

MHR *Connections*

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Keynote speaker Madeline Drohan says that "clearly these communities need help when mining companies come to town."

One of the most important challenges facing the 21st century is ensuring that international investment and corporate activity do not contradict Canada's commitment to human rights. That message was delivered at a public meeting hosted by Rights and Democracy, an independent Canadian institution that is mandated to promote, advocate and defend the democratic and human rights set out in the International Bill of Rights.

Rights and Democracy kicked off its Cross-Canada Dialogue Series at the Aboriginal Centre in Winnipeg last week.

Keynote speaker Madeline Drohan, author and correspondent for the Economist, focussed her presentation on the right to life. She shared some of her case studies of communities surrounding four mines in Africa: Angola, Congo, South Africa and Mozambique.

Drohan said that before mining operations begin, the politicians and mining officials often meet with the local villagers to seek their cooperation and to answer any questions or concerns they may have. But for many villagers, who have little experience with mining or the dangers involved, the meeting does not always address primary concerns.

"It is difficult for villagers to envision how their lives will be changed by mines," Drohan said, adding, "when these information meetings are held to talk about possible impacts the operation may have, the villagers do not know what questions to ask."

Although the poverty-stricken villagers are generally glad to hear that jobs will be created and are grateful for the promise of a better life, there are associated problems many do not foresee.

Drohan said that in Angola, workers are often confined to the mining sites for months at a time, even though their

Profits take precedence over human rights

In a world of increasing free trade and borderless flow of capital from the rich to the poorer countries, profits can take precedence over human rights, life and safety.

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The Rights Connection by Jerry Woods - Chairperson

Misconceptions about the MHRC

There is no doubt that there are misunderstandings about how the Manitoba Human Rights Commission works. At times, this can confuse the public, not only regarding human rights, but also about the procedures the Commission follows.

First, all the processes used by the Commission are transparent. When a complainant first approaches the Commission, an attempt is offered to resolve the situation through the fast and efficient pre-complaint process. In many cases this results in a resolution to the situation that is agreeable to both parties, without a formal complaint filed.

The Commission does provide confidentiality to both parties. The names are never released until the last resort of a public hearing is announced.

The Commission has trained mediators who will offer assistance in both pre-complaints and formal complaints. An investigation will only take place if the parties do not wish mediation, or no resolution is found. Studies have revealed that successful mediation results in a high level of satisfaction from both parties. It is also important to know that even once an investigation has started, if the parties want to return to or begin mediation, the option is always available. Over the years, on average 40 per cent of complaints result in a mediated settlement.

It has been said that human rights commissions have extraordinary investigation powers. This is certainly a myth in Manitoba. Speaking to a Commission investigator is completely voluntary and the Commission's investigation powers are no different from many other governmental agencies charged with investigating complaints, such as the Consumers' Bureau. Both sides of a complaint are given full opportunity to present their side of the story and point to information that supports them.

There is also the misconception that the staff of the Commission advocates for the complainant. Not so. Investigators and mediators are neutral and provide their services in a professional, objective manner. Complaints that cannot be substantiated with evidence after an investigation are dismissed by the Board.

More myths will be addressed in subsequent issues of the Connections bulletin.

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Caroline Brodeur explains to participants how to identify concerns by using a program developed by Rights and Democracy.

families live in different communities. Sometimes the village itself is relocated, or changed beyond recognition. Village miners are searched and x-rayed to ensure they are not hiding gold or diamonds inside their bodies.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo at Shikolobwe, she says, the people are hand mining cobalt, which is found

with uranium. Miners are covered with black radioactive dust. The dust from the mines floats to nearby villages and there are no health and safety measures in place.

In many of the countries in the developing world where mining is taken place, there are such concerns as polluted rivers, use of chemicals that are banned in the developed world and exposure to radioactive chemicals. The right to health is non-existent.

Later in the evening, participants at the public meeting found themselves in front of computers trying to assess the impact of foreign investment on human rights using a sample case and a step by step computer program provided by Rights and Democracy. The answer to the question, "What is the responsibility of the Government of Canada for companies registered here but operating abroad?" was being sought.

According to verbal reports from the participating groups, the exercise was useful and helpful in understanding the impact investments have on the local population and the underlying issues and concerns.

The speakers at the event included Remy Beaugard, President of Rights and Democracy, and staff members Carole Samdup and Caroline Brodeur.

The purpose of the Rights and Democracy series is to raise Canadian awareness about the challenges facing the international community, especially regarding human rights obligations in the context of international investment.

Upcoming Events

**The 8th Annual Run for Rights will bring people together to run and walk in support of human rights and social justice everywhere on Saturday, June 6th, 2009 at Kildonan Park
Registration: 8:30 a.m. to 9:00 a.m.
Start time: 9:30 a.m.**

**LAMBDA Pride Mart 2009
Sunday June 14th 2009
Memorial Park 1- 4:00 p.m.**

**Multiculturalism Day Celebrations
at the Forks Saturday June 27th from
12 noon to 4:00 p.m.**

Cultural performances, storytelling, spiritual display tables, face-painting, henna art and more. There will be something for the entire family.

New citizens welcomed to Winnipeg

It was a day of hope and optimism for the people who received their Citizenship certificate as well as for their sixty friends and family who accompanied them.



Judge Gilleshammer welcomes one of Winnipeg's newest citizens.

France, India, Mexico, Moldova, and Morocco among others, were sworn in as new Canadian Citizens.

Before the formal swearing in ceremony there was a facilitated round table discussion to provide an opportunity for new Canadians to discuss how they felt about becoming Canadian citizens. The new Canadians were unanimous in praising Canada's diversity and openness, making them feel welcome. They also appreciate the opportunities that are available to newcomers such as language training and job search skills as well as Canada's medical system. These were among the top reasons that new Canadians felt pride in being Canadian.

Bringing greetings and words of encouragement to the new citizens were Mr. Jerry Woods, Chairperson of the Manitoba Human Rights Commission and Shirley Chang, President of the International Centre while Citizenship Court Judge, Harold Gilleshammer officiated the ceremony.

Judge Gilleshammer told the new citizens that he himself is a first generation Canadian. He explained that his parents were immigrants and encouraged all newcomers to take advantage of the opportunities Canada has available for growth and development. He also spoke about the importance of contributing to their new country.

Mr. Woods welcomed the newcomers to the shores of Canada as the Aboriginal people once welcomed the Europeans to the country.

Ms Chang informed the new citizens that they now have a right to vote in elections and urged them to exercise this important right.

"Immigrants are enriched by the experience of becoming Canadians and Canada has also been enriched by its multicultural tapestry to share on the world's stage," she said.



Shirley Chang spoke about why it is important to exercise the right to vote.