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**PUBLIC INTEREST GROUPS CRITICIZE ADMINISTRATION INITIATIVE ON
REPROCESSING THAT WOULD UNDERMINE U.S. NON-PROLIFERATION
EFFORTS, COST TAXPAYERS HUNDREDS OF BILLIONS, AND
WORSEN OUR NUCLEAR WASTE PROBLEM**

Washington, D.C.- In a letter to Members of Congress, over twenty arms control, consumer, environmental, and public health groups cautioned Congress on the proliferation, cost and environmental risks of a new international initiative that the Department of Energy is preparing, the Global Nuclear Energy Partnership, that would pose serious risks for nuclear non-proliferation, worsen the nuclear waste problem and cost taxpayers over \$100 billion.

They warned that while “this initiative is being couched as a ‘non-proliferation’ program and a radioactive waste ‘recycling’ program, reprocessing will perilously undermine U.S. nonproliferation and do nothing to decrease the heat and amount of nuclear waste.”

The groups warned that “Over \$100 billion has been spent globally in an attempt to commercialize plutonium, resulting in 250 metric tons of separated plutonium that remains vulnerable to theft-equivalent to more than 30,000 nuclear bombs” and that “the much touted [new] technologies for ‘proliferation-resistant’ reprocessing, as well as for transmutation [which would in theory reduce the volume and heat of nuclear waste], are not yet in sight and remain decades away, at best, from commercialization.”

The letter continued “Significantly, the ‘proliferation-resistant’ reprocessing technologies currently being researched by U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) 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.” While increasing the risk of terrorist diversion, domestic U.S. reprocessing “would promote an ineffective ‘Do as we say not as we do’ approach, undermining US credibility on non-proliferation. It would also reverse thirty years of non-US reprocessing practice that helped keep many countries including South Korea and Taiwan from reprocessing.”

Highlighting the expense of reprocessing, the groups cited a 1996 report by the National Academy of Sciences that estimated the costs of reprocessing and transmutation of nuclear waste that has already been discharged by existing U.S. reactors reaching over \$100 billion. The letter also cited the example of the only private commercial reprocessing facility in the United States in West Valley, NY, shut down in 1972 after

operating for only six years. A 1996 estimate on the cost for cleaning up the part of the site that did reprocessing is \$5.2 billion.

The groups that signed the letter include: Alliance for Nuclear Accountability, the Arms Control Association, the Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, Citizen Alert, Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety, Fernald Residents for Environmental Safety & Health, Georgians Against Nuclear Energy, GRACE Public Fund, Greenpeace USA, Steven and Michele Kirsch Foundation, Natural Resources Defense Council, Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, Nuclear Information and Resource Service, Nuclear Watch of New Mexico, Nukewatch, Peace Action, Peace Farm, Physicians for Social Responsibility, Physicians for Social Responsibility -Wisconsin, Public Citizen, U.S. Public Interest Research Group, Snake River Alliance, Southern Alliance for Clean Energy, Southwest Research and Information Center, Union of Concerned Scientists, Women's Actions for New Directions, and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.

The letter is available at <http://www.citizen.org/documents/CongressReprocessingLtr.pdf>.

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