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**THISDAY**  
:: The voice of transparency ::

## URANIUM MINING:Tanzania faces the devil's choice, experts warn

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### David Kisanga

Uranium mining experts who have been attending a six- day conference in Dar es Salaam have warned the government against mining uranium, asking Tanzania to choose between expanding the country's economy and waiting for horrendous health and environmental consequences.

The warning has come only three days after Acting Commissioner for Minerals Eng. Ally Samaje announced in Dar es Salaam that uranium reserves amounting to 178.8 million tons had been confirmed at Mkuju River in Ruvuma region.

The deposits, according to the commissioner of minerals, would earn the government over \$360m in corporate tax and another \$50m in Pay as You Earn (PAYE). Also, the government would get \$190m in royalties from commercial extraction.

An Australian firm, Mantra Tanzania Limited, has won the tender to carry out the mining. Mkuju River in Ruvuma region is one among sites the government has publicly announced to have huge deposits of uranium, among others, such as Bahi in Dodoma region.

The experts who sounded the warning belong to the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW), Speakers and Specialties on Uranium and its effects from Australia, the United States, Canada, Germany, Switzerland, the Rose Luxemburg Foundation of Germany (East Africa office), the Legal and Human Rights Centre (LHCR) of Dar es Salaam, and other African countries at a meeting where Tanzania played host.

The international conference that ends today was deliberating on the impact of Uranium on health and environment.

The participants raised concern that Tanzania government came up with the decision to mine uranium without adequately assessing the potential effects to human health and the environment.

They pointed out that uranium mining activities would cause adverse effects to safety and occupational health of mineworkers as well as environmental degradation and social disruption of local communities around mine sites.

However, they underscored that it would be "very hard" for the country to dramatically improve management systems for health, occupational safety and environmental performance in mining operations because it has failed to do so at other mining areas such as gold and diamond mines.

One of the experts, himself a Board Member from the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW), Prof Andreas Nidecker, stressed that the Tanzanian government should choose between money and human health as well as environmental consequences before it makes a final decision on uranium mining.

"There should be a comprehensive and transparent public debate among all stakeholders given the serious medical concerns and potential environmental damage," he said, insisting that Tanzania would not be a secured country once it starts mining uranium.

He also argued that people in most uranium mining countries had experienced more problems than economic benefits, adding that Tanzania should learn from such countries.

He challenged the decision by the government to open up uranium mining as unfortunate, calling it to consider the long-term impacts of industry which might outweigh any short-term economic benefits.

He gave vivid examples from Germany and Japan which are struggling to pay lots of money to their people who have suffered from uranium mining activities.

"We would like to advise the government to opt for other means of earning revenue other than uranium mining ... which is not a good idea for the development of the country, human health and its environment," he argued.

According to the expert, starting mining operations in rural areas (Bahi and Manyoni) or even on the margins of the Selous Game Reserve would also damage tourism, environment and local livelihoods.

Seconding the motion, Legal and Human Rights Centre (LHCR) Executive Director Hellen Kijo-Bisimba said the mining of

uranium would not only affect the miners and their families but also people living nearby.

She said that there was evidence that the price of uranium had across the globe due to the fact that most countries had stopped using it due to its adverse health and ecological effects.

Bisimba argued that Tanzania should learn from other countries which have mined uranium and rethink its resolve to mine a mineral that may adversely affect the people and the environment.

Representatives from Bahi, Namtumbo and Manyoni also rose up and said the government should go ahead with its decision to mine uranium in their areas until they are given proper education on it.

They said that they would not allow mining activities to take place in their areas due to clearly and already demonstrated side-effects to their health and the environment.

Expounding the government steps, the Minister for Health and Social Welfare, Dr Hussein Mwinyi agreed that uranium mining had serious health effects, but insisted that the government would take yet unspecified "special measures" to ensure human health risks and environmental degradation were minimized.

For starters, Dr Mwinyi says the government would require mining companies to set aside funds for environmental rehabilitation and mine closure obligations.

Dr Mwinyi assured the public that the government would "make every effort" to protect the health of the citizens by collaborating with stakeholders.

On October 3, the government through the Acting Commissioner for Minerals, Eng Ally Samaje announced that Tanzania had confirmed 17.8 million tons of uranium reserves at Mkuja River, whose extraction would bring in some \$363m in corporate taxes and another \$50m in Pay As You Earn (PAYE).

Samaje said the government would also earn \$190m in royalties from commercial company, Mantra Tanzania Limited.

He added that other benefits would include dividend payment since the State Mining Corporation (STAMICO) had a stake in the project which will also pay import duties and service levies to Namtumbo District Council where the mine is located.

Other benefits that would accrue from the project situated in the Selous Game Reserve would include the creation of employment opportunities to 690 people.

"However, the revenue will depend on the price of uranium in the world market," he cautioned.

He said that the National Environment Management Council (NEMC) has since issued an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Certificate, and that the Ministry of Energy and Minerals has also issued a licence that allows the extraction of uranium to take place.

## **THE GUARDIAN**