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November 17, 2008

Dear Mr. Bhuta,

Sub: Your invitation dated 11 Nov 2008 to the technical workshop organized by the IUCN from Nov 28-30, 2008 at Bhubaneswar, Orissa.

This is with regard to your invitation to the IUCN technical workshop in Bhubaneswar. As you may have seen in our articles and other communications, some of us believe that constructive engagement with the Tata Company and DPCL could have positive consequences for sea turtles and conservation. However, this is based on the premise that the port will go ahead. We believe that the port is very likely to have negative consequences for sea turtles and marine biodiversity, and abiding by the precautionary principle, the first choice would be to change the location. Therefore this avenue needs to be fully explored first.

Second and equally important, as members of the MTSG, we have repeatedly protested in writing that we were not consulted prior to this involvement, nor has there been adequate effort to rectify this lack of transparency either by the MTSG leadership or the IUCN authorities.

This sentiment is shared by our other MTSG and IUCN colleagues. Please refer to our letters to the IUCN dated May 7 and August 31, 2008 (also published in the Marine Turtle Newsletter and Indian Ocean Turtle Newsletter).

We have in these letters called upon the IUCN to:

- A. Issue a statement that the IUCN abides by the Precautionary Principle and therefore does not support the construction of the Port in principle.
- B. Clarify publicly that any advice IUCN provides could only mitigate, and only partially, some of the threats to marine biodiversity, endangered species, and local livelihoods.
- C. Insist that a complete and scientifically rigorous Environment Impact Assessment be conducted to compile baseline ecological data, assess the impact on sea turtle movement, recruitment and nesting beaches, and the effects on Bhitarkanika National Park and Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary, as has been requested by various national members and other specialists. .
- D. Urge the Government of Orissa to reconsider its unrestricted coastal development plan and to integrate environmental concerns and mitigation into their planning.
- E. Actively consult and engage with its membership in India and representatives from local artisanal fishing organizations, NGOs and other relevant organizations.

**Following your invitation, we have consulted with MTSG members and sea turtle conservation colleagues and the general consensus seems to be that:**

1. The IUCN should never have been involved in the Dhamra project without first fully consulting its Indian members
2. The IUCN should not have proceeded in the absence of a proper EIA

3. The process of the IUCN's involvement has been neither transparent nor democratic
4. The project proponents are using the IUCN association to falsely claim that environmental impacts have been adequately addressed and mitigated
5. By ignoring the critical need for a credible EIA and accepting the Dhamra project as a *fait accompli*, the IUCN is undermining years of dedicated work and efforts by respected national conservationists
6. Lastly, the IUCN has completely failed to satisfactorily address our carefully considered concerns, raised in the letters mentioned earlier.

This lack of transparency continues with this call for a meeting where none of us have been consulted on the meeting agenda, and it appears that only a select group have been invited. Apart from MTSG India members, many others have raised questions about the Dhamra issue and IUCN's involvement in it. Amongst them, IUCN members have endorsed the stand in the abovementioned letters to the IUCN, while others have expressed these concerns at meetings and in publications.

Ignoring this, and inviting us to a technical workshop, indicates IUCN's disrespect of our concerns. In the interest of wider consultation and greater transparency, these organizations including IUCN India members (Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment, Bombay Natural History Society, Foundation for Ecological Security, Gujarat Institute of Desert Ecology, Indian National Trust for Art & Cultural Heritage, Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History, and Wildlife Protection Society of India) and other local NGOs (Wildlife Society of Orissa, Conservation Action Trust, Greenpeace, Reef Watch Marine Conservation, Sanctuary Asia) and artisanal fishermen's organizations (National Fishworkers' Forum, Orissa Traditional Fishworkers' Union), should also be involved.

IUCN should attempt to first host a meeting with its disaffected members in India and the others named above to find common ground and resolve the fundamental issues that have been raised before engaging in a technical discussion. We will consider attending such a meeting as outlined above, but to attend a technical meeting at this stage while our concerns remain unaddressed, would be futile and premature.

Sincerely,

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*As: MTSG-India members*