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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Crying Earth Rise Up Examines the Human Cost of Contaminated Water & the Fight to Prevent the Expansion of Uranium Mines

Available for Community Screenings and Events

(Chicago, IL.): *Crying Earth Rise Up*, a recently released one-hour documentary addresses the impact that modern uranium extraction has on the land, water, and people.

Elisha Yellow Thunder (Oglala Lakota) waits with her daughter, Laila, during a dialysis session. Photo by Suree Towfighnia.

Produced and directed by Suree Towfighnia of Prairie Dust Films with consulting producer Debra White Plume (Oglala Lakota), the name of the documentary comes from a belief of the Lakota that Mother Earth needs to be cared for through good stewardship of the land and caring for its natural resources.

The film follows Elisha Yellow Thunder (Oglala Lakota), a young mother and geology student. Elisha is fully aware of the contamination dangers posed by the uranium mines to the vast and precious Ogallala Aquifer. During Elisha's first pregnancy, she drank contaminated water. Today, her nine-year-old daughter, Laila, continues to suffer from serious, life-threatening birth defects and medical abnormalities. Elisha is determined to identify the source of the contamination in an effort to protect her water supply, as well as that of her Lakota people.

Debra White Plume is a grandmother and tireless leader in the fight to protect her people's water and land from corporate polluters. Debra is the lead plaintiff in a case challenging uranium mining on Lakota treaty territory and speaks out about the issue from her own community on the Pine Ridge Reservation to the steps of the White House in Washington, D.C.

The narrative arc of the film follow's Elisha and Debra's parallel search for answers to the questions, "Why are there high levels of radiation in our drinking water? And, how can we protect our families and community against this threat?" They are supported by members of the tribe, environmental activists, and a host of others who have filed a case to prevent the mine's expansion in the region. Balancing the story are local residents and the mine company itself, who claim that the town would fold if the mine were shut down.

As this struggle grows on the Great Plains, *Crying Earth Rise Up* stands in defiance to contemporary uranium mining assertions of minimal impact on land and water. When nations discuss "green and clean" alternative energy, uranium and nuclear are often touted, however, the discussion never includes the long-term impact of mining.

"We live in a world where 40% of our energy comes from nuclear sources, so uranium mining impacts all of us. Flipping a switch powered by nuclear energy makes you wonder where that uranium comes from," explained Suree Towfighnia.

The practice of *in situ* leach mining (ISL) involves combining groundwater with a leaching solution, then injecting the solution through plastic pipes into uranium reserves located below or within the water table. The uranium in the groundwater is pumped to the surface to be drawn out and dried into yellowcake. After this process, some of the leaching water becomes radioactive sludge and must be stored at a uranium tailings facility for disposal. The remaining groundwater is then treated by cleaning it through reverse osmosis and re-injected back into the aquifer.

"With 70% of the world's uranium resources being located in the lands of Indigenous people, this topic is especially relevant and pressing to Native communities. *Crying Earth Rise Up* aims to increase awareness about the timely and critical need to protect water," said co-producer Courtney Hermann.

Bruce Ellison states in the documentary, "Until companies can prove that mining is safe, they shouldn't be allowed to operate in our communities."

Crying Earth Rise Up—which received major funding from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) and Vision Maker Media—is an offering of the National Educational Telecommunications Association (NETA) and will feed for national broadcast on April 4, 2015. It is currently on the film festival circuit and was accepted into the Sedona International, Frozen River, Big Muddy, Byron Bay, International Uranium, Portland EcoFilm, Native Women in Film & TV and the Athens Film Festivals. Screenings are planned in over ten regions around the continent this year.

Our Outreach Initiative

Crying Earth Rise Up is designed as a conversation starter for events and screenings highlighting issues relating to: the environment, native/indigenous/first nation's contemporary struggles, women, nuclear energy, clean energy, mining, water protection, American domestic policy, government responsibility and oversight, Treaty rights, and documentary film. Over the past five years, we have screened portions of the film with over 3,000 people in over 40 venues. We have community partners in many regions who will facilitate deeper discussions on the issues the film project addresses. We also offer music, poetry, art and media training in conjunction with film themes and topics.

About Prairie Dust Films

Founded in 2002, the mission of Prairie Dust Films is to create media that engages audiences and inspires creative solutions for positive social change. We collaborate with musicians, artists, designers and educators to reach new audiences and inform discussions. Our films screen on national television, in festivals, at schools, libraries, museums, community centers and online. Aside from our film work, Prairie Dust Films facilitates media and documentary training workshops and mentors Native youth in the Lakota Media Project.

Additional Information Regarding *Crying Earth Rise Up*

Release Date: 2015
Run Time: 56:46
Credits: A Prairie Dust Films Documentary.
Crying Earth Rise Up is a co-production of Prairie Dust Films and Vision Maker Media in association with Owe Aku.
Funding: Major funding provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) and Vision Maker Media.
Additional funding provided by Seventh Generation Fund, Honor the Earth/Headwaters Foundation for Justice, the Indigenous Environmental Network/Western Mining Action Network (WMAN) and our Kickstarter Supporters.
Listen to Suree Towfighnia and Debra White Plume's Producer Profile:
http://www.visionmaker.org/audio/producerprofiles/towfighnia_white_plume_profile.mp3
Link to the Trailer and Work Samples: http://www.cryingearthriseup.com/#!media/c1efl
Film Pages:
Official Film Website: http://www.cryingearthriseup.com
Film Facebook Page: https://www.facebook.com/cryingearthriseup
Prairie Dust Films Website: http://www.prairiedustfilms.com

Key Personnel Bios:

SUREE TOWFIGHNIA, DIRECTOR/PRODUCER

Suree Towfighnia is a director, producer, director of photography, and documentary educator from Chicago, Ill. She directed *Standing Silent Nation* (www.standingsilentnationfilm.com), that chronicles a Native American family's struggle for economic empowerment by growing industrial hemp on their sovereign Reservation lands. It was broadcast nationally on POV and garnered many awards in competitions and festivals. More recently, it has been the centerpiece of outreach and community engagement pushing for legislative change. Her thesis documentary, *Tampico*, about a low-income Latina street performer, won the Studs Terkel Award for Community Media. Suree works in youth media and teaches master classes in documentary making for universities, non-profits, and at EICTV in Cuba. She began the Lakota Media Project (LMP) in 2003 to train Lakota girls and women in telling their own documentary stories. Suree has been dedicated to working on social justice documentaries and community engagement since 1997.

COURTNEY HERMANN, CO-PRODUCER

Courtney Hermann is an award-winning independent documentary filmmaker and educator from Portland, Ore. Her most recent independent films include *Exotic World and the Burlesque Revival* (2012) and *Standing Silent Nation* (2007). *Exotic World and the Burlesque Revival* (2012) enjoyed a World Premiere in summer 2012 at dOCUMENTA13, in Kassel, Germany, and is currently in film festival and DVD distribution. *Standing Silent Nation* (2007), which aired nationally on PBS's Emmy®-Award winning documentary series, POV, was favorably reviewed by *The New York Times*, and won the Audience Award at several film festivals, including the Sedona International Film Festival. The film was featured daily at the Smithsonian Institution's Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C. in July 2008.

DEBRA WHITE PLUME (OGLALA LAKOTA), CONSULTING PRODUCER

Debra was born and raised on the Pine Ridge Reservation in southwestern South Dakota. She has been involved in Lakota cultural preservation and revitalization work her entire adult life, including work to protect Treaty Rights and Human Rights. She has been an active community organizer around such issues for 40 years, from the grassroots level to the United Nations, where she participated in the drafting of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Permanent Forum for Indigenous Peoples and Issues. She lives along the banks of Wounded Knee Creek with Alex, her husband of 30 years, where they raise horses and provide stewardship to the small buffalo herd kept for spiritual and cultural purposes. Debra earned undergraduate degrees from the Oglala Lakota College on the Pine Ridge Reservation.

SHARON KARP, EDITOR

Sharon Karp has edited documentaries for over 40 years, beginning with the original *Kartemquin* collective. Among her award-winning films are the Emmy®-nominated *Silent Pioneers*, Chicago Film Festival Silver Hugo Winner; *The Chicago Maternity Center Story*; and *Return of Navajo Boy*, a Sundance Film Festival official selection. Her most recent projects include *Standing Silent Nation*, a Pare Lorenz nominee; *The Innocent*, winner of the Crystal Heart Award for documentary feature, about people wrongly sentenced to death; and *Burnt Oranges*, winner of the Cine Golden Eagle Award, about state terrorism in Argentina during the 1970s. Sharon is the owner of Media Monster in Chicago, Ill., which provides full-service production and editing services.

TANTOO CARDINAL, NARRATOR

An accomplished and celebrated actress, Tantoo Cardinal has advanced Aboriginal performing arts throughout the world. Known for her authenticity, her complex and diverse Aboriginal characters have worked to dispel stereotypes. Her performances on stage and in both film and television have helped to blaze a trail in an industry where few roles for Aboriginal women previously existed. In 2010 Tantoo was inducted as a Member into the Order of Canada for her outstanding contributions. Other honors include a National Aboriginal Achievement award, the Harvard University Sunhill Award for excellence in Aboriginal filmmaking and four honorary doctorates.

REUBEN CRUZ (PEE POSH/MARICOPA/QUECHAN), WRITER

Reuben is a father/musician/poet/organizer/humanist from the Gila River Nation near Phoenix, Ariz. He documents stories of love and circumstance gathered from the places he's seen or lived. As an emcee (Che Christ), he uses his storytelling skills to bring messages of social justice and respect for all peoples through positive hip-hop music. Reuben teaches writing workshops with youth in urban centers and in Native communities. He collaborates on events that use film, art and music to celebrate contemporary activist movements. As a member of Prairie Dust Films, Reuben works as story consultant, writer, sound recordist, artist, and post-production assistant on feature documentaries.

LAKOTA MEDIA PROJECT (LMP)

An initiative of Owe Aku and Prairie Dust Films, the LMP began in 2003 to mentor Lakota youth and women on documentary filmmaking. LMP creates projects that complement social justice and activism work happening on the Pine Ridge Reservation. The work of LMP on different issues benefits the Tribal Nations' population and beyond, through the distribution of educational materials about Native issues from a Native perspective with a Native voice. Although LMP suffered a devastating loss when they lost almost all their equipment, footage, and archives in a house fire in 2007, the stories exist in the minds of participants and their activism continues. Little by little the work goes on. The Lakota Media Project is collaborating on *Crying Earth Rise Up*. They work on production, editing, and music.

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