

GUNDJEIHMI

ABORIGINAL CORPORATION



Media Statement

August 23 2014

Former Japanese Prime Minister visits Mirarr country to discuss shared nuclear concerns

The Mirarr traditional owners of parts of Kakadu National Park, including the Ranger and Jabiluka uranium deposits, today welcomed former Japanese Prime Minister Naoto Kan to their traditional lands. As Prime Minister when the Fukushima nuclear reactor crisis began in March 2011, Mr Kan considered the full-scale evacuation of Tokyo in response to the emergency and subsequently made the decision to shut down all of Japan's nuclear reactors.

In October 2011 the Australian Safeguards and Non-Proliferation Office (ASNO) confirmed the Fukushima nuclear crisis was directly fuelled by uranium from Australia. At the time Mirarr senior traditional owner Yvonne Margarula wrote to UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon expressing her concern and sadness at the devastation that uranium from her lands was causing in Japan: "This is an industry we never supported in the past and want no part of in the future. We are all diminished by the events unfolding at Fukushima," Ms Margarula wrote at the time.

The chairwoman of Gundjeihmi Aboriginal Corporation, Annie Ngalmirama, said today:

"Our people have lived with the consequences of unwanted uranium mining for over three decades and we are very sad about the ongoing disaster in Japan. I am glad Mr Kan has come to witness the impacts at the start of the nuclear cycle. Mr Kan's country is hurting because of uranium, here he will see that the nuclear industry is hurting Mirarr people also."

GAC CEO Justin O'Brien said: "There is a long history between Mirarr country and Japan. Mining began at Ranger - against the wishes of the Mirarr - in large part because of agreements between the Australian and Japan governments.

"Mr Kan's visit marks a new chapter in the longstanding partnership between our two countries. We will discuss the ways in which uranium has damaged both Mirarr country and Japan. We will look at ways we can highlight the human rights and environmental problems at the front end of the nuclear cycle and working together towards peaceful energy sources and better outcomes for all people."

From Kakadu Mr Kan will travel to Perth to meet with community groups and parliamentarians and to visit a wave power facility.

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Chronology: Mirarr Country – Japan

1974 – Japan Prime Minister Tanaka visits Australia prompting Australian government commitment to develop Ranger uranium mine and supply Japan with uranium. This commitment took place prior to any discussion with Traditional Owners despite stated Government commitment to Land Rights.

1978 – Mirarr Senior Traditional Owner Toby Gangale says he does not want a uranium mine on Mirarr land. Expresses grave concerns about the risks of disturbing the Djang (sacred power) at the proposed mine site and potential nuclear proliferation:

“Something might go wrong if the mine goes ahead”

“What if they make an atom bomb or something? Same as they did in Japan. All the houses, all the buildings. Flat”

1981-2014 – Ranger uranium mine operates within the bounds of the World Heritage Listed Kakadu National Park. Uranium from Mirarr lands exported to fuel Japanese nuclear power stations. Ranger uranium mine records over 200 leaks, spills and breaches of licence conditions.

January 2011 – Mirarr and other Kakadu Traditional Owners join Hibakusha and Tahitians affected by nuclear testing on the 72nd voyage of the Peace Boat.

March 2011 – Earthquake and tsunami off the east coast of Japan causes Fukushima Daichii nuclear facility to fail. 150,000 people permanently evacuated from their homes. Radiation spread and impacts continue to be reported and monitored, long term consequences unknown.

April 2011 – Yvonne Margarula writes to UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon expressing sadness and concern at the impacts of the Fukushima disaster (letter attached)

March 2013 – Mr and Mrs Hasegawa, farmers forced to permanently abandon their farming lands near the Fukushima power plant after the nuclear disaster, visit Mirarr country and meet with Yvonne Margarula.

2013 – GAC representatives meet evacuated students from Fukushima region visiting Australia for a break from radiation exposure.

Dec 2013 – Ranger uranium mine halts production after one million litres of radioactive acid is spilt from a burst tank. Federal Government orders mining operations ordered to halt while spill is investigated.

August 2014 – Mr Naoto Kan, ex-Prime Minister of Japan visits Mirarr Country to see firsthand the impacts of the front end of the industry that has caused such devastation in his own country.

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Ban ki-Moon
Secretary-General United Nations
760 United Nations Plaza
New York, NY USA 10017

Dear Secretary-General,

It was with great sadness that we Mirarr People of the World Heritage listed Kakadu National Park in the Northern Territory of Australia learned of the suffering of the Japanese people due the recent earthquake, tsunami and nuclear crisis. Our thoughts and prayers are with the people of Japan at this most difficult of times. We hope that individuals, families, communities and the nation may rebuild their lives. We also hope for a speedy resolution to the ongoing Fukushima nuclear emergency.

It is known that Aboriginal people have occupied Australia for some 60,000 years because of an archaeological site on my country in Kakadu, where people, including myself as a child, regularly visited and camped. I am the clan leader, or senior traditional owner, in the world's oldest continuing cultural tradition. We Mirarr are the traditional owners of the land now subject to the Ranger Uranium Mine and the site of the proposed Jabiluka uranium mine. The Ranger mine now produces some 10% of the world's mined uranium. We Aboriginal people opposed Ranger's development and even though our opposition was overruled it has never gone away.

A month ago a delegation of this Corporation, comprising three young Indigenous women from Kakadu, visited Tokyo, Hiroshima and Nagasaki as part of the 72nd Global Peace Voyage of the Peace Boat. Here they met with Hibakusha (survivors of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki) and people and organisations concerned with nuclear and peace issues. This recent visit heightens the sense of solidarity we feel for the people of Japan in their suffering and reinforces the Mirarr People's position against further uranium mining in Kakadu.

In the early 1970s the Australian Government, as part of its negotiations with Japanese Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka, committed to the export of uranium from our land at Ranger to Japan. This commitment came many years before the enactment of Aboriginal land rights in the Northern Territory. We were not consulted about this. We opposed Ranger's development. When the Australian Government introduced land rights legislation in 1976 our ability to stop the Ranger mine was blocked by special provisions of the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act*. Given the long history between Japanese nuclear companies and Australian uranium miners, it is likely that the radiation problems at Fukushima are, at least in part, fuelled by uranium derived from our traditional lands. This makes us feel very sad.

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Ranger has operated since 1980 and has brought much hardship to local Aboriginal people and environmental damage to our country. For over 30 years we have experienced and lived with the 'front end' reality of uranium mining and we are opposed to any further mining at the Jabiluka site. From 1998, I led an international coalition of environment, peace, faith and human rights groups against Jabiluka's development. We received a lot of support from international networks and institutions such as UNESCO, the European Parliament and the US Congress. Over an eight-month period in 1998 more than 5000 protesters, including myself and other Mirarr traditional owners, peacefully blockaded the Jabiluka site. All our efforts were recognised that year when I was awarded both the Friends of the Earth International Environment Award and the Nuclear-Free Future Award. In 1999 I jointly received, with Jacqui Katona, the Goldman Environment Prize for my efforts to protect my country from uranium mining. We Mirarr remain opposed to Jabiluka's development; the Fukushima incident only strengthens our resolve.

Today some 12 million litres of radioactive contaminated water lies on site at the Ranger Uranium Mine, upstream of Indigenous communities and internationally recognised Ramsar listed wetlands. The mining company, owned by Rio Tinto, has suspended all milling of uranium due to the persistent water management problems and threats posed to the environment. All this is of great concern and is taking place within Australia's largest national park and our homeland, Kakadu.

I am writing to you to convey our solidarity and support with all those people across the world who see in the events at Fukushima a dire warning of the risks posed by the nuclear industry. This is an industry that we have never supported in the past and that we want no part of into the future. We are all diminished by the awful events now unfolding at Fukushima. I urge you to consider our viewpoint in your deliberations with governments in relation the Fukushima emergency and the nuclear industry in general.

In 2009 the European Commission found that approximately 70% of uranium used in nuclear reactors is sourced from the homelands of Indigenous minorities worldwide. We Mirarr believe that this constitutes an unfair impact on Indigenous people now and into the future. We suffer the dangers and long term impacts of the front end of the nuclear fuel cycle so that others overseas may continue to enjoy lives without the awareness of the impacts this has on the lives of others.

For many thousands of years we Aboriginal people of Kakadu have respected sacred sites where special and dangerous power resides. We call these places and this power *Djang*. There is *Djang* associated with both the Ranger mine area and the site of the proposed Jabiluka mine. We believe and have always believed that when this *Djang* is disturbed a great and dangerous power is unleashed upon the entire world. My father warned the Australian Government about this in the 1970s, but no one in positions of power listened to him. We hope that people such as yourself will listen, and act, today.

Yours truly,

Yvonne

Yvonne Margarula

6/4/11