

June 15, 2007 (revised and signed by Western Shoshone Defense Project June 19, 2007)

Robert Coombe, Chancellor
University of Denver
2199 S. University Blvd.
Denver, CO 80208

Dear Chancellor Coombe:

It has come to our attention that the Graduate School of International Studies at the University of Denver intends to honor Wayne Murdy, CEO of Newmont Mining Corporation, with an International Bridge Builder Award on August 30, 2007. While Mr. Murdy's resume is undoubtedly impressive in some respects, we find it troubling that DU would bestow such an honor on the head of a company that is ensnared in so many human rights and environmental conflicts around the world.

As you know, Newmont is the second largest gold mining firm globally. But you may not be aware that the company has one of the most problematic records of environmental abuse of any corporation on earth. The company has operations in Latin America (Bolivia and Peru), Africa (Ghana), Asia (Indonesia), Central Asia (Turkey and Uzbekistan), and the U.S. (California and Nevada). Let us consider Newmont's track record under Mr. Murdy's tenure.

In 2003, the US Environmental Protection Agency listed Newmont as one of five top chemical polluters in the United States.

Newmont is one of the world's largest dumpers of mine wastes in ocean waters. In Indonesia, the National Police charged top Newmont executives with polluting Buyat Bay with toxic mine waste. Although a court cleared Newmont employees of criminal negligence, Newmont was forced to pay \$30 million to settle a civil suit. The controversy forced many families to abandon their homes in Buyat, fearful of toxic impacts on their health and the marine environment. Similar concerns have been reported at Newmont's Batu Hijau mine on the island of Sumbawa, Indonesia, another STD (submarine tailings disposal) operation.

Newmont is set on continuing its STD mining operations in developing countries, despite the fact that STD mining would not be permitted under US and Canadian environmental laws today. At Newmont's Batu Hijau mine, over 80,000 tons of heavy metal-laden tailings are dumped directly into the ocean each day and for the next 18 years. STD mining is, at best, controversial, and potentially an environmental time bomb through the biotransformation and bioaccumulation of mercury and other heavy metal compounds. Even the World Bank recommends exercising the precautionary principle with STD mining. Yet at the 2005 Newmont shareholders meeting, when Indonesian community representatives asked Newmont to stop dumping mine wastes in their waters, Wayne Murdy assured them and his stockholders that the wastes dumped into the ocean are "nothing more than sand."

Newe Sogobia, the land of the Western Shoshone native people in eastern Nevada, has been ravaged by dozens of open pit cyanide heap leach mines. Newmont has been pushing the United States to privatize huge tracts of land in order that the gold industry can have even greater access to these areas which has been the forefront of Native American land rights for decades. The land base is the home of the Western Shoshone and holds foods, medicines, healing waters and spiritual places which date back to Shoshone creation stories. The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination has recently ruled in favor of the Western Shoshone and told the United States to “freeze”, “desist”, and “stop” from further mining and other destructive activities. Newmont was immediately notified of this decision and yet has done nothing to address the impact of their operations on the ongoing human rights violations against the Western Shoshone

Of all the chemicals Newmont uses in its operations, cyanide is the one that worries local populations the most. Cyanide is highly toxic. One teaspoon of a 2% solution (about the size of a grain of rice) can kill an adult. We know this because cyanide is used in prison executions in the United States. One of the worst mining environmental disaster in our nation’s history involved a cyanide spill at the Summitville Gold Mine in San Luis Valley of Colorado in 1993.

In 2003, Newmont’s President, Mr. Pierre Lassande, stated publicly that no mining company could survive in this century if it was not sensitive to the needs of the people. From that day forward, he asserted, Newmont would not operate without a “social license,” or support from local populations. But then Newmont promptly pressured the Ghanaian government to open up precious protected forest preserves, showing no respect for environmental laws of the needs of African people. Having lived through previous gold mining disasters, Yao Graham, Coordinator of the Third World Network in Ghana noted, “To be sitting on gold, people might have envied you before, but today gold spells trouble and poverty.”

Military force, shootings, rape, torture, illegal detentions, harassment, and murder of villagers, community leaders, and mining critics are just some of the human rights violations committed by governments hell bent on attracting companies to mine sensitive areas around the world. The regions where Newmont’s mines are located are no exception. But every community where this company has a mine has seen significant resistance and vocal opposition from residents concerned about public health, environmental protection, and stable economic development.

The largest gold mine in all of South America is the Minera Yanacocha, located near the town of Cajamarca, Peru. Newmont is the mine’s owner and has been steadfast in its efforts to extract as much gold as possible with little apparent concern for human and ecological well-being.

In 2000, a Newmont-contracted truck spilled almost 300 pounds of mercury at Yanacocha, resulting in at least 950 persons experiencing mercury intoxication (by the company’s own admission). Shortly thereafter, Newmont made efforts to expand the mine, which would directly impact Mount Quilish, a fresh water source for the town and nearby farmlands. For four years the people of Cajamarca protested through every means available; but it wasn’t until they shut down the entire city for two weeks that Newmont “heard” them and retreated from Mt. Quilish.

Last year was quite eventful for Newmont and the communities impacted by its mines. In August 2006 a community protest and blockade prevented business as usual at the Yanacocha mine in Cajamarca, Peru. Thousands of farmers there protested alleged depletion and pollution of critical water resources due to mining operations. When two anti-mining protesters were killed in separate incidents, Amnesty International and Global Response urged the Peruvian government to investigate these murders and to guarantee the safety of other community activists who received death threats.

In Ghana, Newmont's Ahafo mine began producing gold in July 2006. This operation has already displaced 10,000 persons and is expected to displace another 10,000 people when the project expands. While the people experienced untold pain and poverty, that same year, Newmont enjoyed record earnings of \$791 million.

This year, Cajamarca-area farmers have continued to protest the expansion of the Yanacocha mine, accusing Newmont of backsliding on a series of agreements spanning more than a decade. In April, Ghanaian farmers and students protested outside Newmont's Ghana headquarters and sent a petition to the company's annual shareholder's meeting.

In April 2007 at the annual Newmont shareholders meeting, 92 percent of shareholders voted in favor of a resolution calling for a global review and evaluation of community concerns about the company's activities. The resolution, noted that "A pattern of community resistance to the company's operations, especially in Peru, Indonesia, and Ghana, raises concerns about issues such as the company's mining waste disposal practices, the potential for water pollution, development on sacred sites, and community resettlement."

It seems premature at best for the University to present an award to Mr. Murdy at the start of an evaluation process initiated by shareholders. The more prudent action would be to wait and review the conclusions of that process and then assess Mr. Murdy's strengths as a candidate for the Bridge Builders Award.

The communities affected by Newmont's mining operations continue to protest the company's corporate policies and practices. Newmont's shareholders have initiated a review. It is time now for Newmont to respond to the needs of the people and to work for that "social license" Mr. Lassande invoked. Until there is clear evidence of this, let us hold the applause.

Thank you for your consideration of these significant concerns.

Sincerely,

Paula Palmer, Executive Director, Global Response, Boulder CO

For the Global Response Campaigns Advisory Committee: David Silver, M.D., MPH, and
David Pellow, PhD

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