



STATEMENT ON URANIUM

SECOND ASSEMBLY, UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA
RESOLUTION 79.26

It was resolved that the Assembly:

- a. receive the statement on Uranium
- b. print the statement, and
- c. refer the statement to Synods and Presbyteries.

Statement on Uranium

- (i) The Assembly Commission on Social Responsibility calls to mind that, on July 10, 1977, prior to the announcement by the Australian Government of a decision to proceed with the mining and export of Australian uranium under certain conditions, the Assembly Commission on Social Responsibility called for a moratorium on the mining and export of uranium for at least two years and for a public and parliamentary debate based on a Government white paper outlining policy options.
- (ii) The Assembly Commission on Social Responsibility believes that the moral considerations raised by the Commission at that time still remain:
 - a. "The Australian community (should) consider seriously whether the demands being made by our Western lifestyle are really in the best interests of human welfare."
 - b. "There is a danger that the decision to mine and export Australian uranium will be based more on short-term economic interest, rather than consideration of the possible long-term consequences."
 - c. "Priority should be given to research into alternative forms of energy and to a conscious energy conservation programme by Australians in the immediate future."
- (iii) The Assembly Commission on Social Responsibility is concerned at the follow development since the decision announced by the Australian Government on August 24, 1977:
 - a. The signing of the Ranger Agreement in October, 1978, between the Ranger partners and the traditional landowners. Far from being a recognition of the benefits of European-type development for Aboriginal people, it represents the feeling of inevitability that what the white man wants, the white man gets. After all, the traditional landowners had no legal right to prevent mining, but only to negotiate for the conditions and royalties on their own behalf, and even in this they did not have the final say: final negotiations were carried out under considerable pressure.

The episode has produced sad division in the Aboriginal community, so that, once more, the self-interests of European Australians have been victorious at the humiliating cost to black Australians.

Parallel development of uranium mines in the Northern Territory (contrary to Fox Committee recommendations) is bound to maximise the pressures on affected Aboriginal communities.
 - b. The slow retreat from Australia's official policy on nuclear proliferation safeguards. Faced with a slackening world demand for uranium, the Australian Government has told potential miners that they are free to negotiate commercial uranium supply contracts before proliferation safeguards are agreed on with the country concerned. This is coupled with a willingness to negotiate bilateral agreements with nations (e.g. the Phillipines and South Korea) whose internal security problems place at risk the effectiveness of the safeguards. The upheaval in Iran, a supposedly stable nation, should serve as a warning.
 - c. In spite of intensive research around the world, a workable method of permanently dealing with nuclear wastes is not much closer. There is certainly no working system of disposal operating in any



country. It may be that solutions will be found to the technical problems of waste disposal, but it is doubtful that the political and social means will ever be available to guarantee the safety of wastes for the time required to render them harmless.

- d. Confidence in nuclear reactor safety has been greatly shaken by the accident at the Three Mile reactor in the United States. This event highlighted how much uncertainty still surrounds nuclear technology, despite industry claims to the contrary.
- e. In Europe and North America, opposition is growing to the nuclear fuel cycle and the apparent cheapness of nuclear energy compared to other energy sources is no longer an acceptable fact. This is illustrated by declining official forecasts of the uranium market. The Australian Atomic Energy Commission forecasts of world demand for uranium in 1984 have been cut by 55% between 1973/74 and 1977/78. (Annual Reports, A.A.E.C.)

In some instances, the building of reactors is at the direct cost to the poor. An example of this is the Philippines reactor being built at Morong, on the Bataan Peninsula. When completed, the project will destroy the homes and livelihood of 20,000 peasant farmers and fisherman, all for the benefit of international companies operating in the nearby free-trade zone. (And the reactor may be fuelled by Australian uranium.)

- f. Our continuing reluctance as a nation to face the question of why our lifestyle needs so much energy to keep it going. Even with the threat of a significant liquid fuel shortage, there has been no serious effort made by the Australian people or government to question their way of life or its goals. We, individually and collectively, still dream of "lucky Australia".
- (iv) The Assembly Commission on Social Responsibility believe the following Christian principles ought to be considered in the discussion about the development of uranium resources:
- a. Our stewardship within the order of God's creation (Genesis 1.26 ff) requires a responsible use of natural resources which includes, in particular, a concern for future generations.
 - b. "Man does not live by bread alone" (Luke 4:4). This principle questions the drive for economic gain which seems to be of central importance in current Australian nuclear policy.
 - c. "Love for our neighbour" (Leviticus 19:18, Matthew 22:39, James 2:8) which means that we must weigh the consequences of our actions upon people in other parts of the world. This applies to the question of waste disposal where Australian policy requires that "our neighbour" bears the consequences of this unsolved problem.
 - d. Justice for all is basic to any truly human development. In its impact on Aboriginal society, its tendency to centralisation of power, its promotion of the philosophy of "more energy for more growth", the Australian nuclear industry diminishes the possibility of a just, participatory and sustainable society.
 - e. The dangers associated with the nuclear production cycle are such that only men and women of utter integrity, incapable of making mistakes and beyond moral reproach could be trusted to handle them. The Christian view of the ambiguous nature of man causes us to doubt man has the moral capacity to handle these dangers on any scale.