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Laguna-Acoma Coalition
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Good Afternoon.

It is an honor to visit your beautiful country. My name is Dorothy Purley. I am a Native American Pueblo Indian from the United States of America. I live in the Southwest region called New Mexico.

I live on an Indian reservation where the U.S. government forced my ancestors to live so many years ago. The early European settlers forced us off our lands and claimed them for their own. We were finally placed in areas that were usually uninhabitable. What the government did not realize was that these areas were rich in natural resources. The community where I live in is called the Laguna Pueblo. It is where the world's largest open pit uranium mine once was.

In 1935 when the mine first opened, it was truly a godsend to my poor native people. We have always lived in poverty, which seems to be a government standard for Native American Indians. The money that was earned enabled us to feed our families and for the first time to become independent. Yes, times were good back then. But, what the government forgot to tell us was that the uranium was dangerous and would become hazardous to our health. They did not tell us that it would also bring death and destruction to others.

Our health was not the only thing that was in jeopardy at that time. The explosives that they used to dismantle the uranium caused our homes to become unsafe. Our village was just 1000 feet from the mining area. We could smell the sulfur and other blasting compounds that they used in their explosives. They usually conducted their blasts during our noontime and evening meals, when our village women would dry their fruit and vegetable during the harvest season. A fine layer of dust would cover our food, but we simply rinsed it off not knowing that it was toxic.

In 1975 I became an employee at the Anaconda Uranium mine. I was now a single parent and had to support my daughter. I was employed as a truck driver and hauled high grade uranium ore to the milling site. I was exposed to high amounts of radiation and did not know this at that time. We would eat our lunches while sitting atop of the high grade ore. We were never advised of any safety techniques or given any safety equipment at the time.

During my employment at the time, I never realized that there was any danger and was never advised about any of the harmful effects of radiation. They never told us that they were going to use this uranium to make a weapon of mass destruction. The company never gave us any information whatsoever. Just recently, our tribe has learned that the government and the mining operation knew about the danger that mining uranium ore would bring. As early as 1935 when the mine first opened, there were documents from scientists warning them to minimize exposure to the uranium ore. It said that people should not be exposed more than two weeks without potential harm. I worked at the mine for eight years. Some of my people retired after thirty years at the mine.

Today my people on the Laguna reservation are suffering from numerous effects of radiation poisoning. We have seen a rise in mental and physical abnormalities. Our cancer rate is rapidly increasing. I myself have been fighting cancer for 6 years now. I have gone through high dose chemotherapy on three different occasions. I am again in remission for the time being. When I am in better health, I travel as much as possible. I try to help people understand that there is extreme danger where there is radiation. I use myself and my family as example of what can happen.

Just recently my daughter's husband was diagnosed with a rare skin cancer. Although he never worked at the uranium mine he was exposed to radiation in many ways. His older brother worked for the underground mine, and dust from his clothing would contaminate their household. My son-in-law also lived next to the railroad which carried the radioactive high grade ore to the mill site. The distance of 60 miles or more alongside the tracks is still highly contaminated to this day. Many more of my people will become ill with cancer and other rare diseases as time goes on. I pray every day that such devastation will never again occur on my beautiful sacred lands.

My greatest hope is that mankind will realize that we need to keep our Earth Mother as healthy as we can. I know that there are better ways to produce power by using solar energy, the wind and water. These are natural powers which our Great Spirit has given. We were meant to use these. By doing this we will keep ourselves healthy and have a peaceful existence.

I strongly believe that we do not need any more nuclear weapons. There are never any winners of war, only victims. We do not need any more deaths and destruction in our world. We have had enough already. The only true way to live is through peace and harmony. My hope is that by sharing my story, it will inspire others to make better decisions for themselves and their loved ones. I wish you long life, peace and happiness. Thank you.