

Tanzania deflects environmental concerns delaying uranium mine project

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Tanzania's energy and minerals minister Sospeter Muhongo has blamed some foreign countries for trying to thwart the ambitious uranium mining at the Mkuju River Project in southern part of the country.



"We are not the first country to engage on mining of uranium; it should be noted as well that all big economies in the world are in demand of the heavy metal for power generation, weapons and for use in health services," Muhongo told the *Sunday News*.

He did not specifically mention the countries he blamed for frustrating the project; stressing that; "the government is aware of deliberate campaigns by foreign sources to prevent uranium mining at Mkuju River."

The minister was reacting to queries on the government's position on the proposed uranium mining, following worries by conservationists on implementation of the project and its impact in the surrounding areas, particularly the vast 50,000km² Selous Game Reserve.

"The very forces opposed to Mkuju project are still using uranium in their countries, our position as the government is that the project will go on as planned," he reiterated. According to the minister, there has been environment and social impact

assessment on the proposed uranium mining which proved that it can be undertaken without grave negative impact to the surrounding area.

"You cannot undertake such a huge and delicate project without conducting scientific studies, it should be noted as well that the uranium to be mined at Mkuju will not be used for power generation locally but rather for exports," he explained.

Initially, the proposed area for the project which is situated on the outer edge of the Selous Game Reserve was considered a World Heritage Site under the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).

However, at its 36th session in St. Petersburg, Russia, in July 2012, the UNESCO's World Heritage Committee approved an application by the government of Tanzania for a minor adjustment to the boundary of the game reserve.

During the meeting, the committee required Tanzania to remove the Mkuju River Project and an adjacent buffer zone from the Selous Game Reserve World Heritage Site.

Since then the government has set out an area covering 350km within the Selous Game Reserve in the southern Tanzania tourist circuit for extraction of uranium. Located at Namtumbo District in Ruvuma Region, the project is expected to create over 1,600 direct and indirect employment opportunities.

During the life of the mine, the Mkuju River project is expected to attract \$1bn and generate about R630m to direct and indirect cash flows.

Source: allAfrica

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