

**PETITION LEPCHA (23<sup>rd</sup> July 2007)**

**Express your solidarity as mountain people with the Lepchas  
(one on the three main ethnic groups of Sikkim, India) who are today in  
hunger strike opposing the destruction of their territory by the construction  
of dams on the Teesta river.**

**TO SIGN THE PETITION : <http://www.petitiononline.com/trb2007/>**

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As Mountain People, we wish to express with strength our deep concern in the hunger strike launched by three young Lepcha citizens in the state of Sikkim, opposing the destruction of their territory by the construction of dams on the Teesta river. It is highly regrettable that, in the biggest democracy of the world, concerned citizens have no other way than a hunger strike to bring to public notice, the lack of transparency and shortcomings of the decisions and of the decision process in the Teesta hydro-electric projects.

We would also like to underline that it is extremely contradictory that, on the one hand, mountains are supposed to be protected by National parks and are, on the other hand, destroyed by dams, under the same pretence of saving the environment: preserve the biodiversity in the parks and fight global warming with clean energy. The consequences of both these insufficient and inadequate answers to the devastating problem of the survival of the Earth are the same for the local populations: they are deprived of their decision making power and expelled from their home and territories. Actually, these two trends are not even equal. No national park, whether in Sikkim or, say, in Himachal Pradesh, will be safe if it is in the way of power production: not only no serious study on the impact of the dams on Khangchendzonga National Park has been made but, even, in the case of the Panan hydroelectric project, the very Ministry of Environment & Forests illegally allows inside the Khangchendzonga National Park activities clearly prohibited inside National Parks & Sanctuaries by the Supreme Court orders passed in Writ Petition (Civil) 202 of 1995.

Furthermore, it is to be reminded that the 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting of the Steering Committee on the Carrying Capacity Study for the Teesta basin held on 25<sup>th</sup> April 2005 had observed: "All investigators observed that North Sikkim is geologically, seismically and biologically extremely sensitive and fragile. Any proposed development activity in this region would have adverse impacts and would cause damage to the nascent ecosystem, alpine meadows and forested slopes as well as some critically endangered flora and fauna inhabiting these ecosystems. The glacial moraines, temporarily forming glacial lakes and debris cones are potential sources of hazards in North Sikkim."

As for the culture of the Lepchas –who are the true keepers of these territories and have, in the past, given ample proof of their ability to transmit them to their children– it is simply ignored, as if the cultural diversity was not of the utmost importance (no less than the biodiversity) to find diversified and locally adapted ways of inhabiting the Earth in an appropriate, sustainable way.

That they face problems nowadays in the management of their mountains cannot be denied, but the answer to these problems is not to expel them, it is to give them the means, to empower them again, to efficiently manage their home land which they love and respect more than anyone.

Furthermore, we would like to underline that such dams do cause an everlasting damage to the mountains and to the societies and cultures but have a mean life expectancy of only 50 years and, thus, give a very insufficient and temporary answer to the energy problem. Since a dam site will soon become a dead site, the energy it produces should not be called "renewable" or "clean": it is as destructive as the energy sources it is supposed to compete in terms of environment.

A better way to produce energy, is to save it. To have appropriate consumption patterns and to strengthen the transmission systems in overpopulated cities. It is these very urban people who, though unable to manage their own environment to save energy and natural resources, pretend to be the experts (selfish enough) to impose on the mountain people the restrictions and constraints they should adopt themselves.

The Lepchas, who are ready to die for their land and culture, are living, magnificent, examples of how Man should respect the Earth. Their query deserves to be answered, their plea to be heard, their ordeal to be respected. They show us a way to a sustainable management of our territories.

Every day, decision makers cry out for people's support: when will they themselves support and serve the people and respect and enforce their true aspirations?

Therefore, we request all concerned authorities to urgently take into consideration the rightfulness of the concerns of the Lepchas and to immediately initiate a real dialogue with them with due respect and without threats or insults with a view to revise decisions that are so damaging People and Nature.

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