



Wednesday, 03 February 2010

Mark Hamilton, President
University of Alaska
Fairbanks, Alaska USA
Via email: Mark.Hamilton@alaska.edu

Copy to Chancellor Brian Rogers at: uaf.chancellor@alaska.edu

RE: The University of Alaska's constructive dismissal of Prof. Richard Steiner

Dear President Hamilton,

As you may be aware, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Commission on Environmental, Economic, and Social Policy (CEESP), is one of the six Commissions set up by IUCN to enable members to support the global conservation mission of IUCN. IUCN is the largest environmental organization in the world, with many national governments (including the United States government) being members. IUCN/CEESP has over 900 members, many of who are faculty members of some of the world's foremost academic institutions.

We have been associated with Professor Richard Steiner for many years, and have relied upon his expertise in a broad array of conservation science initiatives particularly in regard to oil operations in the Arctic which your University is ideally situated to help conserve.

Prof. Steiner has also helped our Commission with his expertise in extractive industry and environment matters across the world, including in West Africa, the Russian Far East, Papua New Guinea, Pakistan, El Salvador, and the Middle East during the Israel/Hezbollah war in 2006. He has shown great courage by helping us in conflict zones such as the Niger Delta in Nigeria where he helped the Government and civil society while militants were very active in the area. Our team which included Steiner operated in the Delta without any armed escorts.

He is clearly one of the best in the world at this business. In its Sunday Jan. 24, 2010 edition, the UK's "Guardian" newspaper, commenting on Prof. Steiner' forced resignation, hailed him as "*one of the world's leading marine conservation scientists*", and "*one of the most respected and outspoken academics on the oil industry's environmental record.*" And while his perspective in this subject may not be consistent with that of political leaders and oil companies in Alaska, it most assuredly is scientifically sound, well-reasoned, clearly articulated, and should be seriously considered by policy makers. His views are supported by many other academics and by a vast majority of the global members of the IUCN Commission on Environmental, Economic & Social Policy (CEESP).

CEESP members have become increasingly concerned at the way in which Prof. Steiner has been treated by your University. They believe that the University of Alaska administration has engaged in what is known as "constructive dismissal" of Prof. Steiner. From the documents we have seen, it is clear that Prof. Steiner was punished for publicly expressing his expert perspective on one particular offshore oil and gas proposal in Alaska's Bristol Bay, and for criticizing a University of Alaska / Shell Oil conference on the matter which he felt was biased toward a pro-drilling decision. This was not just his *right* to do so, it was his *job* to do so. Academic freedom and the responsibility of academics to be the public conscience are cornerstones of being a credible academic.

We understand that it may be too late to correct your mistake in Prof. Steiner's case, as he has resigned in protest for this treatment, and because he could no longer conduct his conservation work freely within your university. As Prof. Steiner notes, the University should be aware that a time-tested lesson of history is that —"***When the powerful seek to silence truth and dissent, truth and dissent only become more powerful.***"

We believe that this case will become known widely around the world as a classic example of public administrators pandering to powerful industrial interests, while sacrificing the very ideal of their institution. Professor Steiner's case has already been publicized as far away as here in New Zealand. It is all the more astonishing that this case derives from the United States, and not one of the many totalitarian countries in which we work that struggle with democratic governance.

We realize that oil is big business in Alaska, and that your institution receives several hundred million dollars each year, both directly and indirectly, from oil revenues. This can create a powerful dynamic where your university both subtly and overtly champions its financial benefactor – big oil. It appears to us that Prof. Steiner is a casualty of this dynamic, as his constructive dismissal seems like a sacrificial offering to your financial and political benefactors. As much as a university administration must stay neutral on such policy issues such as oil development, it also must protect the right of its faculty to freely express their perspectives and concerns on such. Otherwise, your public and students will lose confidence in the objectivity of your faculty.

Thank you very much for considering our profound disappointment in this case, and I look forward to hearing from you on this matter at your earliest convenience.

Yours Sincerely,



Aroha Te Pareake Mead
Chair, IUCN Commission on Environmental, Economic & Social Policy
www.iucn.org/ceesp