

Appeal to the Greenlandic and Danish Governments and the European Union to Help Protect the Greenlandic and Arctic Environment

New Arctic strategies are underway in the Danish Realm¹ and the European Union. By encouraging large-scale mining and oil and gas extraction, the existing strategies have a negative impact on Greenland's pristine environment. Unfortunately, there are no signs that the new strategies will be any different. Greenland possesses some of the world's largest oil and gas and mineral reserves and currently, there are [about 70 active large-scale exploration and exploitation licenses in Greenland](#), covering thousands of square kilometres, and almost all related to surface mining projects. Most of them are located in Southern Greenland, which has the country's richest biodiversity and all of Greenland's farm land. Recently, the big rare earth elements mining project at Kringlerne has been approved, which is described by its owner as the probably largest deposit in the world. And in a few months, the controversial rare earth elements and uranium project at Kvanefjeld is expected to get an exploitation license. In addition to containing the second biggest uranium and by far the largest thorium deposits, the Ilimaussaq-complex, of which Kvanefjeld is a part, has the second largest deposits of rare earth elements in the world.

WE CALL on the Greenlandic and Danish governments, the European Union, and everybody else who take an interest, to help establish an Arctic sanctuary. The inspiration could be [the Antarctic Treaty, as supplemented by the Madrid Protocol](#) signed in 1991, but respecting the fundamental difference represented by the populated nature of Greenland and the Arctic and the rights and needs of the peoples and nations of the Arctic region.

WE APPEAL to the Greenlandic and Danish governments and the European Union to adopt new Arctic strategies that help protect Greenland's fragile environment. A moratorium on large-scale mining and oil and gas extraction should be implemented and during this time, the Greenlandic government should be compensated for the possible loss of revenue. Even if not much revenue can be expected, the Greenlandic government should benefit from a fixed yearly payment in order to support and consolidate Greenland's economy. Furthermore, it should be investigated, how a larger part of the proceeds from the fishery in Greenland's waters could benefit its economy.

WE ALSO APPEAL to the Greenlandic government to implement environmental standards equal to the standards of the European Union, to adopt the Aarhus Convention and sign the Paris Agreement. The Greenlandic government should also consider reinstating the uranium zero tolerance policy, because uranium mining would contaminate the vulnerable Arctic environment and lead to nuclear proliferation.

THE REASONS FOR OUR APPEAL ARE THE FOLLOWING:

Exploitation of Greenland's vast oil and gas reserves will contribute significantly to global warming and go against the aims of the Paris Agreement. Recently, in order to live up to this agreement, Denmark cancelled new oil and gas exploration in the Danish part of the North Sea.

¹ The Greenlandic and Danish governments are partners in the Danish Realm, which consists of Southern Denmark and the two autonomous regions Greenland and the Faroe Islands.

The Arctic environment is particularly vulnerable to pollution, because it recovers very slowly. The long-term economic costs of pollution in Greenland could be so high that they by far exceed the short-term economic benefits of large-scale mining and oil and gas extraction

The Greenlandic marine areas contain some of the planet's cleanest waters and make an important contribution to the reproduction capacity of the marine biodiversity and the ecosystems in the Northern part of the Atlantic Ocean. These areas will be threatened by large-scale mining and on-shore and off-shore oil and gas extraction.

Many other countries have experienced negative impacts from large-scale mining, including widespread pollution of water, land and air, and the destruction of pristine nature and precious habitats.

Mining and particularly uranium mining are incompatible with development of three of the four sectors that are the key growth sectors in Greenland's economy, namely fishing and catching, tourism and food production. Most of Greenland's mineral resources are located in Southern Greenland, which is often described as "Greenland's bread basket". All of Greenland's sheep stock – more than twenty thousand overwintering sheep – are found in Southern Greenland and there is an ambition to introduce beef and dairy cattle, when global warming makes the climate milder. Furthermore, Southern Greenland has some of the country's best catch areas.

Greenland will not gain economic self-sufficiency by large-scale mining and oil and gas extraction. In 2014, a [study](#) was published by the University of Copenhagen and Ilisimatusarfik, the University of Greenland. It concluded that 24 concurrent large-scale mining projects would be required to zero out the financial support from Denmark. To achieve this goal within a reasonable timeframe, a new large-scale project would have to be developed and launched every other year and an unrealistically large number of mineral deposits required. The report also established that a mineral-based economy is not economically sustainable: when the mining industry starts to recede, Greenland will find itself in the same situation as before, only with fewer resources. These findings have since been confirmed by other reports.

The mining projects at Kringlerne and Kvanefjeld threaten the nearby [Kujataa world heritage site](#), a farming landscape, which was inscribed on UNESCO's world heritage list in 2017. There have already been calls to put Kujataa on the World Heritage Convention's danger list.

The European Parliament has expressed support for [the idea of an Arctic sanctuary](#). In October 2008, it adopted a resolution on Arctic governance, which among others states: "(The European Parliament) suggests that the Commission should be prepared to pursue the opening of international negotiations designed to lead to the adoption of an international treaty for the protection of the Arctic, having as its inspiration the Antarctic Treaty, as supplemented by the Madrid Protocol signed in 1991, but respecting the fundamental difference represented by the populated nature of the Arctic and the consequent rights and needs of the peoples and nations of the Arctic region; (the European Parliament) believes, however, that as a minimum starting-point such a treaty could at least cover the unpopulated and unclaimed area at the centre of the Arctic Ocean".