

Windhoek, 22 July 2022

Att: All Media Houses

Sugarcoating the dangers of radioactivity

Various media houses and other entities were invited to pay a visit to the farm Tripoli on Wednesday (20 July 2022), in the Leonardville area, south-eastern Namibia. (It needs to be stated that the SAUM Committee did not receive an invitation for this outing.) As could be expected, newspapers are now singing the praise of uranium mining and communal benefits for Namibia. But – is this really the case?

Leonardville and surrounding areas are covered by Exclusive Prospecting Licenses that have been issued to Project Wings of Headspring Investments, a subsidiary of Uranium One, itself a subsidiary of Rusatom, a Russian state-owned uranium exploration, mining and processing company.

Showcasing operations on the ground and improvements made to the community of Leonardville, obviously influences perception. The SAUM Committee supports improvement, development and mining projects if not detrimental to our country. Contributions to Namibian communities are always welcome but window dressing hides the long-term health dangers that underground, in-situ leach mining of uranium with sulphuric acid in these top quality drinking-water aquifers of the water-controlled Stampriet Artesian Basin.

So far about 600 exploration boreholes for uranium have been drilled in the basin. Two uranium orebodies with associated heavy metals have been discovered in the main and strongest artesian aquifer which contains the above top quality drinking water. The water in this aquifer is also pumped by NamWater to provide the communities of Leonardville, Aranos, Aminuis, Onderombapa, Derm, Stampriet, Gochas and Koes with drinking water.

Headspring Investments have indicated an intention to test the feasibility of mining one of the above orebodies by means of a Pilot Plant operation involving acid in-situ leach mining. This proposed operation is now the subject of an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and it will only be able to proceed if issued with an Environmental Clearance Certificate by the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism.

The SAUM Committee is aware of, supports and feels responsible for the united concerns of inhabitants of the Stampriet Artesian Basin regarding the safety of the only fresh water source within this 63,250 square-kilometre-wide area. Landowners and community members fear that the groundwater could be polluted by uranium, radioactive decay products of uranium and heavy metals if in-situ leaching of uranium was to take place.

This concern is highlighted by the large number of Exclusive Prospecting Licenses issued for nuclear fuels (uranium) which cover about sixty percent (60%) of the total area of the Stampriet Basin.

Statements made on various videos and in newspapers claiming that the in-situ exploration and mining is safe, cannot be proven. Supporting our concerns is the fact that two drilling permits covering 37 boreholes issued to Headspring Investments, were retracted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Land Reform on 9 November 2021 – citing non-compliance with Permit Conditions. This same letter clearly stated that at least 70 more boreholes were drilled for exploration purposes without a valid permit.

Since in-situ leaching happens underground, no-one can see the impact of this process immediately if leakage occurs. There is no guarantee that in-situ leach mining of uranium will not negatively affect our precious drinking water. We do not want to risk the health and safety of our children and of present and future generations and endanger this unique and critical water resource.

The SAUM Committee is open to dialogue and discussion.

SAUM Committee

Chair – Divan Oppermann