

CSD Thematic Seminar on Mining Chair's Summary

The CSD Thematic Seminar on Mining was held at UN Headquarters on 9 April 2010. The event was moderated by Mr. H.E. Mohamed A. A. Alahraf, Vice Chair (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) of CSD-18. An introductory statement was made by Mr. Tariq Banuri, Director of the Division for Sustainable Development (DSD).

Mr. Tony Hodge discussed how the changes in conditions facing the mining industry since the 1990s, which included higher publicity about the impacts of mining activities as well as increased pressures stemming from civil society and governments, have caused a shift in attitude from major mining companies. He noted that mining companies face on a day-to-day basis questions of sustainability that are dealt with theoretically in other domains. Globally, there are some 6000 companies in the formal mining sector. Major companies represented in ICMM have felt the need to respond by engaging in proactive measures that include voluntary principles, guidelines and best practices. While there is a long way to go in order to improve the sustainability of mining operations, ICMM's position is that all actors have to cooperate in this direction. Major issues to be addressed include: improving indigenous peoples' and local communities' involvement in decisions related to mining; improving governments' capacities to negotiate with companies on equal terms; integrating the whole implications of mining life-cycle, including de-commissioning, more fully into regulation; and improving the distribution of costs, benefits and risks from mining activities among stakeholders.

Mr. Manuel Pino focused his presentation on indigenous rights relating to mining, with an illustration from the case of uranium mining in the Navajo nation in the USA. While national and international instruments allowing indigenous peoples to gain control over the use of their native lands have developed in the last decades, enforcement is often an issue, and stepped-up dialogue and other efforts are necessary to address issues related to the impact of mining operation on land, water and livelihoods of indigenous people. He highlighted the provisions of the United Nations Declaration on Indigenous Peoples. In the Navajo nation, the legacy of past uranium mining operations with high costs on the health and availability of resources of indigenous peoples has yet to be adequately addressed. Toxic and hazardous remains from orphan mines have contaminated watersheds beyond local mining operation sites, and caused cancers and other diseases among former mines and local residents.

Mr. Patrick Chevalier presented the Intergovernmental Forum on Mining, Minerals, Metals and Sustainable Development (IGF). The IGF aims at providing a global forum for governments interested in mining issues and in particular in following up on the issues raised at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002. The IGF was set up as a CSD Partnership in 2005 that governments can join on a voluntary basis; the Forum currently comprises 43 members. UN agencies participate as observers. Partnerships are seen as the key to making progress, because government and industry cannot act alone. The Forum promotes the sharing of best practices among mines ministries and industry does not supplant national decision-making. So far the Forum has reviewed issues such as: the generation and distribution of economic benefits from mining; community engagement; and environmental best practice – life cycle approach. A policy framework based on a survey of members will be presented at CSD-19.

Delegates and others raised issues related to, *inter alia*, the balanced distribution of benefits from mining activities; the existence of an oversight agency for the industry; the enforcement of international law relating to the rights of indigenous people and other social and environmental issues; the extent to which progress made over the last 40 years was sufficient for local populations to feel more confident about mining activities; possible paths for developing countries which depend on their natural resources; how to ensure that countries negotiate with companies on an equal basis; how to mitigate local conflicts arising from mining activities; and how the industry principles were concretely turned into practices.