



NAVAJO NATION PROCLAMATION

PROCLAIMING JULY 16, 2009, AS *URANIUM LEGACY REMEMBRANCE AND ACTION DAY* TO COMMEMORATE THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CHURCH ROCK URANIUM TAILINGS SPILL AND 60 YEARS OF URANIUM MINING IMPACTS IN NAVAJO COUNTRY AND BEYOND

WHEREAS, On July 16, 1979, an earthen dam at the United Nuclear Corporation uranium mill tailings facility collapsed, releasing 1,100 tons of radioactive tailings and 94 million gallons of toxic wastewater to the Puerco River; and

WHEREAS, The Church Rock Uranium Tailings Spill contaminated the river for at least 80 miles, affecting the communities of Pinedale, Church Rock, Gallup, Tseyatoh and Manuelito in New Mexico, and Lupton, Houck and the New Lands Area near Sanders and Chambers in Arizona; and

WHEREAS, The Spill is the largest release of radioactive waste, by volume, in U.S. history, and ranks second only to the Chernobyl nuclear reactor accident in total radiation released; and

WHEREAS, Many Navajo residents of the river valley lost livestock in the days after the Spill, others stopped gathering herbs from the river banks, and a few were burned by the acidic wastewater; and

WHEREAS, The Puerco River was also contaminated by discharges of untreated or poorly treated uranium mine water and municipal sewage for a period spanning parts of three decades, and uranium levels in groundwater below the streambed in the Church Rock area was increased by up 67 times over normal levels; and

WHEREAS, Despite the widespread impacts of the Tailings Spill and of mine dewatering in communities downstream from Church Rock in the 1970s and 1980s, federal and state governments declined to fund and conduct a comprehensive health study among the populations in the Puerco River Valley in both states; and

WHEREAS, Beginning in 2003, Church Rock Chapter and community-based groups secured private funding to conduct environmental monitoring that demonstrated mining-related contamination was still present in residential areas near mining and milling operations, more than 20 years after the last mines closed; and

WHEREAS, Beginning in 2004, community-based groups collaborated with universities to conduct a targeted health study in 20 chapters of the Eastern Navajo Agency, the preliminary results of

which have been reported to the Navajo Nation and indicate that long-term exposure to uranium from living in close proximity to abandoned mines increases an individual's risk of kidney disease and diabetes; and

WHEREAS, The Navajo Nation has asked Congress to appropriate one-half billion dollars to help remediate and restore more than 500 uranium mining sites, scores of homes contaminated with mine wastes, and dozens of water sources polluted with uranium that are located throughout Navajo Country, yet the federal government has allocated only a few million dollars in new funding from existing agency budgets to address the Navajo Uranium Legacy; and

WHEREAS, In response to the threat of new uranium mining proposed in Church Rock and Crownpoint Chapters and around Mt. Taylor, a sacred mountain of the Navajo and Pueblo peoples, the Navajo Nation Council adopted the *Diné Natural Resources Protection Act* (DNRPA) on April 19, 2005, prohibiting uranium mining and processing in Navajo Country; and

WHEREAS, The Multicultural Alliance for a Safe Environment, with support from Church Rock and Coyote Canyon chapters and other organizations, is holding a 30th Anniversary Commemoration of the Church Rock Uranium Tailings Spill "to remember and honor the *Diné* communities that were affected by the largest release of radioactive waste in U.S. history, and to reaffirm the Navajo Nation's ban on uranium mining and processing".

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT PROCLAIMED: that, I, Dr. Joe Shirley, Jr., President of the Navajo Nation, hereby proclaim July 16, 2009, as "*Uranium Legacy Remembrance and Action Day*" for the purpose of informing the people of the United States of America and of the World that we, the *Diné*, will never forget the devastation that uranium mining and processing has wrought on the health, safety, and natural resources of our Nation, and that we will continue to work to restore our health, lands and water to their natural conditions to return harmony and balance to our relationship with our sacred Mother, the Earth.


I, FURTHER, HEREBY PROCLAIM, that the Navajo Nation reasserts its call to the federal government and private industry to appropriate the necessary financial resources to undertake and complete within the next decade a Comprehensive Action Plan to resolve the Uranium Legacy throughout the U.S., toward of the goals of:

- accomplishing full reclamation of abandoned mines and mills;
- restoring lands and waters damaged by uranium mill tailings disposal sites;
- replacing contaminated homes and water supplies;
- conducting health studies in communities impacted by mining; and
- fully compensating uranium workers and their family members, and community members living near uranium sites for their illnesses and disabilities.

I, FURTHER, HEREBY PROCLAIM, that the Navajo Nation reaffirms its commitment to implement and enforce the *Diné Natural Resources Protection Act* to prevent further harm to our people and our resources from uranium development in Navajo Country, and I call on federal and state permitting agencies to respect the Navajo Nation's sovereign uranium ban by declining to issue permits for new mines and mills within Navajo Country.

I, FURTHER, HEREBY recognize and extend the Navajo Nation's deepest appreciation to the many *Diné* individuals, communities and organizations, and the many non-Navajo individuals and organizations, who have worked tirelessly for 30 years to study the effects of the Tailings Spill and uranium mining in Navajo Country, and who have continually sought and demanded justice for those who have been adversely affected by the Uranium Legacy.

PROCLAIMED THIS 16th DAY OF JULY 2009



**DR. JOE SHIRLEY, JR., PRESIDENT
THE NAVAJO NATION**