

To:

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**Appeal: Protect Sundarbans from coal-fired power plants**

The Sundarbans, located in the south-west of Bangladesh and north-east of India, is the largest remaining mangrove forest in the world with a total area of 10,000 km<sup>2</sup>. It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, extremely biodiversity rich, comprising terrestrial, aquatic and marine habitats, and is of critical importance for globally endangered species such as the Royal Bengal tiger (*Panthera tigris ssp. tigris*), Ganges River Dolphin (*Platanista gangetica*), Irrawaddy Dolphin (*Orcaella brevirostris*), and the endemic river terrapin (*Batagur baska*).<sup>1</sup>

This exceptionally high conservation value area is seriously threatened by a proposed super thermal coal-fired plant (1320 MW), the Rampal power plant, approved by India's state-owned National Thermal Power Corp. and the Bangladesh Power Development Board. In addition, a more recent proposed project, the Orion power plant (630 MW), is planned to be constructed near the Sundarbans in Bangladesh. Moreover, other national and international business groups with vested interests have been invited to grab land in the forest and set up hundreds of commercial projects in and around the Sundarbans.

If built, the Rampal power plant will be dependent on huge amounts of imported coal. The coal will be shipped approx. 35 kilometers on the Pashur river, which flows through the Sundarbans, and will need to be dredged. UNESCO's World Heritage Centre and the IUCN have identified four grave key concerns related to the plant's construction: pollution from coal ash by air, pollution from wastewater and waste ash, increased shipping and dredging, and the cumulative impact of industrial and related development infrastructure. They recommend that the Rampal power plant project proposal should be cancelled.<sup>1</sup>

The burning of fossil fuels, such as coal, causes emissions of carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas, which causes global warming. Temperatures are already increasing world-wide; 2016 being the warmest year on record, surpassing 2015 and other previous hot years.<sup>2,3</sup> The aftermaths will be, and are already, melting ice sheets, rising sea levels and more frequent extreme events such as floods, droughts, heat waves, storms and wildfires, with major negative consequences for ecosystems and human communities.

Investing in fossil fuel-fired power plants is therefore an incredibly short-sighted, retrogressive and seriously detrimental strategy, which will have devastating consequences for future generations. At the same time, the Bangladesh Government has set an ambitious target to have over 3 GW of renewable energy capacity installed by 2021.<sup>4</sup> India, being the fourth biggest emitter of greenhouse gases in the

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<sup>1</sup> IUCN & World Heritage Centre (2016). *Report on the mission to the Sundarbans world heritage site, Bangladesh, from 22 to 28 March 2016*; <http://whc.unesco.org/en/documents/148097>

<sup>2</sup> Science Daily (2017). *2016 Edges 1998 as Warmest Year on Record*; <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2017/01/170104130257.htm>

<sup>3</sup> NASA (2016). *2016 Climate Trends Continue to Break Records*; <https://www.nasa.gov/feature/goddard/2016/climate-trends-continue-to-break-records>

<sup>4</sup> CleanTechnica (2015). *Bangladesh Approves 200 MW Solar Power Project By SunEdison*; <https://cleantechnica.com/2015/11/26/bangladesh-approves-200-mw-solar-power-project-sunedison/>

world<sup>5</sup>, has also set very ambitious targets to have 100 GW solar power and 60 GW wind energy by 2022.<sup>6</sup> This does not go hand in hand with the proposed investment in fossil fuel power plants.

In fact, India's installed electricity generating capacity is already significantly higher than the peak demand (although some parts of the country suffer from power shortages due distribution losses, etc). The country's coal generation capacity alone is actually higher than its peak demand.<sup>6</sup> This further proves that India's involvement in the planned Rampal power plant would be completely useless, only leading to inevitable climate change and loss of biodiversity.

Besides from emitting huge amounts of greenhouse gases, the planned coal power plants not only threaten the unique biodiversity and ecosystem of the Sundarbans but also threaten the livelihoods of millions of local people. It will also make the lives of even more millions of coastal people vulnerable to natural disasters since the Sundarbans acts as a barrier against frequent cyclones, storms and other natural disasters (which will increase when more greenhouse gases are released to the atmosphere). It also serves as a major carbon sink in its undisturbed natural state.<sup>1</sup> The Government of India established the National Adaptation Fund on Climate Change (NAFCC) in 2015 to meet the cost of adaptation to climate change.<sup>7</sup> Fossil-fired power plants will increase this cost immensely in Bangladesh. The freshwater flow into the Sundarbans has already been drastically reduced due to human activities, resulting in substantial increases in siltation and salinity, threatening the overall balance and function of the ecosystem and its species.<sup>8</sup>

The Sundarbans is a fragile ecosystem but a sustainable balance between socio-economic development and conservation can still be achieved, if the right choices are made. On November 26<sup>th</sup> 2016 a protest was organised in Dhaka, Bangladesh, which gathered about 1,500 people. Today is the Global Day of Protest, and we hope that you would like to raise your collective voices with us for the survival and preservation of the Sundarbans. Please urge Bangladesh and India to cancel the construction of these coal-fired power plants in the Sundarbans and its surroundings, and make sure that Bangladesh and India invest in renewable solar and wind power instead (read more below). The world can't afford to lose the Sundarbans.

Yours sincerely,



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Alternative to fossil power plant: The Bangladeshi solar company ME SOLshare Ltd, the government-owned Infrastructure Development Company Limited (IDCOL) and other companies were honoured with the Momentum for Change Award at the UNFCCC Conference of Parties 22 in Marrakech, Morocco, in November last year (2016), for its work with solar home systems.<sup>9</sup> By the end of 2014, about 10 percent (3.5 million) of the Bangladesh's total households had installed solar home systems. The aim of the government of Bangladesh is to generate solar electricity for around 6 million households this year (2017).<sup>10</sup> Solar panels have proved to be affordable and reliable, and are a realistic alternative to fossil fuels. In India, new wind projects are cheaper (at the point of generation) than the comparable costs of power from new imported coal-based projects.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> World Resources Institute (2015). *Infographic: What Do Your Country's Emissions Look Like?*; <http://www.wri.org/blog/2015/06/infographic-what-do-your-countrys-emissions-look>

<sup>6</sup> National Institution for Transforming India/Government of India (2015). *Report of the expert group on 175 GW RE by 2022*; [http://niti.gov.in/writereaddata/files/writereaddata/files/document\\_publication/report-175-GW-RE.pdf](http://niti.gov.in/writereaddata/files/writereaddata/files/document_publication/report-175-GW-RE.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (2015). *National Adaption Fund on Climate Change (NAFCC)*. <https://www.nabard.org/English/NAadaptFund.aspx>

<sup>8</sup> IUCN & World Heritage Centre (2016). *Report on the mission to the Sundarbans world heritage site, Bangladesh, from 22 to 28 March 2016*; <http://whc.unesco.org/en/documents/148097>

<sup>9</sup> DhakaTribune (2016). *Bangladeshi company honoured with UN climate award*; <http://www.dhakatribune.com/climate-change/2016/11/18/bangladeshi-company-honoured-un-climate-award/>

<sup>10</sup> Reuters (2015). *Bangladesh aims to be world's 'first solar nation'*; <http://in.reuters.com/article/bangladesh-solar-idINKBN0KY00220150125>