

**FOURTH UNECE REGIONAL IMPLEMENTATION MEETING ON  
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

*GENEVA, 1-2 December 2009*

**Agenda item 5. Transport**

Intervention by the International Federation of Business and Professional Women<sup>1</sup>

In many mining domains either the material itself (uranium, coltan) or the way to get the material are toxic (gold mining with the help of quicksilver, mercury and cyanides). This creates huge health risks for the mining workers and also indirectly for their families, because the dust is often in the clothes of the workers and then is spread in their homes as well. Residues get into the ground water and rivers and influence the quality of the drinking water and endanger the swimming/ bathing population.

In order to build a mine often land ownership is violated, whole villages are removed (problem of internally displaced persons) or whole villages are build with very low infrastructure, almost only men living there – both variations have major impact on the people, their economies and their cultural identities and heritages; it leads to further feminisation of agriculture or loss of production, more female headed / one parent households.

Mining in many cases is very hazardous for the workers, safety and health regulations not being upheld. Female workers often face violence and sexual assaults. Child labour is still often the rule not the exception.

The men returning home to visit are basically a huge health risk for the women, bringing chemical dust, sexual transmitted diseases and aggression home resulting in domestic violence.

Governments and companies should make sure that basic provisions and basic values are upheld to protect the health of workers and their families. The mining companies have to have full liability for the whole mining projects. That needs to include compensation for removing people, compensation for health related problems (maybe followed by death) and after the closing down of the mining sites they need to be accountable for contamination of the land and water. Renaturation of the mining area could be one starting point.

In case of illnesses caused by the impacts of mining the families need to receive financial compensation for care and medication and for not being able to work. In case of death the rest of the family (often women and children) needs even more financial help.

In Surinam, UNEP and national NGO's developed a great, daring project to reach out to illegal gold miners to teach them how to mine gold in an environmental and health conscientious way. We would be happy if projects like that would be done all over the globe.

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<sup>1</sup> The text is presented as received from the author.

Civil society, especially indigenous peoples have to be involved and heard before the concessions are given out; governments and regional organisations have to safeguard the process and its participants.

In general we would call on governments to be consistent and insistent and implement the international ILO agreements, the CEDAW and Convention on the right of the child also for this sector and support people with legal aid to actual get their rights where necessary.

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