



## THE NGOs

By

**Dr. T. I. Mudder**

A main article in this issue examines NGOs and particularly environmental NGOs, also known as ENGOs. The latter have achieved much in raising awareness of the public, governments and companies about protecting the environment. However, that task has been largely accomplished with respect to the mining industry. With at least partial acceptance of the UNEP Cyanide Code, development of the MMSD and GMI, and the launch of the Toronto Declaration and the ICMM, what is the mission and role of NGOs in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Is it possible the NGOs have outlived their usefulness and actually become redundant? Clearly, one must question the motives of groups opposing the Cyanide Code, when it is clearly better to have it than not and others such as UNEP, World Bank, and many mining companies support it.

The MMSD and, to a lesser extent the GMI Conference, have been criticised for being “industry lead.” Yet, it is worth remembering no other environmental or professional organisation took the lead to expend funds or to bring the various stakeholders together, with the exception of the ICME and The Gold Institute. Organisations that truly want to change things surely need to engage industry. The mining industry organised, at considerable expense, the MMSD and GMI Conference. Organisations that genuinely want to improve matters should have been there. The credibility and commitment of those rejecting the Cyanide Code or invitations to engage through the GMI brings into questions their true agenda and motives. It remains to be seen whether they will engage with the ICMM.

Then again, why are there so many NGO groups? Does that mean they are not effective or is there so much money in the not-for-profit businesses that everyone wants in? Exactly what do the environmental and mining-related groups do for industry and the public on a day to day basis? They seldom provide educational outreach programs or financial support to the public or industry. To many, they seem only to spend money on themselves and perpetuation of their operations. These observations seem to extend to industry-related NGOs including mining associations and professional organisations, whose memberships are shrinking. Based upon the lack of success of the mining industry in the US in the 1990’s, they appear to have had little effect against the long-term opposition to mining.

What have the NGOs accomplished outside the awareness issue and is that sufficient? In the case of MEM, an open forum for debate and publishing of technical information are provided regarding environmental matters. The ends of the NGO spectrum have become more extreme as their rhetoric for and against mining have intensified over the last decade. The level of polarisation has left the collective NGO community in large part ineffective. It will be very interesting to watch if the mining industry can implement the UNEP Cyanide Code, the Toronto Declaration and sustainable development. If without a chance the naysayers indicate industry will not follow through and “mining cannot be trusted,” those organisations should be discounted. We must give industry our support and help get it to the place everyone wants it to be with respect to environmental and social issues. How can the NGOs help in this matter and become a positive collective force? That is the critical question for their future.

It would be enlightening to examine the breakdown of money given to NGOs internationally and where the money goes. This level of accountability is demanded of industry. Certainly, with the exception perhaps of having been the impetus that gave birth to the GMI and all that followed, have the NGOs directly brought about major societal and environmental changes?

Demand for metals and minerals rise each day. We all use metals and minerals. Mining will continue and will not be stopped. Groups that attempt to stop mining completely or that support mining at any cost are of little consequence. Mining is the oldest industry on earth, even coming before agriculture. Where are the problems with mining?

What about the small miner and junior mining companies. Shouldn't they be scrutinised to a higher degree? Will ongoing acquisitions and mergers help make the industry better? Many of the problems within emerging and developing nations are associated with them. The bigger companies have the ability to fix long-term problems. Is it fair for the NGOs to direct their attacks in a broad-based manner without giving any credit to the more progressive companies? When does the public say all we hear is naysaying and nothing else? Where is the accountability in the NGO system and the watchdogs? Many of them have a free ride often without the need to support their contentions with science or facts. A consensus is needed amongst the NGOs to regain their importance and effectiveness, which can only be derived through a collaborative effort.