To: Rick Perry, Secretary, Department of Energy
Kristine L. Svinick, Chairperson, Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Members of the New Mexico Congressional Delegation

Dear Mr. Secretary, Madam Chairperson, and Members of Congress:

We are faith leaders from many religious traditions, and from many diverse communities in New Mexico. We are greatly concerned about an issue that will affect our communities, our future generations, and the wonderful state we call “home.” As Pope Francis stated in his 2015 encyclical addressing climate change and the economy, “As faith leaders we take seriously the responsibility to help discern what is equitable, just, and for the common good of Our Common Home.”

Our concern is about a license application by Holtec International for the Consolidated Interim Storage of high-level radioactive waste that the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) will consider. As stated in the license application, this proposed project would allow the storage of 110,000 tons of spent nuclear reactor fuel from nuclear power plants in 35 states. The proposal is for a shallow sub-surface burial system in Lea County between Carlsbad and Hobbs. This facility would store the spent fuel currently at the power plants as well as the spent fuel from what is currently in use and projected for future years.

We are concerned that the decisions to approve this project will be made without adequate time for communities to understand the project and voice their concerns. Some of the issues are:

1. The safety of the transportation of the spent fuel on highways and railroads through communities. Also, since this is a “storage” site and not a “disposal site” like the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP), at some future point the spent fuel will need to be removed and sent to a disposal site, thus doubling the transportation risk.

2. The safety of the operations at the site during construction and operation. Spent fuel is many thousands of times more radioactive than the waste disposed of at WIPP.

3. Assurance that The State of New Mexico will not have to shoulder the cost of railways, roads, accident mitigation and recovery, and future clean-up and decommissioning of the site. The operating entity is likely to be Holtec Government Services, LLC, a Limited Liability Corporation (LLC) and as such is protected from many of the financial consequences of failure. If their corporation dissolves, who is stuck with the bill? New Mexico does not have the resources for this.

4. The public has been unable to obtain information from the NRC regarding Holtec Government Services, LLC compliance with regulatory requirements, safety performance, and financial responsibility in their existing operations. Holtec has no current presence in New Mexico so their corporate ethics are unknown.

5. When the people of New Mexico agreed to the WIPP Site they were promised that New Mexico would not store high-level nuclear waste. The Federal government has been unable to agree on a disposal site for the permanent disposal of spent nuclear fuel, and given that history we are concerned that the “storage facility” here will become a de-facto disposal location.
6. There is also an environmental justice concern for this project. We already have a large number of industrial activities which can pollute our air, land, and water and pose potential failure risk. Our citizens, many of whom are Hispanic, bear a disproportional amount of risk as citizens of New Mexico living in the communities where environmentally risky operations take place.

7. We are concerned that the NRC does not have the resources or presence to adequately monitor or regulate the construction or operation of this facility. The NRC has no current presence in Southeast New Mexico. The WIPP site is overseen by the Department of Energy (DOE) which has decades of presence in New Mexico.

8. Waste Control Specialists, LLC has already started the development of a storage facility for spent nuclear fuel near the Texas/New Mexico border near Eunice, NM. This raises the question of the economic viability of this project since a competitor is already started.

Our religions have ancient roots, and this ancient wisdom calls us to protect and care for Creation and Community. One passage in the Judeo-Christian tradition from the Book of Deuteronomy calls us to be responsible and to engage in these issues: “Today, I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore, choose life that you and your children may live.”

Please take action to ensure that all concerns for the risk of this project are in the open, receive public scrutiny, and receive due consideration.

Thank you for the consideration of our request.

Undersigned Faith Leaders and Organizations:

Rev. Susan Quass
Executive Director
New Mexico Conference of Churches

Bishop David Bailey
Epicopal Church Navajoland
Farmington, NM

Sr. Joan Brown, osf
Executive Director, NM Interfaith Power & Light
Albuquerque, NM

Sr. Rose Marie Cecchini, MM
Director, Office of Life, Peace, Justice & Creation, Catholic Charities of Gallup Diocese
Gallup, NM

Rev. Dr. William M. Lyons
SouthWest Conference Minister
United Church of Christ

Rev. Nick King
Mennonite Pastor
Carlsbad, NM
Rev. Stephanie Harmon  
Methodist Chaplain  
Carlsbad, NM

Rev. Marty Singleterry  
Pastor, St Peter Lutheran  
Retired Methodist Superintendent  
Carlsbad, NM

Rev. Gene and Ellen Harbaugh  
Retired Presbyterian Minister  
Carlsbad, NM

Associate Pastor, Holy Rosary Parish  
Albuquerque, NM

Betty Jo Nye, President  
Albuquerque District  
United Methodist Women

Fr. Tom Smith OFM Conv.  
Director, Holy Cross Retreat Center  
Mesilla Park, NM

Fr. Richard Rohr, O.F.M.  
Center for Action and Contemplation  
Albuquerque, NM

Fr. Gene Gries, O. Praem  
Maria de la Vid Norbertine Abbey  
Albuquerque, NM

Organizing Director  
Interfaith Worker Justice – NM

Fr. Warren, J Broussard, S.J.  
Immaculate Conception Church  
Albuquerque, NM

Linda Popelish  
Gallup's Morning Light Sangha  
Jamestown, NM

Sister Catherine Clemons  
Gallup, NM

Rev. Virginia Bairby  
Pastor, First Presbyterian Church  
Taos, NM
Rabbi Paul J. Citrin  
Albuquerque, NM

Sr. Marlene Perrotte, rsm  
Legal Immigration/Asylum Ministry  
Albuquerque, NM

Lynn R. Anner-Bolieu, Deacon (Ret.)  
Episcopal Church of Navajoland  
Reside in McKinley County, NM

Rev. Pamela Shepherd  
Pastor, Taos UCC  
Taos, NM

Judy Traeger  
JustFaith Facilitator, St. John XXIII  
Catholic Community, Albuquerque, NM

Rev. Larry Bernard, ofm  
Pastor, San Diego Mission  
Jemez Pueblo, NM

Kathleen Mezoff  
Elder, Westminster Presbyterian Church  
Gallup, NM 87301

Sr. Diana Wauters  
Sisters of the Assumption  
Chaparral, NM

Rabbi Harry Rosenfeld  
Congregation Albert  
Albuquerque, NM

Rev. Jean Siegfried Darling  
Minister Emerita, Peoples Church of Chicago  
Cerrillos, NM

Rev. Harry Ebert  
Pastor, First Presbyterian  
Santa Fe, NM

Rev. Andrew Black  
Pastor, First Presbyterian  
Santa Fe, NM

Rev. Sarah TevisTownes  
Pastor and Teacher, Church of the Good Shepherd UCC, Albuquerque, NM
Rev. Gail Marriner  
Pastor, Unitarian Universalist  
Santa Fe, NM

Rev. Tiffany Curtis  
Pastor, First Christian Church  
Santa Fe, NM

Rev. Sue Joiner  
Pastor, First Congregational United  
Church of Christ, Albuquerque, NM

Rev. Erica Lea-Simka  
Albuquerque Mennonite Church  
Albuquerque, NM

Pastor Anne Morawski  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
Associate in Global Mission

Jutta Stonawski  
Teacher of the Gifted  
Gallup, NM

Rev. John Dear  
Santa Fe, NM

Rev Sharon Littrell-Marsh, Ph.D  
United Church of Christ  
Southwest Conference

Fr. Frank A Quintana  
Albuquerque, NM

Rabbi Nahum Ward-Lev  
Temple Beth Shalom  
Santa Fe, NM

Mary Ellen Gonzales  
Board of Trustees, Unitarian Universalist  
Congregation of Santa Fe

Rev. Jeremiah Griffin  
Pastor, St. Chad Episcopal Church  
Albuquerque, NM

Rev. Dr. Stephen J. Miller  
Disciples of Christ pastor, retired  
Albuquerque, NM
Rev. Anita Amstutz
Anabaptist Fellowship of Alamosa
Mountain States Mennonite Conference

Rev. Joan Jiko Halifax
Abbot, Upaya Zen Center
Santa Fe, NM

Rev. Kenneth Cuthbertson, PhD
Presbyterian (USA)
Albuquerque, NM

Rabbi Neil Amswych
Temple Beth Shalom
Santa Fe, NM

The Rev. Angela Herrera
Senior Minister, First Unitarian Church
Albuquerque, NM

The Rev. Ryan W. Roberts, n/OLF
Albuquerque, NM

Rev. Dr. Bert Scott
United Methodist Church
Albuquerque, NM

Rev. Sarah Tevis Townes
Pastor and Teacher, Church of the Good Shepherd UCC, Albuquerque, NM

Lilly B. Irvin-Vitela
Children Youth & Family Ministries
First Congregational United Church of Christ
Albuquerque, NM

Mirakhel Windsong
Lay leader, Westminster Presbyterian
Gallup, NM

Rev. Janet Norden, Pastor
University Heights United Methodist
Albuquerque, NM

Rev. H. Blaine Wimberly
Santa Fe, NM

Janet Gildea, SC
Sisters of Charity
Anthony, NM
Peggy Deneweth, SC
Sisters of Charity
Anthony, NM

Carol Wirtz, SC
Sisters of Charity
Anthony, NM

Rev. Karen Bash
Retired United Church of Christ Minister
Albuquerque, NM

Rev. Allen Bash
Retired United Church of Christ Minister
Albuquerque, NM

Rev. Alexander Lenzo+
Priest, St. Francis Episcopal Church
Rio Rancho, NM