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சேது சமுத்திர திட்டத்திற்கு எதிரான தேசிய அமைப்பு
National Movement Against Sethusamudram

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24-08-2005

H.E. Shri Nirupama Rao,
High Commissioner for India,
Indian High Commission,
36-38, Galle Road,
Colombo 3

Your Excellency,

**People's Memorandum on the Destruction due Proposed Sethusamudram
Ship Canal Project (SSCP)**

We are presenting herewith the memorandum prepared, taking into the consideration the environmental and social issues of the above project on behalf of the Sri Lankan citizen. We strongly protest the construction of Sethusamudram Ship Canal Project (SSCP) without taking into consideration the environmental and social impacts of it.

In compiling these impacts we are very much concerned with the social and environmental impacts on the Asian Region and beyond.

We hope that your Excellency will forward the copies of this memorandum to all responsible Departments of the Indian Government.

Thank you,

Yours sincerely,

On Behalf of,

NATIONAL MOVEMENT AGAINST SETHUSAMUDRAM

Suranjan Kodituwakku
Chief organizer,
GREEN MOVEMENT OF SRI LANKA

Cc: 01. Hon. Prime Minister,
Prime Minister's office,
Temple Trees Galle Road ,
Colombo 03 , Sri Lanka

02. Hon. Minister,
Ministry of Foreign Affairs,
Republic Building ,
Colombo 01, Sri Lanka

03. Hon. Minister,
Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources,
82, Sampathpaya,
Rajamalwatta Road ,
Bathharamulla , Sri Lanka

04. Hon. Minister,
Ministry of Fisheries and Ocean Resources,
P.O. Box 1707 , New Secretariat
Maligawatta, Colombo 10,
Sri Lanka

Peoples Memorandum on the Adverse effects of the propose Sethusamudram ship Canal project

This petition is served on behalf of the people of Sri Lanka, taking into consideration environmental and social factors relevant to them. Nevertheless we would like to emphasize that we do focus on the environmental and social impact of this project on India , the Asian region and elsewhere as well.

All things in this world are connected. Nothing exists as a separate entity. All things, not just the biotic but the abiotic as well, are connected in extremely complex ways. Although Sri Lanka and India are two separate countries, they lie on the same geological plate. All creatures big and small, wild and wonderful, in these two countries may live on separate territories, but they are, each and every one of them, important to the entire world. There are no identifiable boundaries when we talk about the existence and sustainability of this earth. Acts that willfully harm the environment are nothing but violation of the human rights of those who have for ages adapted their lives and lifestyles to specific environmental conditions.

The Sethusamudram Project is a mega naval development project on the Sri Lanka-India maritime border. It is being implemented according to the unilateral wish and will of the Indian government. It is nevertheless a project that ought to receive the attention and raise the concerns of Sri Lanka, the Asia-Pacific region as well as the entire world.

The Sri Lankan government, for reasons of political expediency, has adopted a conciliatory position, while the Indian government seeks to achieve its commercial and national security related objectives. While the Indian people have had little or no say in the matter and are therefore helpless, Sri Lankan have either remained silence for petty reasons or have adopted an anti-Indian stance regarding the project. This situation does not bode well for either the respective peoples of these countries or for all the ecological systems.

The Indian government has prepared an Environment Impact Assessment in relation to the project. Considering the dimensions and the character of the project, it is not possible for us to be satisfied with this Assessment. It remains an incomplete document and it is our view that it is such because of a deliberate strategy of concealing the true impact and damage potential of the project. The project itself has a 144 year old history. The environmental and societal cost of implementing the project has been the main reason why this has not got off the ground for so long. The current trace of the canal has been developed after considering many options.

Although the canal will lie on Indian waters, it is still extremely close to Sri Lanka's border. As such it directly impacts Sri Lanka's environment, economy and society and especially her cultural ethos and values. No study has been done on the effect this project would have on Sri Lanka in these terms. We therefore express our grave concerns and objections to the fact that the Environmental and Social impact assessments carried out have not taken account the impact on our country. It is a serious oversight. Indeed it is an insult to the country and an open threat to our sovereignty.

Many institutions and experts have pointed out the weaknesses and flaws of the project and the environmental impact assessment. They have pointed out that the project will have serious negative social, environmental, archaeological and economical impacts on Sri Lanka and the region. It has been strongly recommended in India itself that a comprehensive study be commissioned to assess the environmental and social aspects of the project. In particular the people of Tamilnadu have strongly protested this project. It is indeed regrettable that neither the Indian nor Sri Lankan officials have paid much heed to such arguments and protests.

The project seeks to deepen the shallow sections of the sea. The sand, mud and stones thus excavated are to be dumped in areas of the sea where it will cause further damage. The waste from the ships and the debris released consequent to accidents will cause the following:

- **Climatic changes**

The deep seas on both sides of Gulf-Mannar region and that beyond the Palk Straits are kept separate by the current physical formations. The project, if implemented, will connect these seas. One of the key determinants of climatic change is the action of ocean currents. The current system of currents is an important determinant of marine resources such as fish as well as benign climates.

The environmental impact assessment is silent on the impact on climate. On the one hand, temporal changes in the climatic situation will impact the efficacy of the canal and also, the canal will cause a certain transformation in the action of waves, currents and tsunamis, thereby disturbing significantly the stability of the climate in the Asia-Pacific region.

- **Destroying biodiversity**

According to studies already carried out, there are over 3600 species in the region where the excavations are to take place. This area, which abounds in coral, mangroves and other sea plants, has been named a protected biodiversity site of the world. As such it is subject to both local and international laws pertaining to biodiversity preservation.

As of now there is very little naval activity in this region. It is an area which is largely protected from natural calamity. It is a site of abundant food sources. Its geographical and physiological uniqueness has made it one of the most important biodiversity preserves. The proposed canal seems to have been pushed as close to the Sri Lankan border in order to protect the marine resources on the Indian side as far as possible.

It is clear that the excavation, waste from ships and other effluents will considerably impact the biodiversity of the area, to the extent that it will impact not only the region but the entire earth as a whole. For example, the routes taken by migratory creatures that cross from Asia to the Pacific will be disrupted and their breeding, nesting and feeding grounds will be destroyed.

In addition, the resultant climatic change will certainly cause damage to the corals, mangroves and sea weeds, impacting negatively the ecological balance of the coasts of both countries and the biodiversity therein.

Sri Lanka has 917122.95ha of natural forest cover. This forest cover lies in a land mass surrounded by sea in the tropical zone. The country enjoys a weather pattern consisting of two monsoons and inter-monsoonal rains. Fresh water flows from the central hills to the coast along major 103 rivers. As a result there is a high density of biodiversity, difference and endemic fauna and flora. However this forest cover, fast dwindling, is barely sufficient to maintain the environmental balance of the island, in particular since the island is by no means insulated by the damage done to the environment globally. We are currently witnessing a serious erosion of our biodiversity. Even the slightest erasure of biodiversity caused by the project is cause for serious worry, we firmly believe.

- **Destroying of breeding grounds of fish**

There are two key breeding grounds in the project region. It is Sri Lanka that benefits mostly from the Pedro Bank breeding ground. While India also benefits from this, the entirety of the Wedge Bank breeding ground is at its disposal. In addition there are minor breeding grounds associated with the coral reefs, mangroves and sea grass in both countries. The dumping from the excavation will occur by the two key breeding grounds. The water will be unnecessarily churned by the movement of sand and mud. This would no doubt impact the breeding grounds negatively. This of course is in addition to the impact on these breeding grounds due to probable climatic changes precipitated by the project.

- **Impacting the fisheries industry**

Destroying fish is naturally the end of the fisheries industry. This will affect both countries. There are 1337 fishing villages in Sri Lanka. There are 123,970 families (a population of 530,420) living in these villages who depend on the industry. This project will significantly impact their catch and therefore their income. The project will directly cause much disruption among the fishing villages in the districts of Mannar, Jaffna, Killinochchi and Mullaitivu. Sri Lanka produced 284,960 metric tons of fish in 2003. Of this, 40,190 metric tons were produced in the aforementioned districts. Sri Lanka earns Rs. 9,524.5 million annually by exporting 15,689.9 metric tons of fish. The project will directly impact those who are directly involved in the fisheries industry and/or those who indirectly benefit from it. The project will displace hundreds of thousands of fishing families and destroy the industry. It is estimated that 49 fishing villages in India will suffer from the project. Over 14,000 fishermen will be directly affected while 54,000 will lose their livelihoods indirectly.

- **Impact on agricultural production**

Around 3,115,076ha of Sri Lanka is utilized for agricultural activity. This is extremely important to the country's food security and foreign exchange earnings through export. In addition agriculture is the direct and indirect source of income for millions of Sri Lankans. The significant impact on the environment and especially the climate changes will no doubt have a direct and serious impact on the lives of these people. In particular the impact of the project on the monsoons could limit the rainfall. This is a condition that is common to India and the rest of the region as well.

- **Pollution of the ocean and its impact**

Even under normal conditions, ships cause pollution. There is also the possibility of accidents, in particular since the banks of the canals lie underwater. This would cause long term damage to the fisheries industry as well as the ecological systems on the coastline. Most important in this is the damage caused to the coral reefs and the breeding grounds for fish. The character of the coastline, crucial to the fisheries as well as the tourist industry, could also be altered.

- **Conflict among fisher-folk**

It is clear that there will be a drop in the harvest of fish. At the same time it is likely that Sri Lankan waters will be encroached upon by fishing vessels at a much higher rate. Already there is conflict between fishermen of the two countries and this can only be exacerbated by the project. In the end it is the local fishermen who will suffer in both countries.

- **Increased threat of natural disasters**

It is impossible to predict when, where and in what intensity natural disaster may strike. The project spans an area of 10500 square kilometers between the coordinates 77.8 degrees and 79.3 degrees latitude. Two earthquakes have occurred close to this area, in 1938 and in 1993. There are also two dormant volcanoes near the project area. The project will result in the loss of protection from warm and cold currents and possible tsunamis. Most critically, it is likely that the project will enhance the rate of erosion of the coastline.

- **Damage to culture and archaeology**

Adam's bridge, which has historically facilitated the cultural exchange and mutual-nourishment between Sri Lanka and India, will be destroyed by this project. We will lose many artifacts that are of social, cultural and archaeological import.

- **Impact on trade**

There were 4032 ships that docked in Sri Lanka in 2003. Of these 3838 arrived at the Colombo Port. Sri Lanka has already spent a lot of money in expanding the capacity of the Colombo Port. The project will render these improvements meaningless and lessen the importance of Colombo as a port city internationally. As a country whose economy is considerably dependent on international trade this project will cause a number of problems within Sri Lanka. One of the key roles played by the Colombo Port is that of a transshipment hub. The annual return of Rs. 10,291 million will considerably diminish if this project goes ahead.

- **Destruction of small Islands**

It is the islands that will have to bear the brunt of erosion. Although most of these islands are uninhabited, their location does have a geographical and ecological significance. They are the feeding grounds, nesting grounds and resting places of migratory birds and play an important role in controlling the impact of currents and tsunamis. There are some which are inhabited and some are seasonally used by fisherman from both countries. The damage that could be caused would be impossible to correct and it will have an international impact as well.

The stand of Sri Lankan communities regarding the Sethusamudram Project and recommendations

- Terminate the Sethusamudram Project and search for alternatives
- Commission an independent and internationally acceptable comprehensive study of the project and its impacts on both countries and the region that covers the economic, social, cultural and environmental concerns detailed above, and recommends viable alternatives
- Make available all information pertaining to current activities and activities planned to the peoples of both countries with full fidelity to the ethic of transparency
- Provide adequate and just opportunity for state agencies and other groups working in both countries as well as internationally on issues of human rights and environmental concerns to express their opinions
- Provide opportunity for everyone to access such opinions, criticism and suggestions and especially provide this information to those peoples who are directly impacted in the language of their choice
- Make adequate provisions to prevent the use of force or bribery in money or kind to obtain approval for the project.

Members of National Movement Against Sethusamudram

1. All Ceylon Workers Association for Fishing Peoples
2. Earth Co- Habitants Development Foundation, Imaduwa
3. Human Development Forum, Matara
4. Help-O, Galle.
5. Arunalu Community Development Foundation, Tangalle
6. Sathvijaya Padanama, Ihalakeembiya.
7. Organization of Human Resource & Environmental Protection , Thissamaharama
8. Prajashakthi Sanwardhana Padanama
9. Social Economic Leadership Foundation, Weeraketiya
10. Janadiriya National Women Development, Weligaththa.
11. Institute of Human Resource & Environment Development, Pannamgoda
12. Green Explores, Pelmadulla
13. Rathnapura District Organization of Indigenous seeds Produce's - Opanayaka
14. Environment & Human Development Foundation, Kuruwita
15. Madara Planting Service, Eheliyagoda
16. Organization of Environment & Children Rights, Preservation
17. Veligepola Integrated Community Development Society, Parakaduwa

18. Participatory Development Centre, Kalawana
19. Hunuwala Welfare Society, Opanayaka
20. Sakura Lanka Mithuro Solidarity Foundation, Buluthota
21. Samadhi Forum, Ruwanwella
22. Solidarity Development Foundation, Yatiyanthota
23. Warakapola Collective Development Organization
24. Malmaduwa Participatory Development, Rambukkana
25. Nirmanee Development Foundation, Hettimulla
26. Community Development Centre, Aranayaka
27. Peoples Development Foundation, Dehiowita
28. Galigamu Peoples Foundation, Galigamuwa
29. Sri Lanka Environment Exploration Society, Polgahawela
30. Imso Development Foundation, Hettimulla
31. Human Resource Development Centre, Mavanella
32. Monaragala Kavdawa Navoda Isuru Samajaya, Monaragala
33. Isuru Community Development Foundation, Buttala.
34. Child Rights Protection Foundation, Monaragala.
35. Sahabagithwa Sanwardene sangamaya, Monaragala
36. Lawer Uva Development Centre, Bibile.
37. Wellassa Development Foundation, Bibile
38. Lawer Uva Women Development Foundation, Monaragala
39. Future In Our Hand, Badulla
40. Organization for Protection of Human Resources in Pahala Uva, Ethiwewa.
41. Women Development Foundation, Badulla.
42. Kinigama Vegetable & Fruit Producing Society, Bandarawela.
43. Centre for Protection of Community Resource, Monaragala.
44. Bio diversity Research Information & Training Institute, Badulla
45. Uva Govijana Kendraya, Bandarawela
46. Uva Sustainable Development Net, Badulla.
47. Sadaharitha Parisara Mithurange Sangamaya, Gampala.
48. Naula Grameeya Sanwardhana Maha Sangamaya , Na-Ula
49. Community Development Foundation of Kundasale, Katugasthota.
50. Environment & Natural Resources Development Centre, Kandy
51. Up Country community Development Forum, Matale
52. ARUNALU Drug Prevention & community
53. Up Country Environmental Forum Development Centre, Gampala.
54. Organization of Parisara Piyasa, Nawalapitiya.
55. Dumbara Mithuro Coordination Office , Naula
56. Sarala Sahana Seva, Gmpala
57. Kandurata Sobadaham Sanraksana Samaja Arthika ,Matale
58. Isuru Jeevithodaya Padanama, Hanguranketha
59. Avadi lanka, Nuwara Eliya
60. Walapane Rural Solidarity Programme, Nildandahinna.
61. Sri Lanka centre of Sustainable Alternative Solution For Community Upliftment, Hatton
62. Panduka Organization, Anukkane
63. Rural Centre for Development, Nikaweratiya.
64. Wannu Community Development Foundation, Thanthirimale
65. Jathika Govi Damuluwa, Eppawala
66. Parisarikayo, Wellampitiya.
67. Arunodaya Parisarikayo, Mabodale
68. Committee For Environmental & Consumer Problem, Jaela
69. Kahapola Rejidel Wattha Surekeeme Sanvidanaya, Madapatha
70. Raddolugama Sumithuro, Raddolugama
71. Mihimavu Science Foundation, Nugegoda
72. Organization to Safeguard Life & Environment OSLEN), Nugegoda
73. Partners of Environment Protection, Bathtaramulla.
74. Institute Of Tropical Studies & Conservation Environmental Organization, Kosgama
75. SENEHASA, Thummodara
76. Community Oriented Resource Exchange (CORE), Meegahathenna.

77. Podujana Himikam Kamituva, Gurugoda,Horana
78. Mihithala Mithuro Environmental Development Foundation, Gonapala
79. Janasra Padanama, Bellana.
80. Community & Environmental Development Foundation, Morontuduwa
81. Panadura Dharmashakthi Foundation, Panadura
82. Integrated Social Development Foundation, Kalutara North
83. Saruketha Movement, Mathugama
84. Beacon of the East- Social Service Organization, Batticaloa.
85. Team of Youth for Development Understanding and Progress (TYDUP) , Trincomalee
86. Nethra, Batticaloa.
87. Rural Economic & Community Development Organization (RECDO)
88. Nesda, Batticaloa
89. WWDF, Batticaloa
90. Desmio, Batticaloa.
91. Sri Lanka Environment Exploration Society
92. MANITHAM-Sri Lanka
93. Rural Women Front
94. Young Zoologist Association
95. Samadhi Foundation - Galle
96. Kithudhana Pubuduwa – Prasansaramaya
97. Public Campaign for Environmental Development
98. Movement for Protection of Eppawala Phosphate Deposits
99. SEDEC -
- 100.SETIC
- 101.Ruk Rakaganno – Trees Protection Society
101. National Forum for Community Organization
- 102.Kirindioya Integrated Farmer Organization
- 103.Janawabodhaya
- 104.Environment Exploration and Conservation Association – Nuwara-eliya
- 105.Turtle Conservation Project
- 106.People’s Development Foundation
- 107.Centre for Participatory Development
- 108.Organization for Human and Environment Development
- 109.Centre for Environmental and Cultural Education
- 110.Development Education Center for Human and Natural Resource Management
- 111.Trade Union of Conservators of Forest
- 112.Village Development & Environmental Conservation Foundation
- 113.Thurunu Mihisraniya – Green Brigade
- 114.Green Movement of Sri Lanka
- 115.Rural Centre for Development - SANGRAMA
- 116.Public Service United Nurse’s Association
- 117.Postal & Telecommunication Officers’ Association
- 118.Free Trade on Workers Union
- 119.Union of Health Services of Republic of Sri Lanka
- 120.Lawyers Association for Human Rights and Development
- 121.United Trade Union Federation of the Irrigation Department for the
Protection of Irrigation Resources & Farmers
- 122.Bank of Ceylon Workers Union
- 123.Movement for National Land & Agriculture Reform