

Canada still has a few dinosaurs

Sent to the Financial Post, August 3 2007

Given the effervescence of international initiatives which aim to introduce better standards for activities in extractive industries at the IFC, the World Bank, concerning the Equator Principles for example, or at different national levels, (UK, Norway and Belgium), one can only gasp at the fact that a journalist in Canada writing August 2, 2007 for the Financial Post (How CIDA supports poverty The Second of Two Parts on NGOs and Mining) should question the wisdom and good judgement of those who led this process in Canada, including corporate leaders such Tony Andrews, executive director of the Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada, when he stresses that his members "continually improve their performance in line with corporate social responsibility expectations."

This is the objective of the International Financial Corporation of the World Bank when it set its Environmental and Social Standards.

This was precisely the objective of the National Round Tables on CSR on whose Advisory Group I also participated over the last year with other Canadians whether from industry or civil society. The Round Tables represented an exercise in public consultation called for by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade which is a multi party body which reports to the Canadian Parliament.

The Round Tables were conducted under the auspices of seven different ministries and created an occasion for Canadians across the country to express their views. The process won the admiration of dozens of the international participants as an innovative and very effective format for democratic consultation. Moreover the recommendations contained in the resulting report which received the unanimous support of all of the members of the Advisory Group and which was submitted to the Government March 29th of this year, could place Canada at the cutting edge of becoming a leader in best corporate practices in a sector where Canadian companies are already playing an increasingly important role all around the globe.

Now what possible motives might a journalist have in trying to undermine a process which was in fact a highly democratic one? What motives could explain that one might seek to undermine the outcome of this process which was a unanimous report which would certainly contribute to making the activities of all Canadian companies in the extractive sector around the world more transparent, more accountable and more responsible? What might be the motivation of someone who, before the Government has had a chance to respond, appears to want the National Round Table process to collapse?

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