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Newsletter

Number 1: Autumn 1999

Editorial:

Well, it's been more than six months since MiningWatch Canada started work, and beyond making ourselves even busier than before, we seem to be doing some really useful work. We may even be beginning to have an impact on the way the Canadian government and Canadian mining companies behave, by direct intervention in policy-making and by supporting communities and organisations struggling to prevent or fix environmental and social problems caused by irresponsible mining activity.

— Jamie Kneen

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Innu Nation co-hosts aboriginal workshop with MiningWatch Canada

On the weekend of September 10-12, 1999, MiningWatch Canada and the Innu Nation convened a gathering of representatives from aboriginal communities throughout Canada that had been affected by mining. The Innu wanted the gathering to share what they were learning through the environmental assessment and land rights negotiations with respect to the Voisey's Bay project, but it was also an opportunity for aboriginal groups to set an agenda for MWC's work with them. A general invitation was sent out, and 32 communities and organisations eagerly responded. Eighty people came.

The event was a powerful learning experience for all involved. At the end of the gathering, participants told us that this was the first time they had been in an environment where they felt safe discussing all the issues occasioned by mining development openly, since mining companies and government were not present in any significant way. (There were representatives from two aboriginal-owned prospecting companies, and one aboriginal employee of Health Canada).

The major themes discussed were:

- Land rights, treaty rights, and mineral development, and the importance of having these rights recognised before any development can take place.
- The disorganising effects on the daily life of communities created by mineral exploration and development.
- Environmental destruction: unfettered exploration, careless operation, bankruptcy, mine closures, and abandoned mines are a problem for many communities.
- The need for capacity-building in everything from law and regulatory frameworks, to metallurgy and engineering, to health and toxics issues, to coping with social dislocation and community development.

Participants expressed a lot of interest in continuing to work with MWC, including participating as members and/or Directors.

Planning for the international "Real Costs of Mining" conference

Next spring, MiningWatch Canada will bring together 30 leaders from communities affected by Canadian mining companies around the world to share their stories and develop a framework for research projects located in their experience of mining in all its stages. A video and booklet will also come out of the meeting.

Community representatives will be invited from Peru, Chile, Guyana, Nicaragua, Mexico, Kyrgyzstan, the Philippines, Indonesia, Ghana and South Africa, as well as from communities in the United States and Canada. The format of the semi-

nar will be very participatory, and translation will be provided.

The seminar will be a collaborative effort with the Canadian Consortium for International Social Development (CCISD) — an organization of scholars, activists and organizations doing and promoting applied research and advocacy. Located in Ottawa, they are committed to social justice, "advocacy from below" and participatory action research.

We have applied to the International Development Research Centre's Mining Policy Research Initiative for funding.

Export Development Corporation taking some heat

The Canadian Export Development Agency (EDC) provides public financing and political risk insurance to Canadian companies investing in large-scale projects overseas. In 1997, EDC worked with 3,711 customers in 145 global markets. It is a federal crown corporation.

EDC projects have enormous human and environmental impact. Some of the world's worst environmental disasters have involved Canadian firms financed by EDC. The Ok Tedi Mine received \$88 million in EDC export credits. The Omai mine in Guyana, the Three Gorges Dam in China and the Kuntor Mine in Kyrgyzstan have all received EDC support. Most famously, so has AECL's CANDU deal with China. Information about these investments is not available from the EDC itself.

EDC operates almost entirely without public scrutiny. It is exempt from the Freedom of Information Act and from the Environmental Assessment Act because it is a crown corporation. It has no envi-

ronmental or human rights policy. In April 1999, EDC did release a voluntary Environmental Review Framework, but it is well below recognised environmental standards, and only considers environmental risk not environmental impact. There are no human rights standards at all.

A group of non-profits has come together to push the EDC to meet minimal human rights and environmental standards, and to demand accountability and transparency in its actions. Headed up by the Halifax Initiative, the working group includes MiningWatch Canada, the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development, the Canadian Labour Congress, Democracy Watch, and the Sierra Club, among many others.

When new enabling legislation goes to the House of Commons later this fall, the working group will be ready to coordinate a strong presence in the Finance Committee hearings.

MiningWatch Responds to Request for Help from Philippines

In September MiningWatch received numerous urgent reports and pictures from the Philippines about a struggle between a local tribal group and a Canadian mining company, TVI Pacific. Calgary-based TVI (Toronto Ventures Incorporated) is accused of harassment and intimidation of indigenous Subanen people in the Philippines who are trying to stop the company from conducting exploratory drilling in preparation for opening a mine on their ancestral land. Local NGOs and six local Catholic bishops have documented violent dispersal, physical assault

and harassment, illegal entry, food and economic blockades, and illegal/warrantless arrests and detention of Subanen people and of small-scale miners in the area.

The Subanen and the small-scale miners, with whom they have a good relationship, have been struggling to stop the incursion of TVI on their area since 1995. TVI now holds mining rights over 508 hectares of land within the 6,557 hectares that makes up part of Subanen ancestral domain in the municipality

of Siocon, in the province of Zamboanga del Norte on the southern island of Mindanao. The Subanen filed an indigenous land claim in 1992. Their claim was only recognised in 1998, one year after TVI acquired the rights to mine in the area — making it difficult for the Subanen to exercise their right, under the Indigenous People's Rights Act, to deny access to the company.

TVI has recently reported financial backing by "Japanese investors" and has resumed test drills after aborting mineral production in 1998 due in part to strong opposition from both the Subanen tribe and

the small-scale miners. Osino Mato, Secretary of the Siocon Subanen Association, protests: "We made an ancestral land claim in 1992 before TVI were ever here but the company has been allowed to go ahead and our claim has been blocked. This is our land. We have always lived here." He says, "I don't believe the Government in Canada know what is going on in our place. I do not believe TVI give an honest report."

MiningWatch Canada issued a press release on September 15 and is following up with several reporters and NGOs.

Natural Resources Canada pushing "sustainable development indicators"

This past Spring, Natural Resources Canada (a.k.a. NRCan) initiated a multi-stage, multi-stakeholder process that MiningWatch Canada has been involved in. The first stage, which is ongoing, is meant to discern 'Canadian values' that might inform indicators that will measure 'progress' in the mining sector with respect to sustainable development.

MiningWatch's participation has focused on the need for a broader underlying and collective 'vision' of sustainability, and specifically on 'sustainability' with respect to mining, to inform this project. MiningWatch has argued that indicators to measure progress in sustainability should flow from this consen-

sus perspective. It is impossible to measure progress towards a goal if there is no consensus on the goal, and if we do not know how far current practice is from this goal. Catherine wrote a short piece on sustainability and mining as a discussion paper. This focus by MiningWatch has found support amongst other involved stakeholders. NRCan has not been enthusiastic in adopting this direction but has put the question of whether there is a need to "develop a common vision" on sustainable development of metals on the agenda for the next meeting.

The next face-to-face meeting of the working group will be on November 24-25.

Communications update:

MiningWatch Canada has issued press releases regarding the environmental assessment of the Diavik project, TVI's activities in the Philippines, and the government liability at the Giant and Faro mines, as well as a joint release on the Ok Tedi mine in Papua New Guinea (partly owned by Inmet of Toronto) together with the Mineral Policy Center and Project Underground in the USA and the Mineral Policy Institute of Australia. The Giant/Faro press release led to a major Financial Post article on September 18, 1999 (page D6), headlined ***Mining's Toxic Or-***

phans Come of Age, and the TVI press release led to another Financial Post article on October 20, 1999 (page C12) headlined ***TVI Expects Victory in Land Dispute***. We've also submitted comments on the Diavik comprehensive study as part of the environmental assessment process. Meanwhile, we're also hard at work getting our web site together.

Check www.canada.miningwatch.org in early November to see what we've come up with.