



United States Department of State

*Washington, D.C.*

Intergovernmental Preparatory Meeting  
UN Commission on Sustainable Development -19  
Thematic Discussion: Mining  
Intervention for March 2, 2011 Afternoon Session

Delivered by: **Alfred E. Whitehouse**, Chief, Reclamation Support Division, Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement, U.S. Department of Interior

Thank you, Chair. We are pleased to address the Commission on Sustainable Development at this timely and important meeting. I have prepared extended remarks for distribution from which I will highlight the key points. In this intervention we have distilled a few key lessons learned from our own mining history. In general, we have adopted a technical problem-solving approach to the complex challenge of developing mineral resources in a transparent, environmentally sound, and socially responsible manner. Above all, the United States stresses the importance of, and encourages other countries to promote sustainability as a fundamental concept in mining. Mining strategies should integrate four basic elements: (1) adopting best mining practices, (2) encouraging good governance, (3) reducing methane emissions from coal mining, and (4) addressing environmental damages caused by abandoned mines. An integrated approach is critical in meeting these four challenges facing all of our nations:

Best mining practices should be adopted to improve the sustainability of mining, by reducing environment, health, and social impacts. The United States works with international organizations as well as individual countries to promote best mining practices, particularly in countries that do not have long histories on large-scale commercial mining. Technical assistance is provided through onsite seminars where the “train the trainer” approach may be used, as well

as other forms of support using web based training. The United States continues to seek ways to reduce mercury in artisanal gold mining.

Environmental governance can be improved through the ongoing support of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) process and through the proper use of environmental impact assessments. The United States continues to support the activities of the EITI particularly related to the need to assure wide public participation in the licensing and environmental management of mines. Additionally, the United States has taken steps to address conflict minerals in Eastern Congo, where minerals are mined in conditions of armed conflict and human-rights abuses. Diamonds, in particular, have been a cause of civil unrest in some regions and we have been working to ensure that countries develop their mineral resources sustainably to benefit the people and that profits do not support armed groups. We believe other countries should also work towards this goal, such as through the Kimberly Process Certification Scheme.

We support reducing methane emissions from coal mines through participation in the Global Methane Initiative (GMI), formerly known as the Methane to Markets Partnership. The United States believes that methane emissions from coal mines can be effectively reduced using cost effective measures. Participation in the GMI may also provide economic benefits to participating mines by reducing operating costs by recovering energy value from recovered methane.

The United States believes that there are a range of engineering approaches, such as water treatment and stabilizing slopes of mine waste piles to reduce landslides that may be applied to reduce the environmental effects of abandoned mines. The United States has performed

remediation on a wide range of abandoned mines and seeks to share its expertise with countries challenged with remediating abandoned mines.

Chairman, these are just some of the ideas that we think can help CSD-19 move forward in advancing the sustainable development of mines. We look forward to discussing these and other ideas.

