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Les enjeux de la filière uranifère au Québec

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**Mémoire of Jimmie Neacappo**

My name is Jimmie Neacappo and I am a community member here in Chisasibi, a board member of the Chisasibi Business Service Centre and the President of the Allen General Neacappo Foundation. I am very concerned about the potential for uranium mining in our territory and I would like to thank you for the opportunity to express my main concerns about this important issue.

In spite of everything I have learned about uranium mining over the past several months, I still have concerns around the impacts of this type of development on our people's health, the health of the land and our traditional way of life. I don't believe that my concerns can be addressed by science alone. Many of my concerns stem from my own personal experiences with mines over the years. Some years ago, I was going to school in Sudbury, Ontario. I'll never forget the smells that came from the mining and smelting facilities when the wind was in the West. You could taste the sulfur in the air. I know that a lot has been done in Sudbury to clean up its act, but I wonder what the impacts were then to our health? Science is always changing and back then we didn't consider the effects on the air quality as much. What are we forgetting to consider today? Some people have said that if you inhaled the air coming from the Sudbury mines and mills back then, it was equivalent to smoking 40 cigarettes a day; now if you were already a smoker who smoked a pack a day, that would be equivalent to 65 cigarettes a day! I am concerned about what the impacts are to adding new substances to the air. What if we are not adequately monitoring all the substances and by-products emitted from uranium mines? Our people have very specific health concerns, specific to our region. We need answers. What are the health risks of uranium mining for people who already smoke?

Like I said, many of my concerns come from my own experiences. I have seen the negative effects of many natural resource development projects. Once I was travelling to Sioux Lookout, Ontario, and there was a stopover in Dryden. We had to stay overnight. As soon as we got off the plane we could smell the chemicals in the air, especially the heavy sulphur smell that was coming from the pulp and paper mill there. It was so bad that it seemed like it penetrated the walls of the hotel, coming in through the ventilation and air conditioning system. You could see that there was pollution all along the river there and it came from the direction of the plant. I often think back to these situations and wonder about how they have changed our environment for the worse. Today, do we even understand all the impacts from these old projects? So should our people take on new risks?

With uranium, I am concerned about the tailings over the long run. We all know that accidents happen, you just have to look at the recent disaster in British Columbia when the Mount Polly tailings pond breached and spilled millions of cubic meters of polluted water into the environment. If there were uranium mines in Eeyou Istchee, what if the tailings pond were to give out? Suppose the radioactive water went into the Mistassini basin? The Rupert River comes from Lake Mistassini, which has now been diverted into the La Grande complex. The Eastmain River is also diverted into the La Grande LG2 reservoir, through LG1. If tailings contents were to spill into the Eastmain River, our drinking water supply would be affected because the river is the source of Chisasibi's water intake. How could the radioactive materials in our drinking supply affect our health? All the surrounding area, and all the people out hunting and trapping in the Otish Mountain area, they would all be affected. What would be done in terms of remedial work then? Can we ever be 100% sure the tailings dams won't break? We don't believe that it's never going to happen. Actually, I believe it definitely will happen; it's just a matter of time. This is why I can never accept uranium mining in Eeyou Istchee. The Crees have been on the land 5000, 6000 years. We intend to be here for thousands more to come. So we cannot risk

jeopardizing our hunting, fishing and trapping practices, which are so fundamental to our people.

Sincerely,

Jimmie Neacappo