

To,

The Prime Minister and Cabinet Ministers of India

New Delhi

Open Statement in support of No Go zones for mining in forest areas

We are in possession of the cabinet note drafted by the coal ministry 'Need for making available more coal bearing areas for enhancing coal production' planned to be issued in the cabinet meeting shortly. This note has been circulated with no consultation with the public or experts and states:"the 'MoEF may be advised to consider all coal blocks without reference to go and No Go areas, as per the current statutes and stipulation for according forest clearance."

Against this background, and recognising that intact forest areas are important watersheds, repositories of biodiversity and wildlife, and a critical survival resource for thousands of forest dwelling and forest dependent communities across India;

Concerned that coal mining poses a serious threat to the livelihood rights of forest dwellers and forest dependent communities, particularly Scheduled Tribes, as has been seen in Jharkhand, Chattisgarh, Maharashtra and other areas in the coal belt;

Noting that coal mining disrupts wildlife corridors that are essential to species such as elephants, tigers and leopards (all Schedule I species), which range over large areas;

Alarmed that coal mining disrupts water catchment areas and negatively impacts underground aquifers and surface rivers and streams, on which many millions depend;

Aware that afforestation/plantations in mined-over areas yield neither the biodiversity nor livelihood benefits that natural forests do, and as such they are not an adequate compensation for the destruction of natural forests to facilitate mining;

Stressing that intact and healthy natural forests are important to mitigate against the current and future impacts of climate change and that coal is a finite and non-renewable resource, whereas natural forests yield benefits in perpetuity;

Therefore, we the undersigned, as representatives of people's organizations, environmental groups and wildlife researchers call upon the Government of India to

1. Support the Ministry of Environment's initiative to classify areas as No GO zones for coal mining, as a first step to protecting India's forests, forest-dependent communities and wildlife in the 9 coal fields under discussion from the devastating consequences of coal mining.
2. Initiate a remediation process for the negative environmental and social impacts that past or ongoing coal mining has had or is having across India.

3. Initiate a process to declare No Go Zones for mining for all forest areas across India on the basis of their importance to forest-dependent communities and to wildlife and biodiversity.
4. Ensure that attempts to fast-track mining proposals do not violate or in any way weaken the provisions of the Forest Rights Act, Environment Protection Act and Forest Conservation Act or the need to secure the prior informed consent of affected communities.
5. Initiate a process of public and expert consultation to enhance participation in the decision making process to ensure that environmental and social concerns are truly reflected in all government decisions on this issue.

Sincerely

1. R. Sreedhar, Convener, mines minerals and PEOPLE
2. Ravi Rebbapragada, Samatha, Andhra Pradesh
3. Dr. Sejal Worah, Programme Director, WWF India
4. Shripad, Manthan Adhyayan Kendra, Badwani & Pune
5. Sandeep Patnaik, National Centre for Advocacy Studies, Pune
6. Bittu Sahgal, Editor, Sanctuary Asia and Member, National Board for Wildlife
7. Debi Goenka, Conservation Action Trust
8. Belinda Wright, Wildlife Protection Society of India, former Member, National Board for Wildlife
9. Shekar Dattatri, Wildlife and Conservation Filmmaker, former Member, National Board for Wildlife
10. Vinod Bhanu, Centre for Legislative Research and Advocacy, New Delhi
11. Madhuresh Kumar, National Alliance of People's Movements, Delhi
12. Shankar Sharma, Power Policy Analyst, Thirthahally, Shimoga District, Karnataka
13. Biswajit Mohanty, Wildlife Society of Orissa
14. S.A. Azad, People's Rights and Social Research Centre (PRASAR), Delhi
15. Gabriele Dietrich, National Convener, National Alliance of People's Movements,
16. Sarasvaty Kavula, Andhra Pradesh State Co-Convener, National Alliance of People's Movements
17. Ramesh Agrawal, Jan Chetana, Raigarh (Chhattisgarh)
18. Ashok Kundapur, Save Western Ghats Group
19. Kishor Rithe, Nature Conservation Society of Amravati
20. Dr. AJT Johnsingh, Member, National Board for Wildlife
21. Prerna Bindra, Journalist, Author and Editor, TigerLink
22. Mitali Kakar, Reefwatch Marine Conservation
23. Ritwick Dutta, The Access Initiative India coalition, (TAI-India)
24. Gaurav Shriodkar, The EIA Response Centre (ERC), New Delhi and Goa
25. Rahul Choudhary and Shibani Ghosh, Legal Initiative for Forest and Environment
26. Rana Sengupta, Mine Labour Protection Campaign, Rajashtan
27. Divya Raghunandan, Greenpeace India