Urgent Action

0915UIND 09.11.09
India: Opencast coal mining destroys the livelihood of indigenous people in Jharkhand

The rapid development of open cast coal mining in the North Karanpura Valley in Hazaribagh and Chatra Districts of Jharkhand is destroying the resources of food and water of the original inhabitants of these areas, mainly Adivasis (indigenous people), of more than 200 villages. The region has extremely fertile land which is now being converted into a mining site, taking away vital farming land and forests, and polluting the Damodar River, which is the lifeline of the area. This means a gross violation of the Adivasis’ right to food – and hunger and malnutrition for them in the future.

An international action is needed to address the violations of the human right to food and to support the movement to resist the mining plans of the Indian government. Please write polite letters to the President of India, the Minister of Coal, the Minister of Environment and the Governor of Jharkhand requesting them to stop all mining operations and suspend all new mining projects in the region.

Background

The Karanpura Valley in Hazaribagh and Chatra districts in the state of Jharkhand in central India is a 60 kms long by 30 kms wide fertile basin yielding one of the richest rice and vegetable croplands in India. The fertile lands of the ancient Barkagaon landscape and the rest of the Upper Damodar catchment watershed are among the best agricultural lands in Jharkhand which has been farmed since before recorded history. The region used to be covered by large forests and was once famous for its wild life, the name Hazaribagh meaning: Land of the thousand tigers. Besides having a tremendous fauna and flora, the Karanpura region holds a fantastic cultural heritage: prehistoric rock paintings have been discovered there and even today indigenous people still keep alive their decorative artistic traditions that can be linked back to the prehistoric rock art designs.

Both Hazaribagh and Chatra districts have a remarkable stock of mineral resources, especially coal. Coal mining is scheduled to start shortly at Pakri-Barwadih near Barkagaon and over thirty other mines which have been allocated in the Karanpura region. These projects will have a major impact: They will ultimately destroy over 1,100 sqkm of land and forest. The vast majority of these mining projects are open cast
mines. A mine producing 40 million tonnes of coal in its lifetime (~15 years) leaves a scar about 25 sqkm in area. Consequently, in a heavily populated country such as India, displacement of people is inevitable. As a result, the economic, social and cultural survival of the local population in over 200 villages will be severely endangered. This expansion has a considerable effect in terms of global warming, to which India is particularly susceptible. The mines will be followed by new coal-fired thermal power stations which will be a further source of carbon dioxide proliferation in large quantities. FIAN has already intervened in this case with s0916IND dated 7th July 2009.

Following are some selected national and international Acts and Declarations whose provisions are being violated if mining is taken up:

1. The Scheduled Tribes and other Traditional Forest Dwellers Act 2008, Sections- 3, 4 (5), and 5.
2. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1966, Art. 11
4. Biological Diversity Act 2002, Sections- 36 (2) which requires directives to the State Government to take appropriate action, where any area rich in bio-diversity is being threatened, and 36 (4i) to assess the environment impact of projects which are likely to have adverse affects on bio-diversity.

In addition, if mining is taken up, following human rights resolutions and reports are not complied with:

**FIAN Mandate**

India is a state party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Therefore India and the state of Jharkhand are duty-bound under international law to respect and protect the human right to food. The plans to massively expand mining activities at Pakri-Bawardih as well as other places in the Karanpura region impose a severe threat to the Adivasi communities’ livelihoods. If implemented India and the state of Jharkhand will violate their obligations to respect and protect basic human rights, including the human right to food, of the affected people.

FIAN carries out this urgent action together with the Adivasi-Koordination, which works to protect the human rights of the indigenous and tribal peoples of South Asia.

**End of action:** February 24, 2010

**Addresses:**

| Copies to: | Her Excellency, Mrs. Pratibha Patil  
President of India  
Rashtrapati Bhavan  
New Delhi – 110 004  
India  
Fax: 0091-11-23017290 / 91-11-23017824 |
|-----------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| Copies to: | Mr. Jairam Ramesh  
Minister for Environment and Forests  
Government of India, Ministry of Environment & Forests  
Paryavaran Bhavan, CGO Complex, Lodhi Road  
New Delhi - 110 003  
India  
envisect@nic.in |
| Copies to: | Mr. Shri Sriprakash Jaiswal  
Minister of Coal  
Room No.353 ‘A’ Wing, Shastri Bhawan  
Dr. Rajendra Prasad Road  
New Delhi 110 001  
India  
secy.moc@nic.in |
| Copies to: | His Excellency  
Shri Kateekal Narayanan  
Governor of Jharkhand  
Raj Bhawan  
Ranchi - 834001  
Jharkhand  
India  
Fax: 0091-651 – 2201101 |

*Please keep Adivasi Koordination and FIAN informed about any reply you might receive.*
Honorable Ms. President,

I would like to express my concern about the news from India which indicate that the expansion of the open cast coal mining in the Upper Damodar watershed is going to devastate the North Karanpura Valley in the Hazaribagh and Chatra districts of Jharkhand, a richly forested and agricultural landscape with hundreds of ancestral villages mostly belonging to Adivasi people. According to our information coal mining is scheduled to start shortly at Pakri-Bawardih near Barkagaon and over thirty other mines which have been allocated in the Karanpura region. By displacing the original inhabitants of the area, mainly Adivasis, from their land and destroying their resources of food and water, their human right to food and water is being violated.

There are also a unique palaeo-archaeological stone tool evidence of Early Man known as the Damodar Valley Civilization, as well as prehistoric megalithic sites, and one dozen rock art sites, the pride of Jharkhand, dated to over 8,000 years back which have been recommended to UNESCO as a Threatened World Heritage Site by INTACH. In addition, there are over 200 villages where the famous Khovar and Sohrai artists are continuing their decorative traditions which can be linked back to the prehistoric rock art.

As a state party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, India, and therefore the state of Jharkhand, is duty-bound under international law to respect and protect the human right to food. In the light of these obligations I am concerned about your plans to massively expand mining activities at Pakri-Bawardih as well as other places in the Karanpura region. By supporting this process, India and the state of Jharkhand are violating their people’s right to feed themselves. According to our information, the Ministry of Coal, Govt. of India, has recently rejected earlier appeals through a letter to the Chairman of INTACH Mr. S.K. Misra dated 23rd Sept., 2009.

I would, therefore like to ask you to:

- Reconsider the decision from the Coal Ministry to go ahead with the mining.
- Take action by ordering an immediate stoppage to mining operations Pakri-Bawardih.
- Enforce a suspension on all new mining projects in the Upper Damodar watershed in the Karanpura region.
- Allow for the open and transparent review of the way mine clearances are granted.

Please inform me of any measure you intend to do in this regard.

Respectfully yours