

**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL
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(Delhi) Indian authorities have given local communities scant or misleading information about the potential impact of a proposed alumina refinery expansion and mining project to be operated by subsidiaries of UK-based company Vedanta Resources in Orissa, Amnesty International said in a new report published today.

The Amnesty International report, *Don't Mine Us out of Existence: Bauxite Mine and Refinery Devastate Lives in India* documents how an alumina refinery operated by a subsidiary of UK-based FTSE 100 company Vedanta Resources in Orissa, is causing air and water pollution that threatens the health of local people and their access to water.

“People are living in the shadow of a massive refinery, breathing polluted air and afraid to drink from and bathe in a river that is one of the main sources of water in the region,” said Ramesh Gopalakrishnan, Amnesty International’s researcher on South Asia. “It is shocking how those who are most affected by the project have been provided with the least information”

Adivasi (Indigenous), Dalit, women and other marginalised communities in the remote part of Orissa where the refinery is located have described to Amnesty International how authorities told them that the refinery would transform the area into a Mumbai or Dubai.

The Orissa State Pollution Control Board has documented air and water pollution from Vedanta Aluminium’s refinery in Lanjigarh, Orissa. Amnesty International found that the pollution threatens the health of local people and their access to clean water yet there has been no health monitoring.

“We used to bathe in the river but now I am scared of taking my children there. Both my sons have had rashes and blisters.” a local woman told Amnesty International. The organization recorded many similar accounts from people living around the refinery.

Despite these concerns and the environmentally sensitive location of the refinery near a river and villages, the government is considering a proposal for a six-fold expansion of the refinery. Neither the Indian authorities nor Vedanta have shared information on the extent of pollution and its possible effects with local

communities.

The Orissa Mining Corporation and another Vedanta Resources subsidiary also plan to mine bauxite in the nearby Niyamgiri Hills. The proposed mine threatens the very existence of the Dongria Kondh, an 8,000 strong protected indigenous community that has lived on the Niyamgiri hills for centuries. The hills are considered sacred by the Dongria Kondh and are essential for their economic, physical and cultural survival, yet no process to seek the community's informed consent has been established.

A Dongria Kondh man told Amnesty International, "We have seen what happens to other Adivasis when they are forced to leave their traditional lands, they lose everything."

"The people of Orissa are among the poorest in India and their health is being threatened by pollution from the refinery. Their voices are being ignored by Vedanta Resources and its partner companies as well as by Orissa's government. There has been inadequate consultation with local people about the changes on the ground and yet it's their lives and futures which hang in the balance," said Ramesh Gopalakrishnan.

Amnesty International is calling on the Government of India and Vedanta Resources to ensure that there is no expansion of the refinery and mining does not go ahead until existing problems are resolved. Amnesty International is also calling for full consultation with local people and for the Indian authorities to set up a process to seek the free, prior and informed consent of the Dongria Kondh.

Notes to Editors:

- The alumina refinery in Lanjigarh is operated by Vedanta Aluminium Ltd. Vedanta Resources owns 70.5 per cent of Vedanta Aluminium and Sterlite India Ltd. owns the remaining 29.5 per cent. Vedanta Resources owns 59.9 per cent of Sterlite India and has management control of the company. The mining project would be operated by a joint venture, the South-west Orissa Bauxite Mining Corporation, involving Sterlite India (74 per cent) and the state-owned Orissa Mining Corporation (26 per cent).
- The Dongria Kondh are an adivasi (Indigenous community) and were described as 'endangered' by India's Supreme Court-appointed Central Empowered Committee (CEC).
- Under international law, the government of India has an obligation to respect, protect and fulfil human rights including the rights to water and health and to protect the rights of Indigenous peoples over the lands and territories they traditionally occupy. The obligation to protect requires measures by states to ensure that other actors (such as companies) do not undermine or violate human rights. Government failure to protect human rights does not absolve companies from responsibility for their operations and the impact of those operations on human rights. Companies should – at minimum – respect all human rights.
- This report is part of Amnesty International's Demand Dignity campaign which aims to end the human rights violations that drive and deepen global poverty. The campaign aims to mobilise people all over the world to demand that governments, big corporations and others who have power, listen to the voices of those living in poverty and recognise and protect their rights. For more information visit www.demanddignity.org