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Canadian (Mining) Companies Abroad

This is my response to Jim Hollingworth's letter on overseas mining operations Canadian companies abroad causing environmental and health damage in the Philippines: I have great respect for Dr Hollingworth's work advocating sincerely for environmental health. He has sent in meaningful correspondence to the medical publications over a number of years. I find the articles he has sent disturbing and I'm glad to be made aware of the subject matter.

The issue for CAPE that he brings up is a very important one; the effect of mining practices on the environment and human health. I would think the long history of mining on environmental and human health perhaps has a worse record than any other industry.

CAPE's policy has been to do literature research on an issue to educate our membership (objective 1) and then to see if the research leads to advocating certain positions or courses of action (objectives). Therefore I would be interested in Jim preparing a referenced briefing paper for CAPE on the subject. This would be put out to the membership as well as interested members of ISDE.

I think there are two broader issues that the articles raise. One is that of international environmental health standards and regulations. I believe that data from the international mining industry record would be a valuable contribution in making the case for standards and regulations. Events of the past year alone have been well publicized and would seem to cry out for better environmental and economic regulation of the mining industry internationally. CAPE needs to be supplied with researched and validated data from its members on an issue before it can take a position to go public with.

The other broad issue is that of environmental health ethics. At last year's AGM workshop session, this came out as a central focus for CAPE. Should and do Canadian companies uphold the ethics of their corporate policy statements and corporate codes of conduct in Canada?

The Sierra Legal Defence Fund in Vancouver opened its Toronto office in April 1996. Mining environmental cases brought by Sierra Legal Defence in 1995/96 are:

- NWT Mining - Filed petition for Judicial Review of federal review panel process regarding BHP's proposed NWT diamond mining project (now settled); represented a coalition of environmental organizations at review hearings.
- Mega-Mine Impact Assessment - Initiated court challenge of the fast-tracked provincial and federal approvals for the massive Huckleberry copper mine, in northern BC's Cheslatta First Nation traditional territory.
- Yukon Mining - Argued in the Federal Court that mineral development along the Yukon's Bonnet Plume River, nominated as a Canadian Heritage River, must be subject to environmental protection laws. Advised native and environmental groups on a law reform strategy resulting in the long-overdue creation of an environmental protection regime for Yukon mining.
- Mining Pollution - Required the Ontario government to investigate the heavily polluted Sherman Mine site in Temagami under the Environmental Bill of Rights.

The BC government publishes lists of companies charged under the Environmental Protection Act. Some companies, including Alcan and Cominco, appear year after year. Cominco remains in non-compliance on the 1996 list for dumping slag into the Columbia River and exceeding smelter emissions for mercury lead and zinc.

Here on northern Vancouver Island the Tsolum River salmon stocks have been decimated by acid mine drainage from Mount Washington, compounded by water fluctuations influenced by logging and agricultural practices, with an economic loss estimated at \$2 to \$7 million.

This is a tough question. How can these companies be persuaded to uphold the same ethics in poorer countries as they are expected to do in Canada, even if these poorer countries have fewer environmental regulations? In BC the mining industry complains that increased environmental regulations have forced it to look elsewhere in the world for what it would call better opportunities for its stakeholders. What we need then are more ethically minded investors, and this brings us to focus our attention on the Multilateral Agreement for Investment (MAI) under the OECD and the discussion by the World Trade Organization (WTO) on Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEA).

Submitted by Dr Peter Carter, Nanaimo, British Columbia

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Declaration of the Rio Paraguay

The following declaration states the conclusions of participants in the Floating Seminar of the Paraguay River, organized by Sobrevivencia - Friends of the Earth Paraguay and the Coalition Rios Vivos Paraguay-Paraná-Plata, who in three boats descended the Paraguay River between 17-27 July, 1998 as part of a permanent dialogue with the populations of the La Plata Basin. Along the way, they traveled through sections of the river programmed for large-scale engineering works as part of the Paraguay-Paraná Hidrovia industrial waterway, currently, being planned by the governments of the region. Participants included citizens of the countries of the La Plata Basin, North America, and Europe.

Declaration of the Rio Paraguay

We, indigenous peoples of the Paraguay basin, traditional communities, scientists, environmental experts, and ecologists from various countries, concerned with the future of our rivers, have taken part in the Floating Seminar on the Paraguay River, and united in our message, propose strategies for the construction of sustainable societies in the region.

We are the Earth, the peoples, the plants, the animals, the waters, the sun's rays. the breath of the winds. We want to honor the Earth as the place of all living beings.

We have come to testify to the depredation we have witnessed along our entire descent of the Paraguay River, from Corumba to Asunción. The model of occupation established in our region bears no relation to the needs of the peoples who live along the riverbank, nor with the potential of its ecosystems. Indigenous peoples have been expelled from their territories and deprived of their sustainable means of wisdom, of happiness, and of life. Huge barge convoys have replaced the ancestral means of transport and navigation adapted to the natural conditions of the river: mining and mineral loading docks contaminate their surroundings; logs pile up in the lumber mills which consume the final remains of the lush ancient forests; enormous columns of smoke and ashes darken the sky in midday, announcing the imminent end of prosperity on the earth and the eclipse of its original cultures. Signs of the inevitable collapse of this heart of America in whose rhythm pulses and breathes the security of life in the La Plata Basin.

Facing this situation, and because we still have time, we want to propose paths that serve to improve the condition of life in the basin: paths which do not destroy, but which restore the balance today threatened.

The salvation of the planet and its peoples, present and future, demands the creation of a new civilization based on an ethic which respects its limits, diversity, solidarity, equality, justice, and liberty.

Earth We are all a unit in our diversity. We assume the shared responsibility to protect and to restore the earth so that its natural resources may be used wisely, preserving ecological balance and the social, economic, and spiritual values which assure sustainability.

The existing patterns of consumption, of production and distribution of resources, currently oriented toward extraction, concentration, and expropriation bring human societies and the ecosystems which sustain them to an inevitable disaster. All initiatives must therefore be urgently directed to meet the needs of local and traditional populations, especially indigenous peoples, assuring the sustainability, the equality, and the respect for diversity in our societies.

Sustainable societies are based on the self-determination of local communities and original peoples in full exercise of their right to decide on the management and administration of the ecosystems that they are part of.

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A Final Comment from Peter Carter

These two articles bring to our attention the global inheritance of over two hundred years of 'limitless frontier consumerist economics' and urge us to put our hearts and minds behind the fledgling shift to sustainable development economics.

As we straddle the new millennium, citizens of rich countries find themselves carried forward by the momentum of centuries of cumulative technology - one that has largely delivered its promise of unlimited material objects. But the future will force us to shift away from the creation of 'goods' toward the prevention, or elimination, of 'bads.' We must treat air, water, and soil as limited supplies that are no longer free, and therefore accept these as new constraints in our ability to create wealth.

Because it is often profitable for the individual or corporation to pollute, unregulated, unrestrained free-market capitalism actually rewards the polluters. At the same time, the success of capitalism in delivering unprecedented material wealth will ensure its ideological acceptance in most countries through the middle of the twenty-first century. How can we reconcile capitalism with the necessity of curtailing pollution?

"Capitalism can survive but not without a rising tide of eco-regulations that limit individual and corporate freedoms in favour of communal well being. Industry will react to the new realities by viewing pollution as an output of each step in the production process. We may have been prolific polluters in the past because engineers, businesses, and government didn't treat the preservation of the environment as a constraint. By giving engineers new constraints, we can hope that they will design novel products and processes free of pollution. But they must begin to do this soon."

(from 'Bold New World' by William Knoke, President, Harvard Capital Group - an investment banking firm, Vice President for corporate finance of Spectrum Securities.)

Unfortunately, the present trend in international agreements is to accelerate the pace of quasi-classical economics, through the proposed terms of the WTO Financial Services Agreement - December 1997, and the Multilateral Agreement on Investment - delayed one year to April 1998. These are totally unregulated and unrestrained globalized free-market capitalism, and as such would throw more gasoline on the environmental fire (pun intended). To make matters even worse at the same time, the possible restraints from other multilateral environmental and other multilateral economic (sustainable development) agreements are being all but forgotten about by all sectors of society. The UNCED, the several UN environmental agreements and conventions, the NAFTA, the OAS, the EU, the GATT, the WTO, and the OECD, are all founded on stated principles of environmental protection and sustainable development. The clearest, most comprehensive and most binding of these, the Organization of American States' Declaration of Santa Cruz de La Sierra (Bolivia December 8, 1996), is also the least known. Other suggested reading with multiple useful references is 'Sustainable Development as Free Trade' by James M. Sheheen.

We have the tools. The time to use them is NOW.

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ISDE (and CAPE) at the United Nations, Part 2: International Society of Doctors for the Environment

Declaration of Chicago on the Phase-Out of Metered Dose Inhalers (MDIs) Containing CFC

The International Society of Doctors for the Environment (ISDE) with its 34 national and regional associations representing some 540,000 physicians in over 100 countries (many of them belong to one or more medical specialty), is concerned about the continued use of metered doses inhalers (MDIs) containing CFCs in the treatment of asthma and COPD. We can no longer accept that a medical treatment contributes to the destruction of the ozone layer and the linked dangerous threats to human health and the ecosystem, since there are equivalent alternatives.

Therefore we call upon:

The parties to the Montreal Protocol meeting in Montreal:

- to stop the exemption for MDIs automatically as soon as a technically and economically feasible alternative (TEFA) is available with a transition period of no longer than 2 years (for the first substances the alternatives are not available)

All governments and drug registering authorities:

- not to allow any new MDI containing CFC
- to withdraw the registration of CFC-containing MDIs after a transition period when the same substance is available in CFC-free MDIs
- to inform and educate patients and physicians about the availability and importance and to promote the use of CFC-free alternatives (dry powder inhalers (DPIs), nebulisers or CFC-free MDIs)

The pharmaceutical industry

- to switch as quickly as technically possible to CFC-free alternatives
- to collaborate with each other for a fast transition
- not to invest any resources in the development of new products containing CFC; in the promotion of existing products containing CFC or in the lobbying against a quick and strong regulation of the transition at national and international levels

Our members and all physicians and patients:

- to change as soon as available to a CFC-free alternative of the same or a similar substance (even if they have to get used to another brand name)

ISDE does not ask for a less good therapy of patients who need it, but in view of the existing and forthcoming alternatives we cannot accept a further contribution of a medical therapy to such an important threat to human health as the ozone depletion.

The present declaration has been accepted by the 7th ISDE General Assembly held in Chicago on May 24, 1997.

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Statement of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation

Parliament States Duma's Appeal to heads of state, parliaments and governments on the problem concerning the ozone layer preservation

Nowadays we all of us have moved forward into a world which will be more and more dominated by an ever decreasing life protective power, the ozone layer, one of the greatest assets of nature. Its depletion is occurring as a result of major impacts produced by industrial activity and technological advances of man. With the planet's ozone loss having amounted to 7 - 8%, the dramatic process of its depletion is carrying on to suffer an annual drop of about 1%. In irony of the situation, the year 1995 - the International Ozone Layer Care Day - was marked by a record-high disintegration of this layer.

Should the international community's combined efforts fail to arrest further depletion of the ozone, the unbridled ultraviolet radiation is likely to imperil the very existence of mankind nearing the third millennium.

Although the Vienna Convention of Ozone Layer Protection and the Montreal Protocol on Substances Detrimental to the Ozone Layer did much in reducing the emissions of carbon tetrafluoride chlorides and other agents that contain chemically active atoms of chlorine and bromine, the disintegration of the ozone shield of our planet is still in progress.

Recent decades have seen a significant increase in the atmospheric percentage of minor gaseous components such as nitrogen, hydrogen, sulfur and carbon oxides, hydrogen peroxides, ammonia, methane, hydrogen sulfide and other compounds, which undergo complex physical and chemical reactions resulting in the ozone layer disintegration.

As a matter of fact, the Montreal Protocol is not aimed at reducing the volume of emissions of the above compounds, which is an impossibility in itself. Even though the Protocol is fully implemented, and the production of ozone-affecting substances discontinued altogether by the year 2000, the amount of the agents emitted and accumulated in the stratosphere up until this point is potent enough to send them on a career of depleting the ozone layer for another 50 to 70 years, thus further aggravating the current already desperate situation.

Over recent decades scientists from Russia, the USA, Germany, Japan and other countries have been active in the search for new ways designed to preserve the ozone layer by using the more adequate stratosphere-oriented techniques based on accomplishments in physics and chemistry. Russian researchers have also contributed greatly to the matter in question. Moreover, they were instrumental in arranging a number of international workshops focused on attacking the problem of restoration of the ozone layer.

Of course, the objectives set forth by the Montreal Protocol are to be thoroughly followed and duly completed by the international community in their own way. At the same time, the more realistic approach for our civilization to survive does seem to be lying in the stratospheric use of the cited techniques of choice.

Given an extraordinary character of the situation on hand, we suggest:

1. Extending the scope of fundamental research and experimental Investigations related to the ozone layer preservation.
2. Arranging in 1997 the First International Conference on Preservation of the Ozone Layer through the use of more efficient techniques.
3. Setting up an International Fund to provide support for the preservation of the ozone layer by the use of effective techniques.
4. Organizing a long-distance TV communication (via satellites) dedicated to the preservation of the ozone layer, where the eminent scientists, political, religious and public figures of the world would be involved.
5. Creating an International Committee in order to work out the strategy to ensure the survival of life on Earth in emergency. Taking part in the activities of the Committee will be the most prominent scientists, political, religious and public figures.

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