

Report of the second roundtable on Corporate Social Responsibility and the Canadian Extractive Sector in Developing Countries

Canadian Network on Corporate Accountability/ Civil Society Focal Point

The purpose of this two-page note is to provide a brief overview of the second roundtable held in Toronto in September 2006. A summary report of this event, covering the Open Sessions and the Issues Focus Sessions, is being prepared by the government and will be available to the public in advance of the Calgary roundtable.

On September 12-14, the second in a series of four multi-stakeholder roundtables on CSR and extractive industries in developing countries was held in Toronto. The roundtable focused on both positive and negative incentives and instruments for implementation of CSR standards. Over the course of two and a half days, the roundtable provided an important opportunity for public participation and in-depth policy discussions with invited experts.

The Toronto event was a positive step forward in the National Roundtable process. Although the government did not notify the media, turn out for the Open Sessions was excellent. Participation was double that seen at the Vancouver roundtable: 45 presentations and more than 250 people attended the two Open Sessions. The time allocated to the Open Sessions was expanded from 5 hrs to 8.5 hrs, in order to accommodate the large number of registrations received. Members of the Roundtable Steering Committee (SC) and Advisory Group (AG) attended the public component of the roundtable to listen to the public presentations.

The presentations were of high quality and provided thoughtful recommendations for action. Although the speakers represented a wide range of constituencies (human rights, church, labour, development NGOs, alternative media, community groups, academics) and spoke from different experiences, their messages were very consistent. In summary, speakers called on the Canadian Government to establish clear standards and to implement effective compliance and dispute resolution mechanisms. Many of the presentations emphasized the need to address the significant power inequities that exist between communities and companies.

Several industry representatives also made presentations during the Open Sessions. Most speakers focused on host country governance issues, the need to reward good corporate behaviour and to help companies attain a “social licence” in the areas where they operate. A few speakers were sympathetic to the idea of improving disclosure and monitoring mechanisms, and to the idea of creating an ombudsman for the industry. Many speakers emphasized the difficulties that they encounter working with NGOs in the field.

The closed session benefited from presentations and the active participation of 16 invited experts, both from Canada and overseas. The Toronto steering committee delegation (federal government) was larger than in Vancouver. For example, Natural Resources Canada’s delegation consisted of 6 people, including 2 at the Director General level.

Civil society members in the Advisory Group welcomed the participation of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) in the Toronto discussions.

The hard work carried out during the summer (see Focal Point July and August updates) and the format chosen for the closed session discussions allowed good quality exchanges. Participants (58) were divided into two break-out groups that ran in parallel and that covered different issues: conditioning government support; legal incentives; monitoring mechanisms; dispute resolution mechanism; disclosure; and conditioning private sector support. The two-day discussion resulted in an increased understanding of the issues under examination and a good brainstorm of possible actionable ideas proposed by different stakeholders. Convergence was noted around enhanced reporting and disclosure requirements and the creation of a robust dispute resolution mechanism.

The challenge ahead is to narrow down the list of Toronto “actionable ideas” and to further develop some of these proposals during the Issue Focus Sessions in Calgary. The themes and the questions to be dealt with in the third roundtable will be the same as in Toronto. The agreed objective is to build upon the Toronto discussion, taking advantage of a new group of experts invited for Calgary, some of whom have expertise in the oil sector. The expected outcome, at the end of the roundtable process, is a menu of the highest quality actionable ideas. The Steering Committee will draw from this list in the development of its recommendation to Cabinet and ultimately to Parliament.

Toronto-based groups organized several parallel events to raise public awareness on the impact of Canadian extractive industries overseas. Activities included a photo exhibit, the screening of 6 documentaries, and two panel discussions featuring Southern speakers. In addition, Global Aware (alternative media) produced 16 human billboards that illustrate the problems experienced in different countries and that call for enhanced regulation. These images were used in several opportunities to raise public awareness. Public response to these events exceeded expectations.

In addition, two speakers from Chile attended the Open Sessions of the roundtable. The visitors traveled to Toronto to present information about the proposed Pascua Lama mine. They participated in public education events in both Toronto and Montreal and spoke with media. The speakers described the conflict that surrounds the project, which Canadian company Barrick Gold seeks to develop on the border between Chile and Argentina.

Finally, as was the case in Vancouver, the media was not allowed to attend the public session. Industry and civil society members of the Advisory Group decided to hold a joint press conference to offer their impressions of the federal government’s Toronto Roundtable. Additional media work was done jointly by Toronto-based civil society organizations and the Canadian Network on Corporate Accountability. Interviews with the CBC and Radio Canada can be accessed at: www.cbc.ca/dispatches/thisseason/september.html; www.rcinet.ca/rci/es/ and www.cbc.ca/thehouse/media/2006091502dac110.ram.