

# Affected Citizens of Teesta (ACT)

## Press Release

23rd June 2007

**North Sikkim:** The President and all members of the Affected Citizens of Teesta would like to thank all Friends, well wishers, members of the media and all concerned social organizations and Political parties of Sikkim for the overwhelming support and concern for the “satyagraha”. The positive initiative of the civil society has encouraged us to carry on our struggle. Hope this support is continued till our goal is achieved.

With reference to the news item published in some papers by the so called Land owners of Dzongu, saying that they have nothing to do with the ACT initiative. The Affected Citizens of Teesta hereby state the following Facts for the information of all concerned.

**1. The helpless subjugated Landowners:** Most of the lands Owners are poor Primitive Tribes who are docile, god-fearing and submissive by nature. Majority of them are against parting away with ancestral land. However, some Govt Functionaries has put so much pressure by coercion, subjugation and administrative intimidation that they are forced to part away with their most precious Land. Fear psychosis has been instilled in the minds of the poor, backward and voiceless, that if they don't follow the Govt order, all their facilities like GCI sheets, children's Scholarship, small contract work; jobs will be stopped. Right now the indigenous aborigines of Dzongu are going through one of the most difficult phase in their History, on one side is the Threat of the Devastation of their land, culture, identity etc and on the other side is the menacing Govt who will destroy their livelihood, dignity and democratic right. All those struggling for their land, rights and future are termed as anti national and anti social and politically motivated.

Besides, the MLA there are the Local Panchayat who are elected based on the party and they are bounded to follow the dictates of their party leaders, who in turn wants to prove his utility to the Chief Minister by carrying out this subjugation of the democratic right of the people. The new Feudal of modern Sikkim are the so called elected representatives who win election by use of force, money, village level dynastic rule, allegiance and blessings of the Powers that are in Gangtok. In North Sikkim, the very essence of democracy and so called total revolution is defeated by these practices.

The concept of Total revolution is just to target some helpless groups of people whereas the plunder of the natural resources, suppression of democratic rights and continuous dictatorial misuse of Govt machinery is most rampant and prevalent.

To add to the woes of the people many Govt officers and employees are acting like the agents of the companies and private armies of the Local leaders. They go around telling the poor and innocent people to accept the Govt line and in disguise of suggestion they threaten them by saying that the Govt can unleash serious action against them and their children.

This division and tension in the villages is the first negative impact of the coming of the Mega Projects. Families and relatives and communities are divided on lines of People who don't want to give up their struggle to live with dignity, pride and peace in their own land and those who are so suppressed and subjugated that they rather fight with their own folks than with the high and mighty Government.

The total number of Land owner is much more than 86 and there are many who will not succumb to the pressure tactics and give away their land. As such The so called memorandum is handiwork of some vested interest and not necessarily of the Landowners.

**2. Land Encroachers: Violations of Forest Conservation Act 80:** There is also certain section of the so called land owners who have been keen to sell their land posing as genuine land owners and make some quick buck whereas they are all illegal encroachers of Govt land.

Large tracts of Government Land has been illegally transferred in the names of some powerful vested interest in connivance with Land Revenue Department officials and they now want to sell and some have already sold these lands to the companies who are paying good compensation thinking they are genuine tribal land. These illegal encroachers are in hurry and have been saying that they are for the project. Before we accept their statement it is important to verify the authenticity of such people.

In Sikkim there have been three Cadastral land survey and settlement operations, one in 1952 and the other one in 1977-78. one Resurvey of Land in Chungthang sub- division is underway .As per the prevailing laws of the State that all landed properties transferred from Forest/khasmal to private individual after the enforcement of the Forest Conservation Act 1980, has to be approved by the Ministry of Environment and forest, GOI. Any transfer/regularization of Land without the clearance of the MOEF is direct violation of the ACT.

Therefore, no land owner can be considered a legal if in case he or she has violated the ACT and does not have the right to speak like genuine land owner.

On the other hand, the landed properties of many genuine forest Dwellers have not been recorded in their name, as they do not have the connection and are not cared for by the political leadership or the Administration. Many landed properties of poor Tribes that were in their possession with document of 1952 have been wrongly recorded as Govt land, thereby depriving them of their right over own land. ACT demanded a genuine and transparent Resurvey of the Landed properties in north Sikkim and Dzongu in particular.

The issue is that the impact of large Mega Hydroelectric power Projects are not confined to the Land owners only, how can 86 persons put the future of all the Lepchas at stake?

The real serious impact caused by the destruction of the Environment, fallout of social, Political, religious, economic implication due to demographic changes is to be borne by every one. The social tension is already experienced by all, breaking up homes and disturbing the peace and tranquility of the area. Infact North Sikkim is the most socially disturbed area in Sikkim due to the Mega project. There was public revolt in Lachung against the projects and Lachen Dzumsa has already issued their rejection of power projects, the Chungthang Gram Shaba has already passed a resolution rejecting the power projects before the just resurvey and settlement of Land records are completed. The under current of resistance is brewing in all sections of the society causing consternation and tension amongst the forced proponent of the projects and the People.

Therefore, our struggle is not confined to issue of land and compensation, though the issue of land is important but we are working toward greater common good. Covering every aspect of our Environment on which the Sikkimese people make their livelihood, culture and tradition which gives our Sikkimese Identity, our rights which gives us our democratic values due to which we can lead a life in our own homeland with peace, honour and security for times to come.

**3. Talks with the Government** which was initiated by Shri KT Gyaltsen, political Secretary to CM, was deferred due to absence of key officials from the state Capital.

Affected Citizens of Teesta

Gangtok

Press Conference attended by:

1. Shri Athup Lepcha, president ACT
2. Shri Sherab Lepcha, joint Treasurer
3. Representatives of concerned Lepchas of Sikkim
4. Representatives of Sangha of Dzongu
5. Representative of Kalimpong Lepcha Youth Association, Shri Ajuk Tamsang, coordinator