

ACTIVIST UPDATE: SUN XIAODI RECEIVES INTERNATIONAL NUCLEAR AWARD

Earlier this year, CRF published a profile of Gansu-based activist Sun Xiaodi, who has spent more than a decade petitioning the central authorities over radioactive contamination from the No. 792 Uranium Mine in the Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Gansu Province.¹

On December 1, 2006, Sun Xiaodi was presented with the Nuclear-Free Future Resistance Award, described as the globe's most prestigious anti-nuclear prize, at the Indigenous World Uranium Summit hosted by the Navajo Nation in Window Rock, Arizona. The award recognized Sun for his "moral courage to petition for an end to the toxic mismanagement corrupting Chinese uranium production."

Sun began reporting the illegal resale of contaminated equipment, illegal mining and careless disposal of untreated water in 1988, while he was working as a warehouse manager at Mine No. 792. However, his repeated petitions to provincial and central government officials resulted in nothing more than his dismissal in 1994, and discriminatory treatment of his wife and daughter. Sun has persisted in his campaign against the illegal mining practices, which continued even after the mine was officially closed in 2002. It now operates as a private enterprise under the administration of the Gansu Province government and Ministry of Nuclear Industry, with many local officials as shareholders.

"These officials have blood on their hands," Sun says, observing how a region of green fields, clear waters and woodlands filled with birdsong have been transformed into a wasteland in which plants wither, livestock die and human inhabitants suffer from birth defects and abnormal cancerous growths. Tibetan medical workers have attributed nearly half of the human deaths in the region to a variety of radioactivity-related cancers and immune system diseases.

Tenzin Tsultrim, an environmental spokesman for the Government of Tibet in Exile, says, "Tibetans from the region complain about their helplessness to stop the uranium mining." He added that Tibetans have no say in projects involving natural resources, which are considered the property of the state.²

In April 2005, Sun disappeared while petitioning in Beijing, shortly after meeting with foreign journalists to describe the environmental degradation in Gansu. After being secretly moved from place to place for eight months, he was finally released from Lanzhou Prison on December 27, 2005. Despite

official warnings and restrictions on his movement, Sun resumed his petitioning, and was detained again in April 2006. He was released soon afterward, but remains under constant police surveillance, and is now forbidden to talk on the telephone, much less leave China to attend an award ceremony.

The Nuclear-Free Future Award was endowed following the World Uranium Hearing in Salzburg, Austria in 1992, and since 1998 has been presented to individuals and organizations who have worked tirelessly to end the nuclear fuel cycle. The jury deciding this year's award included environmentalists, activists, scholars and journalists from the United States, Germany and France. A \$10,000 cash prize that accompanies the award will be held by the organizers until it can be safely presented to Sun. Although unable to attend the award ceremony, Sun sent a recorded message to the gathering, accompanied by a video prepared by HRIC:

Dear Chairman and Friends,

I regret very much that I cannot be here to accept the award personally. Since my release from detention, I have been in an extremely insecure situation in which I am threatened, intimidated and harassed. I felt tremendously honored and touched when I learned that I had been selected as this year's Nuclear-Free Future Award recipient, because I have seen the great power of world peace and development. At the same time, I feel a deep sorrow, because I have also helplessly witnessed the environmental problems caused by the failure to effectively contain and reduce nuclear contamination. Breaking through fear to fight for a nuclear-free environment requires a person to take a path full of hardship, bloodshed and tears, which could end up in either life or death. However, I firmly believe that if all people who are peace-loving and concerned with human destiny and upholding justice can come together and take action as soon as possible, a nuclear-free tomorrow can become a reality.

I wish the conference great success!

NOTES

1. Ren Chong, "The Case of Sun Xiaodi," *China Rights Forum*, No.1, 2006, http://hrichina.org/public/PDFs/CRF.1.2006/CRF-2006-1_Sun.pdf.
2. AFP, "Exiled Tibetan government warns against increased mining," July 23, 2006, posted at <http://www.terradaily.com/reports/a060723032330.kyqeo4md.html>.