

OPENING STATEMENT TO UNCSD19: INDIGENOUS PEOPLES MAJOR GROUP

CSD 19 deals with the future of mining, interlinked with other critical themes, which are deeply contentious for indigenous peoples. The Mirarr people, who have two uranium mines sited on their lands against their wishes, recently wrote to UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon:

“ I am writing to convey our solidarity and support with all those people across the world who see in the events at Fukushima a dire warning of the risks posed by the nuclear industry.... Approximately 70% of uranium used in nuclear reactors is sourced from the homelands of Indigenous minorities worldwide. We Mirarr believe that this constitutes an unfair impact on Indigenous people now and into the future. We suffer the dangers and long term impacts of the front end of the nuclear fuel cycle so that others overseas may continue to enjoy lives without the awareness of the impacts this has on the lives of others.”

The statement of the Mirarr people in Australia generally holds true for mining. It is imperative that CSD19 and Rio +20 seriously address the life cycle of unsustainable mineral and metal production and consumption. A major contribution to sustainability must come from maximising recycling and reuse of existing minerals, also of substitution and minimisation, particularly of “greenfield” mining, and the rejection of widely used mining technologies and practices that cause large scale or permanent damage - such as riverine and marine disposal of toxic wastes, strip mining of ancient forested

zones, the waste of water particularly in arid regions, hydraulic fracturing for gas extraction, and unnecessary gold and uranium mining.

Solutions to mining problems are urgently needed, but for dialogue to prosper, it requires the full and effective participation of indigenous peoples and mining-affected communities. The Inter-governmental Forum on Mining brings together mainly mining ministries and mining companies, and as such lacks the confidence of indigenous peoples, and the broad mandate and participation needed for genuine progress.

We welcome those elements of the Chairman's text that call for dialogue and broad participation to improve mining practice and to determine the future of mining. We urge delegates to significantly strengthen the text through implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and respect for our rights to life, culture, and self-determined development, including free, prior, informed consent. These are necessary social safeguards against unsustainable mining.

The Convention on Biological Diversity supports the diverse customary resource management and sustainable use systems of indigenous peoples and local communities, as proven contributions to ecological renewal. We believe diverse local economies are critical components in building a green economy, and our customary rights, livelihoods and governance must be secured at UNCSD19 and at the UN Conference for Sustainable Development.