

Forging New Links: Promoting and Protecting Human Rights and the Environment

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January 14, 1999 Roundtable

San Francisco, CA

Introduction

On January 14, 1999, seven non-governmental organizations launched their national human rights and environment programs by convening a Roundtable dialogue on the key issues for the coming millennium. This Roundtable on "Forging New Links: Promoting and Protecting Human Rights and the Environment," was hosted by Amnesty International USA, the Center for International Environmental Law, EarthRights International, Human Rights Advocates, the Natural Heritage Institute, the Nautilus Institute for Security and Sustainable Development, and the Sierra Club and included the participation of environment, human rights, and development organizations.

Today, the impact of globalization is felt not only on trade markets but on the political and social practices and policies of developing countries. Foreign policy decisions, multinational corporate practices, international trade agreements, and multilateral lending arrangements can serve to support government repression where it exists and promote the abuse of human rights and the natural environment. Some argue that globalization will increase the standard of living globally, while others suggest that it will increase the divide between haves and have-nots. Either way, the protection of human rights and establishment of sustainable environmental norms are challenges brought by globalization which exist now.

While government repression remains a pervasive problem in parts of the world, increasingly social activists are facing problems resulting from the actions, or failure to act, of large global corporations. Many corporate actors from developed countries are now doing business in countries with abusive regimes, in some cases contracting with the government not just for operations but for

security from para-military units. These units have been used to suppress environmental campaigns and their defenders that threaten economic production. At home, Americans are learning that their elected officials are all too willing to cast these concerns aside when trade relations are at stake. Yet, these concerns must be addressed if economic development is to be durable.

The Roundtable brought together experts from the Bay Area and national human rights, environment and development groups together with representatives of affected communities overseas to exchange ideas and information on these issues. These groups laid the foundation for a coalition to promote reforms in government policy and corporate behavior during the next 50 years of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

This document provides a summary of the key presentations and discussions from the Roundtable. It reflects the overwhelming consensus of the participants that human rights and environmental protection must be integrated in order for either to truly be effective both in the context of inside developing countries and here in the U.S.

We would like to express our deep appreciation to our keynote speakers, to the activists who participated in the Roundtable discussion, and to The Richard and Rhoda Goldman Fund for its generous support of this effort and its continued dedication to reducing human and environmental abuses worldwide. For more project information, please contact Sandy Buffett at the Nautilus Institute.

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