

MEMORANDUM TO THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

ON THE UNFCCC's 15th CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES AT COPENHAGEN

24 November 2009

Dear Prime Minister Manmohan Singh,

We, the undersigned people's organisations, social movements, trade unions and concerned citizens, submit this memorandum to the Government to draw your attention to the several urgent and so far unaddressed concerns about the climate crisis and the Indian Government's response to them, especially in light of the upcoming 15th Conference of the Parties (COP) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) at Copenhagen from 7-18 December 2009.

We believe that the economic and political issues of inequality, both within and between nations, grievously impact distribution and consumption and are at the core of the crisis of global warming and of responding meaningfully to it. The crisis is also about a few usurping the rights and access of the vast majority of the disempowered over the commons – air, water, land, minerals and forests. Unsustainable economic development and inequitable growth based on an economy dependent on the use of fossil-fuels and extractive industries – which intensified in the last 60 years – have led to the sharp rise in carbon emissions, way beyond what the Earth can absorb. The global annual carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions have reached about 35 billion tonnes a year from the burning of coal, oil and gas, and from deforestation. This is much more than the net absorption capacity of the Earth, estimated to be 16-17 billion tonnes a year or roughly 2.5 tonnes per person, which is declining due to a gradual warming of the oceans.

Hence, there is an extremely urgent need to make sharp and immediate cuts in the emission of greenhouse gases (GHGs). We fear that this urgency has not been reflected in the ongoing negotiations leading up to Copenhagen, neither in the Indian government's position and policy interventions, nor in the positions of governments worldwide. The urgency stems from the fact that scientific evidence suggests we may already be close to significant tipping points in some of the Earth's major ecosystems. Crossing a tipping point – whereby natural systems deteriorate even without any further human intervention – will make it that much more difficult for us to collectively intervene in halting possibly runaway global warming. We need to make drastic cuts in emissions, starting immediately. Anything less or watered down at Copenhagen will have massive consequences for humanity and for other species.

INDIA IS IN THE FRONTLINE OF CLIMATE VULNERABILITY

Climate change has become a serious threat to the poor, particularly in developing countries. Impacts are going to get unavoidably worse, with massive disruption and loss of human life and of other species that invisibly support our ecosystems. In India, widespread and significant impacts of climate change have been noticed for at least 10-15 years in many regions. These impacts are adversely affecting the urban working poor, the lives and livelihoods of the Himalayan and other hill people, fishing communities and other coastal and island communities, small,

marginal and rainfed farmers and agricultural labourers, dalits, women, adivasis, forest dwellers, and other disadvantaged and marginalised communities in different regions. Published scientific evidence and other observations of people from different communities reveal that the following are some of the major impacts that are already visible:

Changing rainfall patterns, reduced rains in July and in winter, shorter south-west monsoon, and intense rains in a short period. This is hurting both small agriculture and water sources and causing unprecedented floods and soil erosion in some places.

In the mid-level Himalayas, reduced snow at mid- to high altitudes, warmer winters, shifting of fruits and crops to higher levels, spread of mosquitoes and vector-borne disease to new areas, drying up of streams, disappearance of small glaciers and receding of large glaciers. The spread and intensification of drought in large parts of India leading to massive forced migration, agrarian distress and mass abandoning of livestock.

In forest areas, the migration of species to higher altitudes, the loss of biodiversity, the greater incidence of pests, increased growth of weeds, greater frequency of forest fires, the decline in stock of certain medicinal plants, and reduced growth of forests and grasslands.

The drying of water sources that supply water for drinking and for livelihoods at many places.

Sea level rise along many coastlines, depletion and migration of fish stocks, and ingress of saline water due to storm surges.

These impacts influence and aggravate a range of other crises with systemic roots, for example the agrarian crisis. It is widely accepted by scientists that the impacts are going worsen further, and will happen simultaneously, hitting the poor in different regions.

THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA'S POSITION

The Indian Government's stand on climate change needs to reflect this urgency. It should affirm the principles of equity, justice and sustainability as essential for effective global and national policy towards climate change governed through a democratic and participatory regulatory mechanism.

Our views on the GOI's stand in key areas in the climate negotiations are as follows:

Mitigation: The Government's stand that India's per capita emissions are low and it will "not allow its per capita GHG emissions to exceed the average per capita emissions of the developed countries" (The Road to Copenhagen, MEA, GOI, 2009) is nothing but hiding behind the poor and is potentially dangerous because it will worsen the climate crisis in the long run. India's average emissions are relatively low for the time being because of the abysmal poverty of the overwhelming majority of this country; in contrast, the elites in this country have emissions approaching European levels. India needs to adopt and push for equity internally on a per capita emissions basis, the same principle it is arguing for in international negotiations. India's energy policy for the

foreseeable future is based on polluting fossil fuels, driven by a model of industrialization directed primarily at elite consumption. This needs to drastically decrease and therefore a complete rethink of our energy policy is essential.

Adaptation: The Government's claim that it is spending "up to 2.5% of GDP on adaptation" is an accounting sleight of hand. The 2009-10 Budget documents reveal that much of the increase in expenditure for the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) and the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) is being accounted for as Adaptation Funds. On the other hand, crucial areas for adaptation such as mangrove conservation, wetlands conservation, protection of rivers and other groundwater recharging systems, afforestation, methods of cultivation such as the system of rice intensification and organic farming and the biodiversity conservation programme have received scant attention and meagre allocations. Also, the shocking lack of prior information, preparedness and action regarding several disasters such as the recent drought, Krishna basin floods and the Aila disaster in the Sunderbans indicate that much more needs to be done and with greater urgency. Unavoidable worsening impacts suggest that they need to be anticipated and prepared for in advance.

Technology: Any technology transfer negotiated as part of the Copenhagen process should be free of conditionalities and Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) restrictions. We need to ensure that we adopt solution-based technologies rather than technology-driven solutions. The belief that large technologies will provide the solution evades the centrality of the need to reduce elite consumption, in India and the world. It brings in large capital and takes solutions out of people's hands. We urge the adoption of decentralized, small and sustainable technologies that are appropriate for people's needs. Many such technologies and materials already exist and need to be examined and improved upon before we venture into blind import of technology.

Finance: We support the stand proposed by the Bolivian government that industrialized countries should pay for their enormous historical emission and adaptation debts to the developing world, including India and the Indian poor. Any financial transfer mechanism and its ultimate use needs to be transparent, decentralized, democratic and decided by the people at all levels – through participation in consultation with national, state and local self-governments. However, we do not believe that adaptation and basic technology implementation in a large developing country such as India is in any way contingent on the prior transfer of financial resources.

Additionally,

We view the Government's formulation and finalization of India's National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) and its eight missions as undemocratic and unilateral. The NAPCC does not question the current non-sustainable, high emissions pattern of economic development. Therefore the Government needs to arrive at a new NAPCC with reference to Parliament, in consultation with state and local governments, and through the widest possible participation of affected people. This must include differentiated eco-zone planning, district level vulnerability and contingency planning for disasters, industry-based reduction of emissions and people's control mechanisms over the commons.

Instead of addressing the crisis at its source, the Indian government is pushing for a series of non-solutions and false solutions towards mitigating emissions. Nuclear power is costly, risky, harms communities in the vicinity of uranium mines and nuclear plants and has significant embodied emissions. Agrofuels – which many state governments are promoting through jatropha plantations – take away land from food production, reduces access to the commons used by the poor and consumes enormous quantities of water. The hundreds of hydropower dams being planned and constructed across the Himalayan and other ecosystems, the Northeast region and elsewhere undermines the will of the local communities, and denies decentralized micro energy projects that would be more appropriate. Genetically Modified Organisms being proposed for mitigation and adaptation of cash and food crops will grossly undermine food security, biodiversity and cause unforeseen consequences along with deepening the control of multinationals over our food chain.

We oppose both India's position of 'Compensated Conservation' as part of the Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) and its support for REDD. REDD and all other variants of carbon forestry encourage and promote the privatization and commodification of forests and their resources. There is the real danger that REDD will aggressively push a forced takeover of forest lands from communities by corporations and the Indian Forest Department. It will limit the access of forest people to their primary source of life and livelihood, who are already facing massive forced displacement in the name of 'development' REDD goes against people-centered forest governance, promotes the much opposed and discredited Joint Forest Management thereby undermining the recently enacted Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006.

Projects under the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) – of which India has about 1,200, both registered and under validation – prevents the physical and verifiable cuts in emissions that are so urgently needed, as does REDD. Carbon offsets perpetuate elite consumption in the misplaced hope that it can be compensated for. CDM in India is dominated by polluting industries that continue to harm communities and ecosystems, emit toxic fly ash and carbon, pollute rivers and underground aquifers. Corporations with bad environmental track records earn huge money through flimsy, non-verifiable and mostly false claims of emissions reductions.

At the Bangkok UNFCCC meeting in September-October 2009, the US introduced a proposed structure for measurement, reporting and verification (MRV) of mitigation actions. It seeks to extend MRV to all countries except the least developed countries (LDCs). The word "commitment" in relation is absent in the US draft. We see this as an important shift in the language of global climate change agreement from binding commitments to that of mitigating "actions". The Indian government should strongly oppose this watering down of the proposed regulatory mechanism of the Kyoto Protocol for developed economies.

WE DEMAND:

Given the increasing risk to life and life-support systems in the world, the Copenhagen Conference should declare a Global Climate Emergency.

A real and verifiable emission cut that is legally binding by the industrialized (Annex 1) countries of at least 50% by 2020, 70% by 2030 and 90% by 2050, over 1990 levels, and not left to voluntary "actions" of the industrialised countries. The cuts should be within national borders, not offset through market and/or other mechanisms such as the CDM, and these cuts should start immediately.

The post-Kyoto process of collective negotiation needs to be strengthened, deepened and widened on the issue of cuts in greenhouse gases. This is being undermined by the industrialized nations, who are pushing for voluntary and individual national cuts. We demand that the baseline for emission cuts should be kept at the 1990 level as agreed.

Large emitters, including China, India, Brazil, Mexico and South Africa, should rapidly shift away from their high-consumption and high-emission development trajectories, while promoting internal equity. They need to commit to necessary and binding reduction targets along with sharp cuts by Annex 1 countries. India should take the lead in building a consensus among developing economies to commit to mitigation targets, which should be binding through national legislation. In this context, the Government of India should reformulate the Industries (Development and Regulation) Act, 1951 so as to incorporate the mitigation target based on a principle of democratic industrialization that ensures equity and social justice.

The Indian government should revise its unsustainable development trajectory of several decades. This phase has witnessed the exploitation of natural resources, the greater displacement of adivasis and other forest dwellers, intensified exploitation and continued pauperization of the urban poor, casualisation and contractualisation of labour, and the promotion of consumption by and production for elites. Such an anti-poor development trajectory — a trajectory reflected in the toothless Biodiversity Act 2002, the much-diluted EIA Notification, 2006, the industry-oriented National Environment Policy, 2006, the rampant violations of the CRZ Notification, and in the NAPCC and various missions under it — intrinsically leads to higher carbon emissions. We demand that emissions by elites in India be urgently brought down to 2.5 tonnes of carbon dioxide per capita a year, thus enforcing equality and equity in resource-sharing by all Indians, and which is the maximum the Earth can currently absorb. At the same time we note that the working poor in the country are forced to consume much less than required for their well-being. Their consumption levels have to rise for them to have reasonable living standards and a life of dignity. We demand an effective framework that promotes the use of public transport alongside binding restrictions on the use of vehicles for private purposes, and one that prevents displacement of the poor in towns and cities. We demand that the livelihoods, constitutional and democratic rights of forest dwellers, fishworkers and small peasant cultivators be ensured.

The Indian Government should prepare a comprehensive policy for compensation of those affected by restructuring of the economy for emission cuts and arrive at an acceptable framework for re-employment of displaced workers.

Drastic cuts in defence expenditure, which is one of the largest consumers of energy, to promote peace in the region.

That the Indian government should redraw its energy strategy, moving towards more sustainable, equitable, employment and livelihood-generating renewable and bio-energy sources and strategies, in a time-bound manner. There needs to be a much more decentralized generation, transmission and use of energy. For renewable energy to be competitive and go beyond experimentation there has to be substantial government subsidy. India has vast resources of solar energy, which, if all past subsidies to conventional power and costs of mitigation of ill-effects are taken into account, becomes a cost competitive source of clean and renewable power. All this would necessitate a credible and transparent re-examination of the Electricity Act in all its ramifications.

The costs of mitigation and restructuring are paid for through direct investment by the government defined by the paramount principle of the public good.

Un-proven, anti-poor and potentially disastrous non-solutions, such as nuclear energy, agro-fuels, large hydro, CDM and hydrogen fuel should be immediately halted. A strict principle of "polluter pays" should be implemented for costing and comparing various energy options.

The government must cease to be party to any disastrous market-based solutions like carbon trading.

We call for a new National Action Plan on Climate Change that will be arrived at after a wide consultation of people and be sanctioned by parliament.

We oppose any attempt to link climate change commitments to trade barriers and tariffs. The Indian government should desist from and oppose any such moves.

That the Government of India support the payment of ecological debt — both for historical emissions and current adaptation — as a legally binding obligation of the industrialized nations to nations and peoples of the global South. Their ecological debt should include the complete restoration of territories, and recuperation of agriculture and ecosystems. We demand the creation of alternative funding mechanisms and flows that recognize this ecological debt and respect, protect and promote the sovereignty and rights of nations and people. We demand an immediate end to any role for the World Bank and other international financial institutions (IFIs) in climate financing and to the tied use of technology to any debt repayment.

Our government must stand united with and protective of progressive efforts of other developing countries, G-77, the least developed countries (LDCs) and the Association of Small Island States (AOSIS). We oppose the reported moves by the Indian government to align with the United States, historically by far the largest greenhouse emitter.

The Indian government must take leadership of the countries of the global South in Copenhagen and beyond, by bringing issues of justice and equity in all their dimensions to the centrestage in climate negotiations. These need to be informed by the principle of ecological sustainability, and need to transcend barriers of generations and species and ensure rights of nations and peoples.

Copies to:
Minister of Environment and Forests Jairam Ramesh
Members of Parliament
Members of PM's Advisory Council on Climate Change

ENDORSED BY

Organisations

New Trade Union Initiative (NTUI)
National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM)
National Forum of Forest Peoples and Forest Workers (NFFPFW)
National Fishworkers' Forum (NFF)
Kerala Swatantra Matsya Thozhilali Federation (KSMTF)
Indian Social Action Forum (INSAF)
South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People (SANDRP)
Programme for Social Action (PSA)
Bharat Jan Vigyan Jatha (BJVJ)
Delhi Platform
Focus on the Global South
Delhi Forum
Environment Support Group
Intercultural Resources
Equations
Coorg Organisation for Rural Development
Popular Education and Action Centre (PEACE)
Kabani (Kerala)
Rural Volunteers' Centre, Assam
River Basin Friends