
**Nominated for the Public Eye Global Award 2008
by Schweizerische Energie-Stiftung (SES):**

AREVA Group S.A.

Based in:	Paris, France
Industry:	civilian and military nuclear technology (all sectors)
Turnover / Net-Profit:	€ 10,863 billion / € 649 million (2006)
CEO:	Anne Lauvergeon
Owned by:	French State, French Atomic Energy Commission, ERAP (84%)
Employees:	61,111 in 41 countries (2006)

In Brief

Did you know you could get HIV/Aids from radioactive radiation? No? Well, the French Nuclear Corporation Areva figures as much – and the company-owned hospitals prefer to diagnose the cancers of its mineworkers as cases of the deadly HIV virus. Are we kidding you? No, this is actually happening in the north of Niger where Areva is the majority shareholder of two companies (Somaïr and Cominak) that mine for uranium. But why the false diagnoses? The state-owned French company would rather not pay for the treatment of its former employees. The mineworkers and their families receive little or no information about the health hazards of uranium mining. Radioactivity concentrations in the air, the water and the soil are far too high. Contaminated material is stored under the open sky. Now this is the kind of information that the operators of nuclear power plants like Mühleberg and Gösgen do not want their customers to know. Because their customers might be very upset to hear that some of the uranium used in Swiss reactors comes from Areva mines.

A corporation behaves badly

Just enough energy to heat one meal per person every day: that is how little electric power the Republic of Niger can afford to use even though within its borders lies one of the world's largest uranium deposits. The riches of this country – one of the world's poorest – are mined and carried off mostly by others: Areva has been mining for uranium in two mines of this former French colony for 40 years. Not far from the Areva mines Cominak und Somaïr – the former is under ground, the latter above – the company built two cities for the mineworkers and their families. The desert cities Arlit and Akouta, whose combined population is about 80,000, also received one hospital each. According to Areva, miners and their families are treated there for free. That's truly necessary, because mine safety is inadequate and the information of mine workers about the hazards of

radioactive radiation is neglected. The workers must wash their protective clothing at home. Millions of tons of contaminated materials are stored outside, emitting radioactive gases in the atmosphere. Contaminated scrap metals are sold for reutilization. Measurements taken by the independent French research commission for radioactivity (CRIIRAD) from 2003 to 2007 also show concentrations of radioactivity in air, water and soil. The area around the mines will be contaminated for generations to come. Areva knows all that but doesn't do anything about it.

Consequences

On the contrary: conditions in the mines and the nearby worker cities are covered up. According to a report published by the human rights organization SHERPA, doctors at company hospitals say that diagnoses indicating a connection to uranium mining are extremely rare. Patients with cancer are told they have some other serious illness like HIV/AIDS or malaria. Of course, says a head-physician in the report, if people have money he will tell them what they need to do to get better. So much for Areva's claim that miners are treated for free. But despite reports by CRIIRAD, SHERPA and the Nigerian environmental organization Aghirin'man seem undisturbed about the desolate conditions in and around the mines of Areva's trading partners. Areva is one of the major suppliers of fuel rods for these Swiss nuclear power plants: Mühleberg, Gösgen, Beznau and Leibstadt.

Current situation and demands

SHERPA, CRIIRAD and Aghirin'man have been calling for independent measurements on the grounds of the mining company but Areva refuses to admit anyone. In about 10 years, Areva figures, the deposits in the two mines will be exhausted. What will the future have in store for the people of Arlit and Akouta? A former mining town in Gabon suggests a possible answer: Mounana is a town in this Central African country and the site of a former uranium mine operated by Areva and closed in 1999. Left behind were people without jobs, half of them with serious problems of the lung, skin, eye or heart – some 7,000 people living on ground that will be contaminated for decades. Courtesy of Areva and its fine mining policies.

For more information:

- <http://www.criirad.org/actualites/dossiers%202007/uranium-afriq/rapportcriirad-niger.pdf>
- <http://www.criirad.org/actualites/dossiers%202007/uranium-afriq/rapportsherpa-niger05.pdf>
- <http://www.criirad.org/actualites/dossiers%202007/uranium-afriq/rapportgabon-sherpacrdmmdm.pdf>