

INDIGENOUS ENVIRONMENTAL NETWORK

Statement on Green New Deal Initiatives to Ensure Nuclear Energy Cannot be Classified as Clean Energy

February 8, 2019

The nuclear industry has waged an undeclared war against our Indigenous peoples and Pacific Islanders that has poisoned our communities worldwide. For more than 60-years, the legacy of the nuclear chain, from exploration to the dumping of radioactive waste has been proven, through documentation, to be genocide and ethnocide and a deadly enemy of Indigenous peoples. This is nuclear colonialism. This is radioactive colonialism.

The ancestral lands of the Indigenous peoples in the United States has been used for testing nuclear weapons, experimenting with biological and chemical warfare agents, incinerating and burying hazardous wastes, and mining uranium. United States federal law and nuclear policy has not protected Indigenous peoples, and in fact has been created to allow the nuclear industry to continue operations at the expense of our land, territory, health and traditional ways of life.

This system of genocide and ethnocide policies and practices has brought our people to the brink of extinction. This disproportionate toxic burden – *called environmental racism* – culminated in attempts to dump this country's nuclear waste in the homelands of the Indigenous peoples of the Great Basin region of the United States. 17 years ago, our network supported the traditional Western Shoshone National Council to oppose a decision of President George W. Bush designating Yucca Mountain in Nevada as the country's official repository for highly radioactive nuclear waste.

This action did not provide homeland security to our Indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples have already made countless sacrifices for this country's nuclear programs.

According to the spiritual leaders and tribal elders of the *Western Shoshone* and *Paiute*, Yucca Mountain is sacred with deep spiritual, cultural and historical value to their peoples. Spirituality is very important as an organizing tool for us, within an industrialized world that has no understanding of the indigenous natural laws that guide our traditional indigenous societies. It's a system change challenge we are dealing with, that will require all people, all cultures to work together.

In the eyes of Indigenous peoples that follow the traditional teachings of our Indigenous Tribal ways, this country, corporations and the nuclear industry do not have a heart of love and compassion for Life and have clouded minds that put money above the health and safety of people and all Life.

The Green New Deal (GND) resolution, as it is written right now, with no exclusion of nuclear energy to be considered clean energy, would open the door for Yucca Mountain to be reconsidered for dumping the nuclear energy waste. It would create the largest nuclear waste transportation campaign in history, possibly endangering residents in 44 states, thousands of towns and cities, and our Indigenous territories.

If nuclear energy is classified as clean energy, there is a danger that the Yucca Mountain site would become the storage site for 77,000 tons of highly radioactive waste, most of it spent fuel from nuclear power plants. This spent fuel, will remain dangerous for hundreds of thousands of years. This government does not have the right to endanger the health and lives of future generations.

Back in those years of our IEN work opposing nuclear colonialism, the US Department of Energy predicted there will be nuclear waste accidents affecting the lives, health, and properties of citizens living and working along transportation routes endangered by accidents or incidents. Roads, rails, and waterways in 44 states would become zones of terror for dangerous radioactive waste shipments enroute to Yucca Mountain. More than 40,000 tons of this waste will be containing hundreds of tons of plutonium, the stuff from which nuclear weapons are made from.

Indigenous peoples within our network, have no desire to accept the deadly, unsustainable ways the nuclear industry and radioactive colonialism will try to force upon us.

We are not asking anyone else to accept our ways, however, we are exercising our right to live our sustainable lifestyles, practice our culture, conduct our ceremonies, and raise our children in a land that is clean, safe and healthy for all our *relations*.

The GND congressional leaders, the environmental organizations, emerging movements and civil society must stand in solidarity to stop this pattern of abuse of our natural environment. Every living being, every creature and every plant has a right to a healthy, sustainable, equitable, and safe environment. Any Green New Deal must fight for systemic change. We are part of a global campaign to adopt new legal structures that recognize the rights of nature - the territorial integrity of Mother Earth.

The legacy of perpetrating nuclear colonialism upon our Indigenous peoples must change. Any Green New Deal must support the government to pay up, in the form of developing Tribal governmental and Indigenous community-based "Just Transition" programs for sustainable economic development and education and training for Tribal nations their communities that have been the target of these nuclear waste programs and the legacy of nuclear colonialism.

IEN understands to meet these needs, all communities must have a viable and sustainable economic base that protects the diversity of our communities. Nuclear waste jeopardizes the most basic human right, which is a clean environment. We commit to end the cycle of abuse that has been initiated by our government, nuclear industry and corporations.

It is our responsibility to assure the survival of all future generations and be true caretakers and guardians for the sacredness of our Mother Earth and Father Sky.