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## UPDATE FROM E-LAW U.S.

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September 1992

**To:** Colleagues and Friends

**Subject:** Update on Environmental Law Initiatives from the Worldwide Alliance of Public Interest Advocates

What follows is our first informal update on recent cases and projects which E-LAW is pursuing around the world. We plan to give our friends and colleagues periodic reports of the projects that grassroots environmental advocates in developing countries are working on today.

The issues, the strategies and the people behind these projects are as varied as the countries themselves. In some countries, E-LAW advocates are working to promote the development of environmental laws and policies, in others, they work to enforce existing laws, or to educate citizens about their right to a clean and healthy environment. Increasingly, E-LAW advocates are looking to the economic issues involved in environmental preservation.

Political and legal systems vary dramatically from country to country. True to its commitment to help build grassroots environmental law movements around the world, the U.S. office of E-LAW does not set the agenda for the network, but rather supports the efforts of environmental attorneys around the world by responding to requests for information and legal or scientific research.

Sometimes E-LAW's work entails uncovering the environmental record of a U.S.-based multinational company; other times it requires providing U.S. precedent or regulations. Often it means locating experts, citizen groups, or attorneys who share their expertise and information on a particular issue with us on a pro bono basis.

While scientific information may be more up to date in the U.S., often environmental advocates in developing countries have more to learn from each other than from the U.S. While this office provides essential information to the advocates in particular countries, it also plays a key role in developing the international communications infrastructure that makes E-LAW a truly global alliance. Thanks to the in-kind support of private computer consultants and of the Institute of Global Communications, E-LAW members and friends all over the world are able to use electronic conferences on a daily basis to share timely information and strategies.

Always, our work depends on the generosity of individuals like you. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all of you who make our work possible by contributing to it in so many ways. E-LAW feels privileged to bring together a network of committed environmentalists in the United States with a network of public interest advocates around the world. Thank you. John Bonine, Board Chair, Michael Axline, Board President, Bern Johnson, Staff Attorney, Lori Maddox, Staff Coordinator, Mari Ely Christie, Development Director, Mark Chernaik, Science Coordinator, Emily Roet, Board Member, Karin Sheldon, Board member, Neil Kagan, Board Member.

### **Newsflash: Victory in Malaysia!**

On July 11, Meenakshi Raman, one of E-LAW's cofounders and an attorney with the Consumers Association of Penang (CAP), won a decision in favor of hundreds of villagers whose health was imperiled by radioactive waste.

The Asian Rare Earth company (ARE), a subsidiary of the Japanese multinational Mitsubishi, was producing rare earth chlorides near the water supply for the Malaysian village of Bukit Merah. The chlorides were sent to Japan for industrial use, but the radioactive by-products, some with a half-life of 14 billion years, stayed in Malaysia. Residents of Bukit Merah suffered high rates of childhood leukemia, toxic levels of lead, depressed immune systems and miscarriages.

Meena and her colleagues brought suit on behalf of the villagers in 1985. Lawyers from E-LAW U.S., E-LAW Japan, and E-LAW Australia helped provide Meena with information on the manufacturing process, the company's expert witnesses who were from Japan and the US, and other evidence rebutting the claims of the company. Years of Meena's hard work finally paid off on July 11.

The Ipoh High Court found that the ARE plant was allowing harmful, radioactive gases to escape to the plaintiffs' neighboring lands, where they were harming the villagers. The court

gave the company 14 days to stop operating the factory and clean up its radioactive mess. An observer from E-LAW Japan reports that over 1000 villagers from Bukit Merah crowded the court yard to hear the decision. Newspapers and television stations in Malaysia, Japan, the U.S. and Indonesia have reported this landmark victory. ARE has appealed the decision to the Supreme Court of Malaysia. The Supreme Court has postponed enforcement of the High Court's order, so Meena's work continues. Meena can be reached on email at [elawmalaysia@igc.apc.org](mailto:elawmalaysia@igc.apc.org).

### **News from Other Members of the Alliance**

#### **Peru**

Despite difficult working conditions, including no electricity between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. on many working days, E-LAW Peru continues to work with environmental groups in Peru and communicate via e-mail with the worldwide network.

E-LAW Peru is working to improve air quality in Lima and other Peruvian cities. The government of Peru recently announced that it will allow the sale of unleaded fuel. Eliminating lead emissions is an important goal because lead severely retards child development. However, E-LAW Peru is concerned that