

GLOBAL NUCLEAR LEGACY PROJECT

BUDAPEST, HUNGARY, was the site of a planning meeting on May 29–31, 2009 that brought together nearly forty representatives from organizations in France, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, the Netherlands, Russia, Ukraine, and the United States to discuss a strategy to expose the full human and environmental threats of the aggressive global expansion of the nuclear power industry and the legacy of nuclear weapons and energy production.

Participants had first-hand experience with the health and environmental impacts of uranium development, nuclear reactor operations, reprocessing, nuclear weapons testing, and waste management, among other aspects of civil and government nuclear activities. Among the attendees were representatives affected by such facilities including:

- **Chernobyl, Ukraine** (then part of the Soviet Union), the site of the major nuclear power plant accident on April 26, 1986, which led to dead and contaminated workers and significant radiation exposures in Ukraine, Belarus, and much of Europe, and the evacuation of hundreds of thousands of people.
- **Hanford, Washington**, where nuclear reactors and reprocessing facilities generated plutonium and highly enriched uranium for thousands of U.S. nuclear weapons from 1943 until 1989, when the mission changed to the many-decades-long effort to address the resulting contamination of workers, people living nearby, and the enduring environmental contamination that threatens the Columbia River.
- **La Hague, France**, on the Normandy coast where reprocessing has been carried out since 1966 for nuclear weapons and nuclear power for France and other nations, resulting in contamination of the English Channel and North Sea.
- **Mayak, Russia**, reprocessing plant where a 30,000-gallon nuclear waste tank exploded in September 1957, showering the Ural Mountain countryside with millions of curies of radioactivity, which resulted in deaths, and contamination that resulted in an “exclusionary zone” where humans may not live. A large Fissile Materials Storage Facility there poses risks of widespread contamination in case of an accident or terrorist attack.
- **New Mexico**, where uranium mining and milling from the 1950s to the 1980s has left a legacy of thousands of dead and sick workers and their families, and groundwater, soil, and air contamination that continues to affect thousands of people a generation or more after mining ceased.



▲ Looking north on the Danube River. Buda is on the left, Pest is on the right. The historic Chain Bridge, which connected the two cities in 1849, is the southernmost bridge.



▲ Plenary session of the planning meeting.



◀ Russian participants make plans for the international hearings.

- **Sellafield, United Kingdom**, a complex of reprocessing and nuclear power plants with worker and community exposures and where the Windscale fire in 1957 released thousands of curies of radioactivity.

Meeting participants want to promote widespread understanding of continuing impacts of the nuclear legacy of the past 70 years, and they are concerned that additional nuclear power plants being planned in many nations will expand the geographic scope of nuclear contamination as well as the effects to workers and the public. They believe that the experiences of their nations should be better understood as part of the ongoing debate about nuclear energy and climate change.

Consequently, participants established a collaborative process for organizing regional hearings in the U.S., Europe, and Russia in 2010 and 2011 to lay the groundwork for a larger movement to effectively address the legacy of radioactive contamination, prevent further nuclear expansion, and promote renewable, sustainable energy. The participants also recognize that the nuclear legacy — and proposed future nuclear projects — extend to Asia, Africa, and other nations in the Americas.

An international steering committee with representatives from Germany, the Netherlands, Russia, and the U.S. was formed as well as three regional committees (U.S., Russia, and Europe), to coordinate

the international hearings and continue the Global Nuclear Legacy Project.

The planning meeting was a result of a conference in St. Petersburg, Russia, in June 2006, when more than 50 Russian, U.S., and European activists, lawyers, journalists, and scientists met to discuss nuclear safety, proliferation, and whistleblower protection in conjunction with a Group of 8 (G8) meeting. The conference advocated for protection of whistleblowers in all nations. Its final report stated: “Any consideration of nuclear power cannot take place without recognizing the victims and lessons of Chernobyl and other nuclear disasters and the legacy of nuclear

weapons production. The global nuclear energy partnership proposal increases proliferation, endangers the public, and undermines democratic principles.”

Among the outcomes of that conference were establishing a network of organizations in Russia and the U.S. working on nuclear issues and an identified need to make people in many countries aware of the lessons learned in the years since the creation of the atomic bomb.

A FEW WORDS ABOUT BUDAPEST, THE CITY

Only four nations (Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Sweden) of the 27 European Union countries have lesser amounts of per capita carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions than Hungary. While income levels play a significant role in energy consumption and CO₂ emissions, one reason for Hungary’s status is that Budapest (with 20 percent of the nation’s 10 million population) has a very efficient public transportation system of buses, subways (the first in continental Europe in 1896), trams, and trains. That system allowed participants to visit many cultural and historic sites of the city. Many buildings, even Soviet-era high rises, had obvious energy-saving window coverings and other energy conservation measures. 🌿

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VOICES from the EARTH

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