

# MONGOLIA HIGHLIGHT

*A Partner in Promoting Justice, Accountability and Prosperity in Mongolia*

## Homeland and Water Protection Coalition of River Movements Targets Mining Law Changes

Under current law, there are few protections afforded to communities and citizens from the potential impacts of mining. This may change if the Homeland and Water Protection Coalition of River Movements, and partner environmental and civil society organizations are successful in their campaign to introduce amendments to the Law on Minerals which is on the legislative agenda for this spring session of Parliament.

Following four-days of Asia Foundation-supported coalition-building in Ulaanbaatar and in the field, 30 representatives from 11 river movements agreed to an action plan that will protect Mongolia from unregulated and irresponsible mining.

The goal of the newly-formed Coalition is to protect Mongolians' right to live in a clean and healthy environment. Their strategy involves community empowerment, environmental education, and legislative advocacy.

The Coalition discussed long and short-term strategies. An immediate outcome: campaigns to influence the Law on Minerals and to promote "green" or "clean" gold. There is urgency to the Coalition's actions. With amendments to the Law on Minerals moving forward, the Coalition must act swiftly in order to capitalize on this opportunity to protect Mongolians' rights.

The Homeland and Water Protection Coalition represents Mongolians nationwide, and it wants change. The Coalition agreed to 7 principles (see box) that they want reflected in the Law on Minerals that will protect human and environmental health. In addition, the Coalition and partners prepared 22 pages of amendments to the Minerals Law, which they presented to Parliament on May 24th.



*Gaining momentum – Coalition members hold a town hall meeting with Ugii Lake residents and the soum governor to discuss environmental issues and potential joint solutions. The lake is imperiled by mining in the upstream reaches of the watershed, and by the numerous tourist camps that dot the shore.*

### **MONGOLIA**

The Asia Foundation is addressing the most critical governance problems constraining Mongolia's sustainable economic growth and social development.

Mongolia has one "legal" copper and molybdenum mine (Erdenet), 127 gold mines, 44 fluor-spar mines, 28 coal mines, and an estimated 250,000 ninja miners.

In 2004, the mining sector comprised 17.3% of GDP, 64.7% of industrial production and 57.5% of exports.

#### **7 Principles to protect human and environmental health from irresponsible mining.**

- Establish socially and environmentally responsible mining in Mongolia
- Require open public access to information related to mining
- Promote clear and transparent environmental impact assessment and decision-making on mineral development
- Ensure that mining operations meet best international standards for environmental practices
- Ensure that public monitoring and public audit compliance with environmental standards becomes normal practice
- Ensure that environmental laws and regulations are adhered to and enforced
- Ensure that Mongolia's protected areas remain free from environmental damage

Domestic and international firms are accelerating their prospecting as the prices of copper, gold and other commodities have soared over the past year. Licenses are being awarded across Mongolia, and many companies are feverishly negotiating contracts for large tracts of land that will be exploited for coal, gold, copper and other minerals. Individual prospectors have swarmed to mining areas in a rush reminiscent of the mid-1800's migration to California and the Klondike. These so-called ninja miners are threatened by hellish working conditions, and by the chemicals that they use to extract gold. Their use of mercury poisons them, their families, and all water-users.



*We used to swim in Ugii lake, but now it causes skin diseases. Let's be proactive, let's protect the lake. If the lake disappears, what are we going to drink, gold?*

*- Battumur, Ugii bag resident*

The use of heavy metals, mercury and cyanide, to extract gold has polluted waterways where citizens report dramatic increases in cancer and other diseases. According to H. Bayarsaikhan from the Uughul River Movement, "herders' flocks have been sickened by polluted water and dust. This has a direct impact on household income and leads to increased economic hardship and poverty."



*Educated people are not easy to exploit. Let's work together, because together we can accomplish much more.*

*- Bayarmaa, Co-chair of the Homeland and Water Protection Coalition of River Movements, Head of Khuvsgul River Movement*

The Homeland and Water Protection Coalition of River Movements was formed early in 2006 with support from The Asia Foundation. Membership is growing and now includes 11 individual movements representing Mongolians across the nation. Co-chair of the Coalition, Bayarmaa, who represents the Khovsgul River Movement, says that "increased coordination and cooperation will ensure that human and environmental health is protected, and that mining is carried out responsibly for the benefit of all Mongolians."

The Asia Foundation is designing new initiatives with the Coalition that will engage civil society and mobilize Mongolians to protect their right to live in a clean and healthy environment. The Coalition members are joining forces because they understand that by sharing information, resources and expertise they can achieve their common goal.

**The Homeland and Water Protection Coalition of River Movements include:**

- Angir Nuuden Bunduuhei Movement (Uvs aimag)
- Ariun Suvarga Movement (Arkhangai aimag)
- Ardin Elch Movement (Selenge aimag)
- Eg-Uur Movement (Khuvsgul, Bulgan aimags)
- Hongor Nutgiin Duudlaga Movement (Bayankhongor aimag)
- Khuvsgul Dalai Movement (Khuvsgul aimag)
- Ongii River Movement (Dundgovi, Umnugovi and Uvurkhangai aimags)
- Onon Ulz River Movement (Dornod, Khentii aimags)
- Salhin Sandag Movement (Govi-Altai, Zavkhan aimags)
- Toson Zamar Movement (Tuv aimag)
- Uughul Movement (Umnugovi aimag)