

In the creation of the Arctic Council, an intergovernmental conference of the eight regional countries which includes the Russian Federation and the United States, Canada successfully championed the inclusion of international and national aboriginal organizations as permanent nonvoting participants. The original idea was that collective action is likely to be better adapted and more successful when those most highly sensitized and vulnerable to the consequences of decision are also at the table (Arctic Council Panel, 1991). Since the Arctic Council's establishment in 1996, the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, the Saami Council, the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples, and U.S. native NGOs have been active and constructive participants. An equivalent practice could be instituted in the MMC for Russian weapons plutonium disposition.

Under this procedure, one Russian and one U.S. environmental/nuclear NGO would each have a seat on the Corporation's Intergovernmental Council, and on its technical and regulatory committees. The NGOs would be selected by their peers in each country. The Russian participant could well be locally based, for example at Ozersk (Mayak). A U.S. NGO would be included to offset the lack of media access for its Russian counterpart and the transnational linkages that operate between national nuclear industries. Private funding would meet all costs of NGO participation including staff, analytical work, travel, and the like. The two NGOs would have full access to the Corporation's information except for proprietary matters not shared among governmental representatives. Formal meetings would not be held without informing and admitting them. Endowed with speaking rights, they would have no voting rights. Perceiving co-optation, not all NGOs would be willing to participate on such terms. Indeed, given international agreement to move ahead with disposition, they would necessarily be present not to undo the Deal, but to reduce the dangers of disposition to Russia and its people. This would surely be a worthy cause. It is also what the Corporation should be doing as it executes the Multilateral Agreement. NGO and Corporation goals could overlap significantly.

Non-governmental participation in an MMC would be productive. Something like it has been done before. It's been done under Russian and U.S. government auspices. It works. The effect in an MMC could be something like having a review team permanently on hand to ask awkward questions about nuclear engineering designs. It wouldn't have to be abrasive. It would help to broaden the range of information available to the Corporation and improve its capacity to anticipate and self-correct. In short, NGO participation in an MMC should contribute significantly to sustained disposition. As well, there ought to be beneficial long-term effects for civil society in Russia. These could redound to the benefit of a disposition programme that carried on over an extended period.

But let's pause for another reality check.

Surely it is counterintuitive to believe that the staff of a disposition management Corporation drawn from industry would see any merit in bringing NGOs into the company, acting to strengthen the regulator, and extending support to civil society. Surely this is not the way things are done, and for good reason. Disposition is a job of materials management. There's engineering in it, but not social engineering. Accordingly, why not simplify the task and develop a management system that's less demanding and more easily negotiated?

Actually, why not forget about trying to change Russia? Why not instead seek substantive goals and concrete outcomes, telling the Russian side what's on offer and not how to