

AFFECTED CITIZENS OF TEESTA

North Sikkim

PRESS RELEASE

1st May 2014

In continuation of people's movement to protect Sikkim against the implementation of destructive Mega hydroelectric Power Projects, the members of ACT have continued our effort to oppose the Teesta Hydro Electric Power Project Stage IV. Last year, we were successful in putting forward our case with the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) and the visiting team made serious and negative report on the Teesta HEP Stage IV.

However, inspite of vociferous protest and boycott of the Environmental Public Hearing, wherein, along with ACT, even the Power Minister and area MLA Mr Sonam Gyatso had raised serious reservation against the projects leading to complete boycott of the public hearing by the elected Panchayats of Dzongu, the MoEF had issued environmental clearance for the project on 9th of Jan 2014.

Since, the track record of NHPC is against the people and established laws of the land, the implementation of the project would be seriously detrimental for the survival of the project affected people.

The ACT has taken up the task of challenging the grant of the environmental clearance and accordingly four members in their capacity as indigenous Land owners - namely Mr Tenzing Lepcha, Mr Chopel Lepcha, Mr Norphey Lepcha, Mr Norzang Lepcha - had petitioned the National Green Tribunal (NGT) against the grant of the clearance. The petition challenging the grant of Environment Clearance by Ministry of Environment & Forests to National Hydro Electric Power Corporation (NHPC) by letter dated 09.1.2014 for construction of 520 MW Teesta hydroelectric Power Project Stage IV has been admitted by the NGT. The appeal has been filed through LD Counsel Ritwick Dutta and Rahul Choudhary, Advocates. The National Green Tribunal has issued notices to Ministry of Environment & Forests, Sikkim State Pollution Control Board and National Hydro Electric Power Corporation as per National Green Tribunal Act, 2010.

The appellants are residents of Dzongu area of North District of Sikkim and are of Lepcha community and are directly affected by the proposed hydroelectric project. The Lepcha community and the residents of the Dzongu area of North Sikkim District have been opposing the construction of the proposed project because of large scale impact to the environment and their religious and traditional rights.

Teesta IV Hydroelectric Project is proposed on Teesta River near Chandey village on left bank and near Hee Gyathang village on the right bank of North District of Sikkim and is one in a cascade of projects planned in the Teesta river basin. The project envisages construction of a 65 m high concrete gravity dam across Teesta River in down-stream of confluence of Runchu with Teesta for the generation of

520 MW hydropower. The project is located in Mangan subdivision of Sikkim North District. The said project is located between the 1200 MW Teesta Stage III project currently under construction and the already commissioned 510 MW Teesta Stage V project. The project with a catchment area of 3,910 sq km includes a 65 metre high concrete dam with a gross storage capacity of 18.60 million cubic metre.

Few of the grounds raised by the appellants are that the EIA report has grossly failed to consider the socio-cultural aspect of indigenous Lepcha community and Dzongu Cultural Landscape. The EIA report as well as EAC and MoEF has ignored the sacredness of Kanchendzonga Sacred Landscape which is embedded in the culture and value system of community and ethnic groups of Sikkim, who are indigenous to the region of Sikkim. The Expert Appraisal Committee and MoEF ignored the large scale opposition to the project and the affected communities of Lepchas have been protesting against the project.

The hearing will commence after all the notices are served and other formalities are completed.

Tseten Lepcha

Working President

Affected Citizens of Teesta