Cyanide kills!
Moratorium on cyanide use

Devastating effects on health and the environment

Sodium cyanide, used mainly by the gold mining industry (1), is an extremely toxic chemical compound. At every stage of its manipulation — transport, storage, use, confinement — cyanide poses a serious threat to our existence. Its effects on the environment, human health and biodiversity are catastrophic and irreversible (2).

In the event of an accident, if it comes into contact with water, sodium cyanide produces hydrocyanic acid, a highly inflammable gas that causes death by asphyxiation, as occurred in China (August 2015), where the explosion of 700 tons of cyanide led to the death of 114 people, with more than 700 injured (3).

When released into the environment, cyanide immediately causes the asphyxiation of all living organisms and a severe imbalance in ecosystems. More than 30 major accidents linked to cyanide spills have occurred around the world over the past 25 years (4). Moreover, since climatologists have announced that extreme rainfall episodes will become more intense and more frequent, an increase in the number of mine tailings dam failures is expected (5).

Contempt of the French government and the European Commission

Despite these findings, the French government responded favorably to the demands of the mining lobby that it increase the acceptable level of cyanide discharged by gold ore processing operations. (6).

Yet banning the use of cyanide-based technologies in the mining industry has also been a repeated demand of the European Parliament, expressed by way of two resolutions adopted in May 2010 (7) and more recently in April 2017 (8), the latter voted almost unanimously (566 votes in FAVOR of the ban, 8 AGAINST).

The European Commission rejected this resolution on the pretext that this measure « would put the European industry under a disproportionate burden » but also that « there is at present a lack of better alternative technologies available at commercial scale » (9).

However, member states can choose to adopt this resolution at the national level. Three European countries, the Czech Republic (2000), Germany (2002) and Hungary (2009), have already made that decision! Why can’t France do so as well?

An immediate moratorium

The cross-border effects of accidents caused by cyanide, in particular with regard to the pollution of major drainage basins and groundwater aquifers, illustrate the need to take a national as well as a European approach (10) to address the serious threat of cyanide use.

The Or de Question coalition and its European partners solemnly call on our respective governments to declare an immediate moratorium on the use of cyanide in the mining industry, with the aim of ultimately banning it permanently.
Sources:

(1) 75% of sodium cyanide (NaCN) products in the world are used by the mining industry

(2) Cyanide: How does it kill? How does it pollute?
https://www.sciencesetavenir.fr/nature-environnement/pollution/le-cyanure-comment-il-tue-comment-il-pollue_102451

(3) Explosions in China: Sodium cyanide in 7 questions

(4) Resolution of the European Parliament dated May 5, 2010

(5) Chronology of major tailings dam failures
http://www.wise-uranium.org/mdaf.html

(6) Press release: How the French government is increasing cyanide discharge limits in our waterways to facilitate the establishment of multinationals in French Guiana!

(7) Resolution of the European Parliament dated May 5, 2010

(8) Resolution of the European Parliament dated April 27, 2017

(9) Quote from the European Commission (Sept. 2017) : « With regard to paragraph 21 calling for a ban on the use of cyanide mining technologies in the EU, the Commission would like to point out that the use of cyanide is currently subject to strict conditions under the Extractive Waste Directive 2006/21/EC (Article 13(6)). The Commission remains convinced that the proper implementation of the Extractive Waste Directive mitigates the risks of accidents and severely minimizes the impact any accident could have on the environment and on public health. The Commission considers that a generalised ban at EU level of these technologies would put the European industry under a disproportionate burden. Based on information available to the Commission, there is at present a lack of better alternative technologies available at commercial scale. The Commission will however keep monitoring the development of such alternatives. »

(10) In 2014, a European campaign, « Bang Ban Cyanide », was already initiated by Romanian organizations:
https://www.facebook.com/BangBanCyanide/
https://www.rosiamontana.org/categori/interzicerea-cianurii?language=en