

Report of the first roundtable on Corporate Social Responsibility in the Extractives Sector

Canadian Network on Corporate Accountability /Civil Society Focal Point

The purpose of this two-page note is to give the reader a flavour of the first National Roundtable on Corporate Social Responsibility held in Vancouver in June 2006. A summary report of the first roundtable is under way and will be posted to the Government website mid-July.

On June 14-15, Vancouver hosted the first of a series of four multi-stakeholder roundtables on Corporate Social Responsibility and the Canadian Extractive Industry operating abroad. This event provided a good opportunity for public participation. It was also a way to test the process and identify some of the issues to be addressed for a fruitful dialogue throughout the fall roundtables.

Though an important first step, the Vancouver roundtable was not given high profile. No media release was issued by the Government, and Government participated with a low profile delegation. The Government Steering committee, which includes eight Government Departments/Agencies, was not represented at the event by senior level officials. Two government members of the Steering Committee, the Canadian International Development Agency and the Privy Council Office, were not represented. Civil society delegates welcomed Export Development Canada (EDC) participation in the roundtable. Outreach for the public session relied solely on the work of the Industry and Civil Society focal points. There was no advertisement for the Roundtable in any Vancouver newspaper.

Within this context, the CNCA increased its efforts to reach the media. Our strategy was successful and several newspapers and radio programs covered the key issues in the roundtables. Members of the network did several interviews for a special issue of Embassy Magazine focusing on CSR. In addition, David Suzuki focused his Science Matters (weekly column) on the need to clean up the extractive industry.

As planned, the Vancouver roundtable included a public session and a session on Standards and Best Practices. The public component was successful both in terms of the level of participation of civil society members and the consistency of the message conveyed. The public wants the Canadian Government to break new ground and enact strong measures to address the failure of current voluntary approach to CSR. Civil society speakers represented a wide range of constituencies from Human Rights to labour, churches and development, and ethnic groups. Sadly, no environmental groups registered to speak in the public session. Though the session was supposed to be open, the media was not allowed in the room.

The public sessions also benefited from presentations made by a number of experts invited to the focused session. In particular, Miguel Palacin Quispe (Mining affected communities in Peru) and by Chief Glenn Nolan (Missanabie Cree) made presentations based on their experiences dealing with mining companies in the South and in Canada.

Though civil society has stressed the importance of participation from the South since the beginning of the roundtable process, the participation of a sole Southerner was only

possible thanks to major efforts by civil society delegates to the Advisory group. Concerns over the lack of Southern delegates were raised by people attending the public session.

The participation of people from industry was very limited in the public session. Only one person from industry registered to speak. Members of the advisory group who represent the business sector were concerned about the negative tone of the presentations at the public session that some questioned the value of these sessions.

The focus session involved presentations and discussion from a wide range of experts on standards applicable to the extractive sector. Many were surprised by the diversity of views between civil society and industry. Many saw as critical the implementation and monitoring process for the implementation and monitoring of the standards adopted.

Outcomes from the focus session were somewhat disappointing. Expectations of many of the members of the Advisory Group were not fulfilled. Civil society delegates prepared themselves to have an in-depth discussion of specific sets of standards to be applied to this sector. In the run-up to the roundtable, the CNCA commissioned two papers on standards to allow an informed discussion. However, the discussion stayed at a very general level.

The format and the dynamics chosen for this session were not helpful at all though some improvements were made the second day. The group was too large (no breakout groups), the rooms were badly chosen for interaction, and the questions for the discussion were unhelpful. Despite this, some areas of convergence were identified. For example, it was agreed that standards for the Canadian extractive industry can be drawn from existing international standards, but we need to find a Canadian approach to implementation and monitoring.

Other areas of convergence were the need for transparency and consultation with communities both early in the project and throughout the whole life of the project, a collaborative and phase-approach to standards, and the need for ongoing dialogue.

Finally, many interesting one-on-one discussions were held during the breaks and lunches, allowing a better interaction between representatives of civil society and industry. Some exchanges were very stimulating, particularly discussions regarding business, human rights and others.