

05 May 2010

Intervention of Indigenous Peoples On Mining

Thanks Ms. Chair.

Most of the governments in their remarks to date welcome the development they hope mining will bring; but also recognize that mining generates serious adverse social and environmental impacts of mining. While indigenous peoples welcome any and all genuine efforts of the mining industry to reduce its carbon footprint and raise the standards of safety, respect for human rights and the raising of environmental standards around mines, there is also a serious concern that mining techniques and operations remain essentially, unsustainable founded as they are on the extraction of a non-renewable resource from the earth.

This is of particular concern since it is estimated that a disproportionately high percentage of the planned expansion of mining activities will continue to be carried out in indigenous territories. The extensive lands of indigenous peoples include many of the most vulnerable and threatened ecosystems on our planet. Indigenous peoples have always made clear that they are culturally, spiritually and economically interlinked with their lands. There is now a growing trend for mining projects to increase in scale and to extend over wider areas, thus inflicting a greater impact and deepening long-term disruption to the environment and to those who depend upon it.

The mining industry has laid increasing emphasis on its commitment to sustainability. We welcome these statements but some solutions lie beyond the industry. All stakeholders must work to minimize overall fossil fuel use and therefore production. Governments therefore need to adopt a strategy of reducing total mining impacts through an increase in reuse, recycling, and substitution and direction towards minimizing in new mining activities.

Future mining activities need to include full recognition and respect for indigenous peoples' rights to their territories and to any proposed developments within them, as enshrined in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, as the minimum international standard relating to indigenous peoples' rights.

This CSD18 Review Session should therefore ensure that implementation in the mining sector is in accordance with the principled framework of the Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development and other international human rights and environmental instruments with its current course, as claimed, moving towards sustainability. The CSD should elaborate guiding principles to assist in the transition to sustainability. In relation to mining, this could be expressed as recognition of the adverse impacts mining can have, including the permanent alteration of the mined area, production of materials that may, through their processing or use, harm the environment and health of the local people. Therefore, all efforts should maximize the recovery, reuse of minerals, substitution of more sustainable materials and better delineation of zones and categories of land and sea that should be barred from mining.

May we again emphasize that for indigenous peoples, maintaining sustainability amid changing patterns of consumption and production, mining, waste management and other development processes depends upon the integration of care for all life and for the land and the rights of the guardians of the land. We continue to assert that respect for the rights and welfare of indigenous communities is essential both as a matter of social justice and for environmental sustainability and for the restoration of the social acceptability of mining. Thanks, Madam Chair.