

**Public Interest Organizations United from the Countries of
Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Finland, France, Germany,
India, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Netherlands, Romania, Russia, Slovenia,
South Africa, and United States**

July 14, 2006

Prime Minister Stephen Harper, Canada
President Jacques Chirac, France
Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel, Germany
Prime Minister Tony Blair, Great Britain
Prime Minister Romano Prodi, Italy
Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, Japan
President Vladimir Putin, Russia
President George W. Bush, Jr., United States

Dear Group of Eight Leaders:

As you gather at this G8 Summit in St. Petersburg, Russia to discuss global energy security, the undersigned public interest organizations from seventeen countries urge you to reject U.S. President George W. Bush's reprocessing proposal under Global Nuclear Energy Partnership (GNEP). Under GNEP, the U.S. and a few other selected countries would reprocess the world's commercial nuclear waste, and use the separated plutonium in fast neutron reactors. We are opposed to this proposal, because global experience in the past 60 years has shown that reprocessing is extremely polluting and expensive, and undermines global nonproliferation efforts. Moreover, efforts to build fast reactors have been safety and economic failures. No solution has been created to deal with the nuclear waste generated by nuclear power or reprocessing. GNEP would result in no new energy supplies for a several decades and perhaps much longer, while investment in energy efficiency and renewable energy would provide energy now and long-term without proliferating nuclear weapons materials.

Of the G8 members, five countries (France, Japan, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America) have reprocessed or are reprocessing domestically. Two other G8 countries, Italy and Germany, sent their waste to France and the UK for reprocessing. None of these countries have solved, or even improved, their nuclear waste problem by reprocessing. In fact, reprocessing waste is not easily contained and has contaminated the global environment. The most radioactively contaminated places on Earth, including Lake Karachai in Russia and Hanford in the United States, are from reprocessing waste. In Europe, both France and the UK discharge radioactive waste into the sea. This waste has contaminated water as far away as the Arctic, and has been found in marine life in Norway and Denmark. In the United States, reprocessing waste threatens to contaminate the Columbia River and the Savannah River, two of the most important water resources in the country.

Despite spending more than US \$100 billion globally, no country has successfully commercialized reprocessing and transmutation technologies. All of these programs are heavily subsidized by their governments. A July 2000 report commissioned by the French government concluded that reprocessing and plutonium fuel are uneconomical, costing nearly US\$1 billion more each year for plutonium fuel use (in 20 of its 58 reactors) compared to a “once-thorough” fuel cycle. Last year, 20 tons of uranium and plutonium leaked from a pipe at the U.K. government-owned THORP reprocessing plant. The plant, which was losing money even when operational, remains closed and its future is uncertain. Meanwhile, the Japanese company, Japan Nuclear Fuel Ltd., recently started up its Rokkasho reprocessing plant, which took 13 years to build and cost US \$20 billion, three times more than initially estimated.

Reprocessing also makes it easier for terrorists to obtain the fissile material needed to make nuclear weapons, and undermines nonproliferation efforts. As a result of global commercial reprocessing, 250 metric tons of plutonium has been separated and remains vulnerable to theft. This amount of plutonium is equivalent to more than 30,000 nuclear bombs.

The “proliferation-resistant” reprocessing technologies currently being researched by the U.S. Department of Energy are not sufficient to prevent theft by terrorists, while the plutonium mix that results from these technologies could be used to make a nuclear weapon. Like the existing, decades-old PUREX process, these technologies would inevitably make weapons-usable material harder to track and easier to lose. Moreover, the materials, technical personnel, technologies and specialized equipment involved in these processes could leak out, as they have in the past, to foreign clandestine weapons programs or be diverted within a state’s program to make nuclear weapons. The fact is that any reprocessing technology is more dangerous than leaving the weapons-usable plutonium bound up in highly radioactive, easy to track, bulky spent fuel rods.

In order to reduce the radioactivity of the reprocessed waste, it is necessary to build one fast neutron reactor to every three light water reactors. Since the early 1950s, governments around the world have made huge investments into the development of fast reactors, but the results have been safety and economic failures.

As you consider global energy security at this Summit, we urge you to acknowledge the economic, safety, and proliferation failures of reprocessing and transmutation. GNEP would threaten, not improve, global energy security. Instead, we ask you to put the vast financial resources that would be needed for GNEP into research and development of energy efficiency and renewable energy projects.

Sincerely,

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