

Session on
"The Invisible Pollution That's Poisoning People Silently"

4:00 pm; Friday, March 12, 2010

With Dr. Richard Fuller, President, Blacksmith Foundation and Mr. Jairam Ramesh, Minister for Environment and Forests
New Delhi.



On the 12th of March, 2010, Aspen Institute India and The Blacksmith Institute India organized an interactive session on 'The Invisible Pollution That's Poisoning People Silently' with President of the Blacksmith Institute, Dr. Richard Fuller and the Minister for Environment and Forest, Mr. Jairam Ramesh.

Mr. Tarun Das, President of Aspen Institute India opened the event with a few opening remarks about the current situation of pollution in India. In an unprecedented event, he asked the CEO of the WWF foundation, Mr. Ravi Singh to open the discussion with his understanding of the current situation vis-a-vis toxins in our environment, the awareness of them and what steps are being taken to solve this hidden problem. In his speech, Mr. Singh outlined some of the current project and situations across India. One of his distinct examples was that due to the industrial and agricultural toxins dumped into the river systems in northern India, crocodiles that are present in the river have now turned pink in colour. He illustrated other such important issues that India is facing in regards to the hidden toxins.

The summation of his speech opened the floor to Dr. Fuller. Using a presentation, Dr. Fuller broke the presentation down into the three parts. First, the overall situation or picture of hidden toxins that most don't know about and their effects, second, the situation in parts of India where the Blacksmith foundation has done some work and third, the solutions for the future ahead. In his presentation he showed documented evidence that 20% of global diseases are caused by hidden toxins. Using pictures and statistics, he also painted a rather grim picture of the current problems that India is facing when it comes to these toxins, predominantly

Hexavalent Chromium, Mercury and Lead. In his presentation of the solutions, Dr. Fuller presented three areas where the Blacksmith Foundation is currently working. In his conclusions, Dr. Fuller noted that even though the problem exists, awareness needs to be created and solutions will become very possible.

Mr. Jairam Ramesh on the other hand presented a detailed picture of the current situation in India and what the central government is doing to tackle the issues. He described that India produces 6.2 million tonnes of hazardous waste or toxins every year. About half of this is recycled and 1.5 million tonnes can be stored. The remainder is floating in the system and needs to be treated and stored. In his efforts to solve the problem of these pollutants, Mr. Ramesh is currently in the process of creating the Indian version of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). He also discussed the multi-million dollar projects with the World Bank in creating storage for the remainder of the hazardous waste. He argued that India needs to boost its storage capacities, step up the laws and litigation involved in curbing such toxins in the system and put hard acting active solutions to start reducing affects and possible consequences of toxins in the Indian environment.

After a brief round of Q&A which included questions on technology, the bureaucratic process and others, Mr. Das closed the discussion and thanked the participants.