

Petition from the Affected Citizens of Teesta to the Government of India re the release of detained activists and the scrapping of two large hydropower projects

To
The President
Government of India
New Delhi

Subject: Release of all 40 Lepcha activists from Sikkim jail

Your Excellency,

On the 7th of February 2009, 43 young Lepcha activists of Affected Citizens of Teesta (ACT) including 3 juveniles and 7 women were arrested from their ancestral homeland of Dzongu in Sikkim. They were protesting against construction activities being carried on by Himagiri Hydro Energy Ltd, the developer of 300 MW Panan Hydroelectric project located inside the Protected Lepcha Reserve of Dzongu. The project is yet to get all the requisite clearances to start legitimate construction activities. Those arrested have been sent to judicial custody.

ACT and the indigenous Lepcha community have been protesting against the construction of around 24 mega dams on their holy river Teesta and its tributaries since 2004. Their protests have been peaceful and democratic. ACT activists have been carrying on a protest relay hunger strike in Gangtok for more than 600 days now.

The Lepcha community in Dzongu has repeatedly pointed out both to the Indian government and the State government of Sikkim that 7 mega hydro projects within Dzongu will not only destroy their culture, identity and livelihood but will also damage the ecology, environment and biodiversity of the area globally regarded as one of the 25 biodiversity hotspots in the world. Further, the rights of the Lepchas to their ancestral homeland in Dzongu are protected by the Special Provisions under Article 371(F) of the Indian Constitution.

We understand that in June 2008, the Sikkim Government under Shri Pawan Chamling had scrapped four out of the six hydro projects located inside Dzongu in tune with the demands made by ACT. This only strengthens the case for scrapping the remaining two – Panan and Teesta IV.

We therefore request you to respond positively to the peaceful struggle of the Lepcha community in Sikkim in right earnest and:

1. Immediately release the detained ACT activists from jail unconditionally, and
2. Scrap all the remaining projects in Dzongu.

Yours sincerely

- Affected Citizens of Teesta
- Lepcha Association, New Delhi
- All India Indigenous Lepcha Tribe Association
- South Asia Network on Dam, Rivers & People
- National Forum of Forest People and Forest Workers
- Intercultural Resources
- Kalpavriksh
- Focus on the Global South
- Hazards Centre