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Nepali Indigenous Groups File Complaint against World Bank Power Line Project

Kathmandu, Nepal, July 10, 2013 – Today, communities in Nepal filed a complaint with the World Bank, demanding accountability for a Bank-funded high-voltage transmission line slated to affect over 100,000 poor and marginalized indigenous villagers. The transmission line will clear a wide swathe of populated land, displacing already poverty stricken communities, and disrupting religious, historical, and cultural sites. Armed police have used violence against peaceful community protesters. Communities demand the World Bank include them in the design and implementation of the project, and reroute the transmission line to cause less impact.

“Our heritage and livelihoods are tied to this land,” said resident Surendraswor Moktan. “The land seized for this project has already forced people to move, leaving them with nothing.”

The most impacted communities, which have large indigenous populations, were not consulted about the transmission line’s route or impacts, in violation of World Bank rules. When the communities tried to raise concerns about the project through peaceful protest, they were met with violence intended to silence opposition. Armed police beat women from local villages so severely during one protest that some still suffer from the injuries several months later.

“No one consulted us about the project,” said Tulashi Prasad Kafle, a priest and resident of Sindhuli District. “There is an unpopulated alternative route that should be considered. We have not given anyone permission to take our land.”

Despite community opposition, the World Bank has stated that right-of-way concerns have been resolved. World Bank financing has accelerated in 2013, even as communities continue to express grave concern to the Bank operations staff in Kathmandu. With money flowing in and the continue presence of police forces, construction on the transmission line proceeds.

“Communities of Sindhuli District are trying to make their voices heard,” said Shankar Limbu, of Lawyers’ Association for the Human Rights of Nepalese Indigenous Peoples who represents several communities affected by this project. “Their rights as indigenous people to consultation and consent, participation in project design and implementation, as well as their rights to lands and territories, under national and international law, must be respected.”

“The World Bank must take immediate responsibility for what is happening in Nepal,” said Komala Ramachandra, South Asia Director for Accountability Counsel, a legal organization assisting impacted communities with their complaint to the World Bank. “Today’s complaint is an important step in demanding urgent action to stop money flowing to this project that has proceeded with disregard for human rights, livelihoods of local people, and other Bank rules.”

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