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KEEWATIN WILDLIFE FEDERATION

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Faxed

November 22, 1988

for files

An open letter to the Hon. Dennis Patterson, Government Leader

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Representing HTAs

I am writing you today in regard to the proposed Kiggavik uranium mine near Baker Lake.

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Repulse Bay

I am very disappointed at the lack of leadership your government has shown towards this controversial issue. I am particularly surprised at your silence given the leadership role you played with regard to this issue during the years I worked with you as Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

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Coral Harbour

You will remember that in 1980 you first told the 9th Legislative Assembly that uranium mining "produces very hazardous tailings or wastes, and the resultant radiation, some of it gaseous and some of it in the form of solids, causes cancer, birth defects and, most seriously, it will spread very easily in the Arctic environment by natural dispersal and through caribou and the food chain."

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Baker Lake

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Chesterfield Inlet

Largely as a result of your efforts, the 9th Assembly held a very intensive debate on the subject of uranium in February and May of 1981. Witnesses such as Dr. Gordon Edwards, and John Moelaert of the Canadian Coalition for Nuclear Responsibility, and Dr. Bob Woolard of the British Columbia Medical Association, laid out the case against uranium mining very clearly, and the pro-uranium witnesses just couldn't stand up to their scrutiny. Dr. Edwards, in particular, made an impression on me. He produced concrete proof that the tailings from a uranium mine will remain dangerously radioactive for millions of years, and that the radon gas emissions from the tailings can cause regional, continental or even global radioactive contamination. I shudder to think what could happen to Keewatin Inuit, and the wildlife we depend on for our livelihood and cultural subsistence.

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Rankin Inlet

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Whale Cove

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Eskimo Point

The end uses of uranium must also be kept in mind. There are only two major commercial uses for uranium: nuclear weapons and nuclear reactors. So the final products of the uranium industry are bombs and radioactive wastes.

I'm sure you remember when the 10th Assembly unanimously approved the Declaration of a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone in 1986. In the discussion leading up to the passage of this motion you said that you were opposed to the exploration and mining of uranium in the NWT. You said this quite clearly, "I am opposed to the exploration and mining of uranium in the Northwest Territories". You took strong exception to a statement by Mr. Nutter of the NWT Chamber of Mines that there are effective laws in Canada which prevent Canadian uranium from being used in nuclear weapons. "Those laws and regulations have been proven to be entirely ineffective and meaningless," you said, and we all agreed with you. You concluded that "if uranium mining is to become a possibility in the Northwest Territories, Members of this Assembly or future Assemblies will look at the eight days debate that the Ninth Assembly had on the problem of uranium exploration and mining and realize that either uranium mining should be prohibited or extremely stringent controls should be in place."

"Responsible use of wildlife is protection of our culture."

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You and I, and every other MLA, declared our opposition to the exploration and exploitation of materials related to the nuclear weapons industry, and also to the establishment of nuclear waste dump sites in the NWT.

I also recall you speaking in support of a resolution passed by the Inuit Circumpolar Conference at the 1983 meeting in Iqaluit which stated:

BE IT RESOLVED that the Inuit Circumpolar Conference emphatically restates its nuclear position:

- 1) that the arctic and sub-arctic be used for purposes that are peaceful and environmentally safe;
- 2) that there shall be no nuclear testing or nuclear devices in the arctic or sub-arctic;
- 3) that there shall be no nuclear dumpsites in the arctic or sub-arctic;
- 4) that exploration and exploitation of uranium, thorium, lithium or other materials related to the nuclear industry in our homeland be prohibited.

Allowing the Kiggavik mine to open would clearly violate position 4; allowing the mine's radioactive tailings to pile up would violate position 3; since no one has ever sunk an open pit uranium mine into continuous permafrost it would be a form of nuclear testing, so there goes position 2; and since the mine can't be proven 100% environmentally safe, nor the uranium guaranteed 100% for peaceful purposes, position 1 would be violated as well.

Why is your government staying neutral on these potential violations? How can you personally stay silent on an issue for which you once had such passion?

The risk of a uranium mine located upwind and upwater from a Keewatin community raises terrible ethical and environmental questions - questions far too serious to be left to the limited scrutiny of a FEARD review. Asking for a FEARD review is all very well, but we both know that will be a very limited inquiry into some environmental aspects of the proposal. There are many other questions which must be carefully considered, perhaps by a Special Committee of the Legislative Assembly.

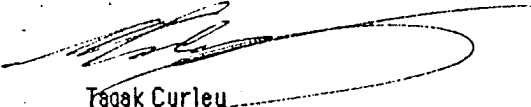
I have personally come to the conclusion that this proposed uranium mine must be stopped. Forever. I have three reasons for this. First, no uranium mine can be guaranteed environmentally safe, especially in an area where the environment is so fragile. Second, no one can guarantee that uranium produced in the NWT will only be used for peaceful purposes. And third, if we allow a uranium mine to proceed, after years of public and political consensus against uranium mining, the international reputation of Inuit as a peaceful people who are careful custodians of our environment will be destroyed. Forever. If Inuit willingly take these kinds of risks, we will never be taken seriously again.

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As you well know, I strongly support the economic benefits which communities can obtain from most kinds of mining. But when faced with the threat of a uranium mine, I believe that communities must say "No. Uranium mines is extremely dangerous and morally wrong." Communities and governments must then try twice as hard to find other ways of achieving economic and social development.

Your government should finish the job begun by the Ninth Assembly. The Legislative Assembly should adopt a clear statement opposing the mining of uranium in the Northwest Territories. As a political leader who clearly understands the facts about uranium mining, you have a responsibility to everyone in this region to show leadership on this issue.

Yours sincerely,



Tagak Curley
President