

## **Letter Writing Appeal to Support the People of Phulbari, Bangladesh in opposing the Phulbari Coal Project**

### **What is the Phulbari Coal Project ?**

The proposed Phulbari Coal Project in Bangladesh is one of the most contentious and ill-conceived development projects the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has ever considered funding. The local human and environmental impacts of the mine, not to mention the broader implications for global warming, far outweigh any benefits the people of Bangladesh will receive through the mine's operation. In conjunction with the people of Phulbari and NGOs around the world, AID/WATCH is calling on its supporters to let Australian decision makers know how much of a bad idea this project is.

**AID/WATCH is asking you to write to Australia's Governor to the ADB, Treasurer Wayne Swan and Australia's ADB Executive Director Phil Bowen and ask them to show leadership by opposing this project when it comes before the ADB board on June 3, 2008.**

### **Key points to include in your letter**

#### **Impact on the local population**

While ADB management claims that the mine will affect approximately 50,000 people, a study conducted by the Bangladeshi Government's Expert Committee Report found that 129,417 persons will be directly affected by the project and 220,000 persons will be indirectly affected due to the de-watering of the mine area and the impact this will have on local water supplies.

In addition to displacement, massive loss of livelihoods is also inevitable due to the sheer scale of agriculture normally carried out on this land. Out of the total land proposed for the Phulbari open-pit mine, 78% is agricultural, providing much needed food security in a country which lacks abundant agricultural land.

#### **Climate Change**

The impact of coal use on climate change is well known and the ADB's Energy policy (1995) states that the Bank should actively promote environmentally sound mining practices and clean coal technologies. Support for this project clearly contradicts this policy.

In a country which will lose half of its surface area to a 1m sea level rise, there is a particular urgency to ensure that all funding provided by the ADB supports only renewable energy production.

The Australian Government has a responsibility to make the ADB accountable to its own policy in this area and to withhold support for climate intensive development projects.

#### **Local Environmental Impacts**

The Bangladeshi Government's Expert Committee Report indicates that arsenic contamination of water is highly likely during and after the mine life of 30-35 years. While Asian Energy states it will rehabilitate the area, it is very unlikely that the land will be conducive to agriculture or other activities such as fisheries given the toxicity level that could remain.

Also of major concern is the fact that the main coal off-loading facility will be at Akram Point, a deep water anchorage site situated within the Sundurbans mangrove reserve. The Sundurbans are a World Heritage listed mangrove forest, and the largest of its type in the world.

As with the Social Impact Assessment, the Environmental Impact Assessment has been commissioned by the same company which wishes to extract the coal, creating a significant conflict interest.

### **Indigenous People's Rights**

The affected indigenous peoples of the Munda, Santal and Mahili ethnic groups have been farmers and agricultural labourers in the region for generations. The proposed resettlement plan is completely inadequate, in that it involves resettling these people in areas with little opportunity for employment in 1/8<sup>th</sup> ha blocks. It is also unlikely that they will be able to purchase land of equal productive capacity from the non-indigenous population given limited compensation offered and existing land scarcity.

### **Human Rights Violations**

On 26 August 2006, between 50,000 and 100,000 local residents participated in a peaceful gathering to protest against the mine. The Bangladesh Rifles (a government paramilitary force) opened fire on the demonstrators killing at least 5 people and wounding hundreds of others. According to eye-witnesses, Bangladesh Rifles members threatened Magistrate Abdul Aziz with a gun in order to make him sign the authorization to open fire on the protestors.

In response to the August 2006 protests and the public outcry which followed the shootings, the Bangladesh government agreed to the protestors' demands to expel Asia Energy from the country and commence a moratorium on open cut mining. The current military government however has refused to acknowledge this agreement, and the ADB has made no effort to ensure the government remains accountable to its citizens.

The current political climate of 'Emergency Rule' declared by Bangladesh's military government in January 2007, has suspended all civil rights and banned public protest. In February 2007, Mr. S.M. Nuruzzaman, one of the local leaders of the Phulbari campaign, was detained and tortured for his opposition of the mine and in January 2008 prominent civil society spokesperson Prof. Anu Muhammad received death threats for his work on behalf of local groups opposing the mine.

### **Violating ADB policies and International best practice**

In a letter to the ADB on the 10<sup>th</sup> of January, 63 International NGOs including AID/WATCH voiced their concerns about the project noting that if it goes ahead, the ADB will be in breach of five of its own policies including its Energy Policy (1995), Indigenous Peoples Policy (1998), Involuntary Resettlement Policy (1995), Environment Policy (2002), and Public Communication Policy (2005).

In fact, the ADB is already in violation of its Communications policy, and has failed to accord with international best practice and the UN declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People by refusing to ensure the right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) of local affected persons.

### **Tips for writing an effective letter**

- Try to make it personal; use your own language where possible and focus on a few issues that you feel most strongly about or have been personally affected by.
- Be succinct - if possible keep your letter to no more than two pages.
- Avoid exaggeration, overly emotive language and generalisations.
- Always include a return address, ask questions that require a response and indicate that you are expecting a reply.
- A letter is usually more effective than email.
- Hand written (legible!) letters are usually more effective than typed letters.

## **Who to send it to**

Once you have finished your letter, send it to:

### **Australian Governor on the Asian Development Bank, Treasurer, Mr. Wayne Swan:**

The Hon Wayne Swan MP  
PO Box 6022  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600  
Wayne.swan.MP@aph.gov.au

### **Australia's Executive Director to the ADB, Mr. Phil Bowen**

Phil Bowen  
Executive Director  
P.O. Box 789  
0980 Manila, Philippines  
pbowen@adb.org

### **Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance, Mr. Bob McMullan:**

The Hon Bob McMullan MP  
PO Box 6022  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600  
Bob.Mcmullan.MP@aph.gov.au

## **Unsatisfactory responses**

If you're unhappy with the reply (eg. it's a form letter, or doesn't give answers):

- Write back to them, letting them know that you are unsatisfied with their reply.
- Send your local print media and AID/WATCH a copy of both the letter and your response.
- Keep copies of all correspondence and let AID/WATCH know how it's going.
- Be persistent - let them know you expect an adequate response!

## **No response**

If you haven't received a response within 3-4 weeks:

- Call directly or write again, seeking a response.
- Inform AID/WATCH so that we know you haven't received a reply.

## **Additional resources**

- <http://www.forum-adb.org/Phulbari.html>
- [http://www.omct.org/pdf/ESCR/2007/BGD\\_211207\\_ESCR.pdf?PHPSESSID=75](http://www.omct.org/pdf/ESCR/2007/BGD_211207_ESCR.pdf?PHPSESSID=75)
- <http://phulbariresistance.blogspot.com/>
- <http://www.bicusa.org/en/Project.59.aspx>
- <http://www.jacsces.org/en/sdap/phulbari/index.htm>

And keep checking the ADB section of the AID/WATCH site for updates:

- <http://www.aidwatch.org.au>

For more information, please contact Flint Duxfield, [aidwatch@aidwatch.org.au](mailto:aidwatch@aidwatch.org.au) or phone +61 2 95578944