

An open letter to President, Dr John Pombe Magufuli



By Kiondo Mshana

- Congratulations, Your Excellency, for your good decision to live up to Mwalimu Julius Nyerere's Dodoma dream. This decision could save our people as well as animals from being killed by uranium;
- But if the Bahi uranium project is allowed to go ahead, its radon 222 gas which travels through the air, could bring untold tragedy on Dodoma;
- And because Bahi is very close to Dodoma, I appeal to you, Your Excellency, not to allow mining of uranium in the area;
- For according to uranium experts, radon gas can travel 59km through the air while the distance from Bahi to Dodoma is shorter than that.
- Since Mkuju River Uranium Project is within the Selous Game Reserve, if uranium mining is allowed to take place, there is a danger of contaminating groundwater and other water sources in the entire game reserve.

Your Excellency, the President of the United Republic of Tanzania, Dr John Pombe Magufuli, I have every reason to congratulate you for your decision to implement, in word and deed, the dream of the Founding Father of the Nation Mwalimu Nyerere, who had in 1973 declared Dodoma the seat of the Tanzanian Government. After you told the CCM Extra-ordinary Conference two months ago, that your government was moving to Dodoma this year, many Tanzanians were not only happy; they also congratulated you. They were strongly convinced that finally they had a man who would implement to the letter what had been promised.

Tanzanians congratulated you because of your courage to implement United Republic of Tanzania Founding Father's dream. Other Tanzanians even went to the extent of saying that after Mwalimu's death, every administration that followed spoke of the need to live the Dodoma dream but failed.

I am one of those who congratulated you. I congratulated you because I could see that unlike your predecessors, you have been implementing, in word and deed, what you promised during your campaigns for the October 25, 2015 polls. I strongly believe that just as you had said the government you lead must move to Dodoma, you would also cancel earlier plans to mine uranium at Bahi.

Your Excellency, why I am requesting you to cancel planned uranium mining at Bahi? It is because the dust from uranium which is in the form of gas, the radon 222, is laden with radiation that is known to cause cancer and eventually death to human beings, animals, plants and generally, to all living things.

Radiation from radon 222 has the ability to travel very fast through the air and would cause havoc to Dodoma and its environs.

Your Excellency, to stop radon 222 from afflicting Dodoma and causing a catastrophe, I humbly appeal to you to take action before it is too late. When I talk of averting a catastrophe, I'm looking at the short distance between Bahi and Dodoma.

That distance is compounded by the fact that radon 222 can travel, very fast, hundreds of kilometres through the air.



President of Tanzania,
Dr. John Pombe Magufuli.

I have raised the issue of Bahi's vicinity to Dodoma in order to stress the important role to be played soon by Dodoma.

But even if Dodoma had remained a simple upcountry city, it would still be affected if uranium mining were allowed to in Bahi. According to experts, what makes uranium extremely dangerous is its ability to seep unnoticed into ground water.

For instance, we don't know the direction of the underground water in Bahi; does it flow from Bahi to Dodoma or vice versa?

The same thing could be said about the direction

of the wind from and to Bahi.

But if the underground water and wind do not flow to Dodoma, are other areas in the region besides the envisaged capital devoid of people, animals and plants?

From what I know, there was a uranium mining company, Uranex from Australia, which wanted to mine uranium in Bahi.

It was, however, later reported that Uranex withdrew from the plan, saying it had discovered graphite, which it preferred and would wish to invest in mining the same.

The company later changed its name from Uranex

to "Magnis Resources." Another company which has been involved in exploration of uranium in the same area is Mantra, also from Australia. Mantra later discovered uranium at Mkuju River in the Selous Game Reserve, the mine of which it later sold to a Russian company.

Your Excellency, my fears are that if these companies are allowed to mine uranium, especially in the Selous Game Reserve, their activities would lead to irreparable damage, not only to the environment in terms of its ecosystem, but also to Tanzania's precious tourism industry. Your Excellency, the planned uranium mining in the Selous Game Reserve, which is expected to start anytime, is known as the Mkuju River Uranium Project.

What this means is that water from Mkuju River would be used in the uranium mining. And the danger of the uranium-contaminated water seeping into groundwater and other water sources in the Selous Game Reserve is almost as certain as the appearance of the sun from the east in any African country.

Your Excellency, the Selous Game Reserve was in 1982 declared by Unesco as a World Heritage Site on account of its richness in flora and fauna. Teeming with 110,000 elephants, the Selous Game Reserve was in 1976 reputed as having the largest concentration of these animals in Africa.

Your Excellency, it is, however, sad to note that in the last four decades, the elephant population in the Selous has dropped, through poaching, to 15,000.

And because of that, in 2014, Unesco declared the Selous an endangered World Heritage Site. Your Excellency, allow me to also congratulate you for the steps you have taken since being sworn in, in tackling poaching.

You demonstrated your determination to consign poaching to history when you appointed an army general Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism. But the now planned mining of uranium at Mkuju River—much as the area was sliced off from the SGR by the last government (after getting the green light from Unesco)—may counter the commendable decisions already taken by your government with regard to dealing with poaching.

It is important to also stress that much as the Mkuju River Uranium Project has been sliced off from the rest, it is still within the 54,000sqkm Selous Game Reserve.

Your Excellency, if the Selous is destroyed by radiation as a result of uranium mining, history will judge us harshly for allowing the destruction of an area equivalent to combined size of Rwanda and Burundi, which are 26,000 and 27,000sqkm respectively!

Your Excellency, it is quite possible that your predecessor may have seen the importance of opening up a uranium mining within the Selous. I would, therefore, like to humbly appeal to you to make a review. The Selous has a lot of water bodies that include River Rufiji. It means that, allowing uranium mining in the area has all the potential of contaminating such water bodies with radiation.

A review of the decision on Mkuju River Mining



An Elephant in Selous Game Reserve.



Former Wismut Uranium Mining in East German.

Project is extremely important lest Tanzanians blame themselves in no distant future and end up say, when it is already too late: "We wish we had known!"

We need to ask ourselves, for instance, what Tanzanians stand to gain from allowing mining of uranium in the SGR compared to what we would get if we had confined the SGR to protection of the flora, fauna and tourism.

It is quite clear that if the SGR is not involved, in any way, with other industrial development activities that include uranium mining, revenue from tourism would surpass that earned from uranium mining.

According to a report released by the last government, if uranium mining was allowed at the Mkuju River Uranium Project, the government would earn US dollars 5,000,000 per annum.

And if the mining remained in operation for ten years (a uranium mine's lifespan), the government would earn US dollars 50 million.

But according to a scientific report from Germany, since the unification of East and West Germany on October 3rd 1990, Berlin has spent euro 7 billion in cleaning up a uranium mining sites in the eastern part of Germany. Despite the huge expenditure, the clean-up has not been satisfactory.

Your Excellency, as we all know, Germany is the fourth most powerful economy in the world after United States, China and Japan. Now a logical question would be: If Germany with all its economic power, science and technology, has failed to clean up its uranium mining sites to satisfaction, how shall we fare, with our limitedness in terms of money, science and technology, to clean up Mkuju River Uranium mining site after the Russians have left?

If the Russians mined uranium in East Germany when that part of the now reunified country was under the yoke of communism and left without a thorough clean-up, how sure are we that the investors here would clean up Mkuju River Uranium mining site after they have exhausted the resource?

Your Excellency, this question is very important because it's about contracts and the question now is: Does the contract we have with the

Germany's Wismut uranium mining legacy
The number of uranium miners who contracted lung cancer while working at the Germany's Wismut uranium mine (which has since been closed) in the eastern part of the country is higher than previously thought.

According to the German statutory accident insurance, 3,700 cases of lung cancer were recognised as occupationally caused since 1991.

The breakdown shows that 100 workers contracted cancer of the larynx, and 2,800 workers, a quartz pneumoconiosis.

On 18th August, 2004, the German Federal Social Court in a landmark ruling decided that a compensation of cancer other than lung cancer is justified for uranium miners.

In two cases, filed by former Wismut uranium miners and/or their surviving families, the Court ruled that larynx cancer developed by the miners must be seen as caused by their former occupation and therefore has to be compensated by the employers' liability insurance.

The court decision was relevant for approximately 2,000 other former Wismut miners who had contracted cancers other than that of the lung.

One thing that is worthy considering here is that, Germany has had 3,700 lung cancer cases, its advances in science, medical care

DANGEROUS HAZARD URANIUM MINING IN GERMAN

system and technology notwithstanding.

The point is, had the Wismut uranium mines been located in a developing country like Tanzania, the number of people afflicted by lung cancer would have been much higher due to the low level of advancement in science, technology and medical care system.

And what is more critical, especially for Tanzania, is the telling disregard on the part of both workers and management towards the use of protection gear when engaged in dangerous work that includes, among others, mining.

Wismut's current estimate for the total decommissioning cost, until 2045, is around Euro 8 billion, of which Euro 6 billion have been spent so far according to a German newspaper, Ostthüringer, dated 17th June, 2016.

However, the management of Wismut uranium mining sites in Eastern Germany requires another Euro 2.1 billion until 2045 mainly for water treatment.

This is in addition to the Euro 6.6 billion already spent in the clean-up of the sites allocated so far and represents a four-fold increase over estimates made in 2015 of an additional Euro 500 million required until 2040.

At the end of 2013, Wismut had completed over 80 per cent of its decommissioning task. The decommissioning work is set for completion by 2020, while long-term maintenance and

surveillance will have to continue for an indefinite period.

So far, Euro 5.8 billion of the Euro 6.6 billion allocated by the government have been spent. It is expected that the total cost until 2040 will rise to Euro 8 billion, according to a German newspaper, Ostthüringer Zeitung published on 15th July, 2014.

Wismut GmbH plans to conclude the clean-up of the uranium mining legacy in Thuringia and Saxony by 2020. After this date, long-term tasks such as water treatment, environmental monitoring and surveillance of reclaimed surfaces will have to continue for an unknown period.

In short the cleaning up of Wismut uranium mining sites is likely to cost more and would last longer than 2045.

The Federal Republic of Germany, sole owner of Wismut GmbH, has increased the initial Euro 6.65 billion clean-up budget by 5.3 per cent to Euro 7 billion.

And out of the foregoing total amount, Euro 5.4 billion had already been spent by the end of 2010.

The completion of the most challenging task, that is, the stabilisation of the largest uranium mill tailings deposit Culmitzsch, is set for 2022.

Russian company clearly spell out how they are going to clean up the mining site upon the completion of their project?

Your Excellency, the Mkuju River Uranium project is yet to start. If we don't want to go through what the Germans went through, we need to act now. Your Excellency, I decided to write this letter to you for two reasons: First, as a highly trained chemist, you know and understand dangers posed by uranium.

Second, and more importantly, because I have not only been impressed by steps you have taken to bring this nation back to sanity, but also because I personally believe that you have what it takes to save this nation from a uranium catastrophe.

I have been impressed by your decision to revive

the tourism industry through the revival of Air Tanzania Company Limited (ATCL).

Through your singular action on the ATCL, this month (September, 2016) Tanzania expects to receive two brand new aircraft, Bombardier model from Canada, both bought on cash terms. After you decided to revive the ATCL, I said to myself: "This is the person who can save this country from a uranium catastrophe."

Surely, one cannot promote the kind of tourism we have in this country without simultaneously protecting the environment.

Your Excellency, the other problem that I humbly request your indulgence in, is the continued exploration for oil, gas and other minerals in the Selous Game Reserve.

Do we really need to support the foregoing activities in the SGR, a heritage that belong, not only to us, but to the entire world as well?

Your Excellency, the other equally pressing issue is that of planned industrial development activities in the SGR in the form of planned water and hydro-power projects.

Our past governments may have had very good reasons to continue to explore for oil, gas, minerals, water and hydro power in the SGR.

I reiterate my humble appeal to you, Your Excellency, to review the foregoing projects, and ask whether reasons that drove past governments to welcome the projects are still valid today, especially after the discovery of massive gas deposits which shall amply be used in harnessing our energy needs.