

## **STATEMENT FROM INTERNATIONAL NGOS ON UN HYDROPOWER AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT SYMPOSIUM**

Beijing, China  
27 October 2004

We welcome the opportunity to attend this symposium and to provide perspectives on the role of hydropower in sustainable development. However, we are disappointed that participation of international NGOs in this conference has been systematically marginalized. We present this statement to clarify our concerns and recommendations regarding hydropower development.

While hydropower projects have brought economic benefits, they have also adversely affected millions of people who depend on rivers for their survival. These projects have irreversibly damaged ecosystems and led to the loss of livelihoods, cultures and the rights of affected communities. Rather than improve the lives of affected people, hydropower projects have left them impoverished and unable to provide for the security and well-being of future generations.

Large hydropower has mostly been developed without the free consent or informed participation of affected communities and without considering other viable energy options, such as small-scale renewables and demand-side management. These options are less expensive, easier to implement and more effective in meeting the needs of people who currently lack access to adequate electricity supplies. Therefore, large hydropower should not be considered renewable.

While many governments and developers recognize these issues, they have not taken adequate steps to ensure these will be resolved with future hydropower development. The International Hydropower Association's Sustainability Guidelines are a positive step, however, these guidelines reflect a strong pro-hydro bias and cannot supersede the comprehensive recommendations developed by the independent World Commission on Dams.

Therefore, while we are not opposed to all hydropower development, we believe that hydropower's role in sustainable development must be carefully considered, especially when it comes to poverty reduction. Should hydropower projects be selected as the most appropriate energy option through a comprehensive options assessment process, projects should proceed only if they comply with the recommendations of the World Commission on Dams at a minimum.

For humane, equitable and environmentally sustainable development, the following internationally recognized principles must be adhered to for ongoing and future hydropower development:

### **Sustainable development includes gaining public acceptance and ensuring participation**

Projects should not proceed without the free prior and informed consent of affected people, including those displaced and upstream and downstream communities with special emphasis placed on ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples. Such consent must be achieved through democratic processes where affected people and civil

society are provided with timely information translated into local languages. These concerns must be incorporated into all decisions on hydropower development.

**Sustainable development includes equitable resettlement programs**

Projects that involve forced displacement should be avoided or minimized at all costs. However, should communities be forced to resettle from their lands for hydropower projects, a fully participatory resettlement plan should be developed with adequate compensation; land-for-land compensation should be a priority. The lives of resettled communities should be improved or at least restored so that they do not fall deeper into poverty.

**Sustainable development includes effective environmental mitigation**

Environmental impacts should be assessed in a river basin context and effective mitigation plans developed and implemented.

**Sustainable development includes equitable sharing of benefits**

Affected people should be among the first to receive benefits from hydropower projects. Legally binding and enforceable agreements on mitigation and compensation should be arranged between affected communities and developers. After projects are completed, periodic monitoring should be carried out by neutral third parties to ensure that commitments are met.

**Sustainable development includes cooperation in sharing and managing international rivers**

Transboundary impacts of hydropower projects must be fully investigated and documented in environmental and social impact assessments. Communities living upstream and downstream should be consulted during the planning process.

*Endorsed by Narmada Bachao Andolan (India), South Asian Solidarity for Rivers and Peoples, Water and Energy Users Federation (Nepal), Southeast Asia Rivers Network (Thailand), EarthRights International, WWF International, Oxfam America and International Rivers Network (USA).*