

Honor the Earth

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A letter of Support ~ Towards A Nuclear Free Future~
By Winona LaDuke, Honor the Earth Program Director

In support of International Peace Pilgrimage's mission this is an account of two communities that have been continually effected negatively by the Nuclear industry and what Honor the Earth is doing to alter our bleak future into a beautiful future for the 7th generation and beyond.

Nuclear Waste: Dumping on the Indians What weighs 30 tons has the radioactive impact of 250 Hiroshima bombs, and is proposed to move down an American highway or train route soon? That would be nuclear waste, and either of two present proposals to dump nuclear waste in Native communities at Yucca Mountain, or on the Skull Valley Goshute reservation. Fifty years into the nuclear age, there is a major problem. The problem is that we have little idea of what to do with the immense stockpile of nuclear waste produced by ill-advised nuclear utilities. Not that the utilities haven't had the money or the time to think about a solution. But it seems, the utilities always figured, that somehow, the American taxpayer and the Indians would take care of the problem. When American people successfully organized to stop the construction of additional nuclear power plants in this country, the nuclear utilities realized that they had a problem. No one wanted them "in their back yard". So, the utilities, with the blessings of the federal government, began offering money to poor communities to take the nuclear waste, on a short-term basis as "monitored retrievable nuclear waste". The government focused it's efforts on Native American communities, knowing full well that many communities had been reduced to economic poverty, as a result of federal government mismanagement of their lands. Of the 20 proposals for nuclear waste dumps by the early 1990s, 16 involved Native American communities. Over time, all of those proposals fell through. So, the government and a group of very desperate nuclear utilities decided to push communities harder to take that waste by bribery, coercion, or downright force. The Nuclear Waste Policy Act is that mechanism. Dubbed "mobile Chernobyl" the law would move the nuclear waste to Yucca Mountain, in the heart of Newe Segobia, the Western Shoshone Nation. For the past ten years, this mountain has been the only proposed nuclear waste site under federal study, despite the fact that it is seismically unstable and did not meet Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) guidelines for radiation danger to human health and the environment. In fact, the area has had 621 earthquakes at a magnitude of 2.5 or higher in the past 20 years alone. The most notable earthquake was at 5.6 on the Richter scale in June of 1992, just 8 miles from the proposed disposal site. Some 33 fault lines and 7 cinder cone volcanoes also exist within a close proximity to the intended dump and are the result of millions of years of faulting and volcanic activity. One hundred miles of tunnel are planned within Yucca Mountain, and preliminary drilling has hit unexplored caverns and chasms, which cross many fault lines. An extensive study of Yucca Mountain found that an earthquake could cause ground water to surge up into the storage area and force dangerous amounts of plutonium out into the atmosphere. This site is located within the treaty area of the Western Shoshone Nation, protected under the Ruby Valley treaty of 1863. This land, and these people have already been devastated by the 1000 plus nuclear weapons detonated both above and below ground in their area. They are reeling from the contamination, and would like to heal. Honorable nations should honor treaties, and honorable nations should not dump nuclear waste on Native people. Over the past few years, nuclear utilities have spent millions of dollars in special interest money on Congress to secure passage of the Nuclear Waste Policy Act. Conveniently, the legislation would transfer responsibility and liability of the waste, which these utilities created, and profited from, to the American taxpayer. By 1998, members of the Nuclear Energy Institute sent over \$12.8 million to congressional delegations to literally get the waste off their hands. Additionally, to hedge their bets, they came up with a back up plan. Skull Valley Goshutes Seventy miles southwest of Salt Lake City, a small community of Goshutes lives on an 18600 acre reservation. For the past forty years, the federal government has created and dumped toxic military wastes all around them. Less than ten miles southwest is the Dugway Proving Grounds, one of three military reservations surrounding the Indian reservation, where the government tested chemical and biological weapons. In 1968, chemical agents escaped from Dugway, and killed 6000 sheep. More than 1600 of those animals were buried on the reservation. Fifteen miles east of the reservation is the Desert Chemical Depot, which stores approximately 42% of the US chemical weapons stockpile and operates a nerve gas storage facility. At the Depot, the world's largest nerve gas incinerator has recently been built to destroy thousands of tons of the deadly chemicals stored there. Thirty miles northwest of the reservation is the Envirocare Low Level Radioactive Disposal Site, a dump for such radioactive waste nationally. Finally, north of the reservation is the Magnesium Corporation Plant, a large magnesium production plant which has been identified by the EPA as the most polluting plant of its kind in the country, due to chlorine gas emissions. The Skull Valley Goshutes