built and started testing a radioactive metal smelter for the purpose at Pelindaba. Unless stopped in the coming month, the NNR will award licenses for three energy-intensive, polluting radioactive metal smelters the country can ill-afford. The will ostensibly operate for at least 10 years at NECSA's Pelindaba atomic complex to smelt down 14,000 tonnes radioactive apartheid-era atomic bomb metal scrap.

"Atomic weapons waste and proliferation technology is not a commodity and should be isolated from people and the environment," said Dominique Gilbert of the Pelindaba Working Group. "We encourage the public to join us in requesting these plants be stopped." More than 86,000 Americans have endorsed a petition to prevent radioactive scrap metal in items such as zippers, belt buckles, eyeglass frames, jewellery, watches, silverware, toys, pet bowls, and leashes. Export items such as cars are also at risk.

If these smelters are not stopped there will be growing volumes of radioactive scrap, mainly from the growing number of decommissioned atomic reactors, weapons and submarines globally that will in the long-term be passed through such plants and sold off into the public domain containing residual radioactive elements.

So-called “recycling” of radioactive metals is unacceptable and irresponsible.

For these reasons global civil society actors, civil society organisations from across the world, are unifying to strongly urge all governments and nations, as well as regional and international organisations, to clearly and unequivocally denounce the removal of radioactive controls from radioactive materials to unregulated destinations by recycling, disposal and reuse.

Non-government and community-based organisations in South Africa call on the public to help say NO! To do so, members of the public can access a sign-on petition at <http://org2.democracyinaction.org/>.

ENDS/....

Issued by:

Pelindaba Working Group (PWG)

Earthlife Africa Cape Town (ELA-CT)

Coalition Against Nuclear Energy (CANE)

Women Against Radiation (WAR)

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South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA)

Ceasefire

Right 2 Know Campaign (R2K)

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Further sources:

- [Nuclear Information Resource Center](#)
- [Commission de Recherche et d'Information Indépendantes sur la Radioactivité](#) (most material in French)
- [Nuclear Free Local Authorities](#)
- IAEA: [Pelindaba Text of the African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty](#)