

MEDIA RELEASE

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Green Cross Switzerland is calling upon the operators of nuclear power plants, asking them to support Tajikistan in the clean-up of uranium contamination.

Swiss nuclear power plant operators purchased uranium from the Soviet Union during the Cold War

“Since Switzerland purchased uranium from the Soviet Union in the 1970s and 80s, it is possible that uranium from these Green Cross project areas might have been used in Swiss nuclear power plants,” says Nathalie Gysi, Executive Director of Green Cross Switzerland. According to a report of the International Atom Energy Agency (IAEA), 30 percent of the uranium was mined in Central Asia at the time of the Soviet Union. The Russian company Techsnabexport (TENEX) offers mining of uranium ore, conversion, enrichment and the production of nuclear fuel and is an important uranium enrichment service provider for nuclear reactors of western design. Between 1975 and 1989 Swiss power companies had contracts with TENEX for uranium enrichment services. The uranium from Central Asia was processed by the Soviet military-industrial complex together with uranium from other regions. In addition to Switzerland, the uranium from the Soviet Union was also sold to Germany, Finland, France, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the USA at that time. Because a substantial part of the uranium mined in the Soviet Union at that time came from Central Asia, it cannot be excluded that uranium from Central Asia was also sold to and used by these eight nations.

Hundreds of million tonnes of uranium mining waste have been abandoned out under the open skies of Central Asia. The situation at the Digmai uranium mine dump in Tajikistan is particularly desolate, where 36 million tonnes of radioactive waste were left. The radiation measured on these tailings is between 4.5 and 20 $\mu\text{Sv/h}$ microsievert per hour. Normally, numbers like these are registered only in the wake of a nuclear disaster such as Chernobyl or Fukushima. In connection with a UNDP project to prioritise the uranium waste in Central Asia, Green Cross Switzerland is working on a clean-up programme to protect the population of Tajikistan.

Green Cross Switzerland is calling upon the operators of nuclear power plants, asking them to support Tajikistan in the clean-up of uranium contamination. Help is urgently needed in northern Tajikistan. Radioactive sources, even hotspots, have been found immediately adjacent to residential areas. Except for an old unfinished fence, there is often no other indication that the presence on the abandoned uranium dumps is fraught with life-threatening danger. As a result, the residents are quite careless. They let their cattle graze in the area and their children play there as well. The nuclear waste also contaminates the drinking water.

In connection with the Green Cross programme Water for Life and Peace, the former uranium processing facility Chkalovsk in Tajikistan is currently being cleaned up. The freely accessible mine tailings were contained by a concrete wall and the population was made aware of the related dangers. The sealing of the water lines in the affected areas to keep radionuclides out is still pending.

Thirty years after the Chernobyl nuclear disaster and five years after the accident in the Fukushima nuclear power plant the worldwide exit from nuclear energy is undeniable. It should additionally be noted that most of the time the release of radionuclides into the

environment is caused by industrial processes, including uranium mining, the disposal of mining waste and the production of nuclear energy.

Every nuclear accident has tragic and far-reaching consequences for centuries. The economy and society in the affected contaminated regions are faced with challenges that are difficult to overcome, as the first comprehensive Chernobyl Cost Report 2016 has shown. The cost of managing the Chernobyl nuclear disaster amounts to US\$ 700 billion. The report promotes the understanding of society's perception of the actual costs of nuclear energy. These costs not only cover construction, operation and shutdown of the plants, they also include the cost of nuclear accidents (<http://www.greencross.ch/de/news-info/tschernobyl.html>).

Approximately 42 million people have been affected for life by radioactive contamination from the nuclear accidents in the Chernobyl and Fukushima Daiichi power plants. The permanent low-level radiation entering the human body through the daily food has a particular impact.

Green Cross Switzerland is committed to the worldwide withdrawal from nuclear energy and concerned with the effects of the military use of nuclear materials on health and environment. With the international programmes Social and Medical Care and Legacy of the Cold War, Green Cross Switzerland is engaged in overcoming the effects of industrial and military disasters and the clean-up of contamination from the period of the Cold War. The primary goal is to improve the quality of life of the people impacted by chemical, radioactive and other types of contamination, as well as the promotion of sustainable developments in the spirit of cooperation instead of confrontation. The goals of the ZEWO-certified environmental organisation are supported by the Green Cross Parliamentary Group.

For further information, please contact Nathalie Gysi, Executive Director, Green Cross Switzerland, at +41 (0)43 499 13 10.