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THIS IS MY HOME

REFINERY DISRUPTS LIVES IN INDIA

A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT
IS A HUMAN RIGHT

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL



“WE LOST OUR LANDS TO THE REFINERY. WE WERE ARRESTED FOR PROTESTING AGAINST IT. I LOST MY BUFFALO AFTER IT DRANK THE POLLUTED WATER. WE CAN HARDLY BREATHE WITH THE DUST FROM THE REFINERY WHICH WORKS 24 HOURS NON-STOP. AND WHAT LAND I HAVE NOW WILL GO FOR ITS EXPANSION.”

A resident of Bandagudha, Lanjigarh



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Indigenous and other marginalized communities are struggling with the harsh effects of living in the shadow of Vedanta Aluminium's (owned by Sterlite Industries and the UK-based Vedanta Resources Plc) refinery at Lanjigarh in Orissa state, eastern India. They must brace themselves for an even more uncertain future with the refinery set to expand its operations to six times its current capacity.

More than 800 families from Majhi Kondh adivasi communities and other marginalized groups risk the compulsory acquisition of 1,340 hectares of their farmlands in the proposed expansion of Vedanta Aluminium's refinery. Six years ago, 750 hectares of farmland belonging to 1,215 families were acquired to build the current refinery.

RIGHTS VIOLATED

In the two years that the refinery has been running, local communities have had to contend with contaminated water, polluted air and constant dust and noise from the

refinery. Faced with dwindling land reserves, local communities are no longer able to produce their own food and live off their lands, forcing many to work in low-skilled, poorly paid jobs.

During a visit to Lanjigarh in March 2009, Amnesty International documented violations of the rights to water and health, including the right to a healthy environment. Amnesty International raised these concerns with the Orissa state authorities, the company and the Orissa State Pollution Control Board.

OFFICIAL REPORTS OF CONTAMINATION

The Orissa State Pollution Control Board has documented numerous failures to adequately manage the disposal of waste from the refinery. The waste, which includes red mud (that is, iron oxide and other minerals left over from the bauxite refining process) and highly alkaline waste water from the refinery, is stored in an improperly sealed red mud pond.

“And whereas during inspection of the industry from 3.12.2008 to 5.12.2008, it has been observed that the operating practices are not consistent with the stipulated conditions and as there has been a number of lapses/defects served during the inspection monitoring of your industry, the expansion work of the industry without CTE [Consent to Establish certificate] and EC [Environmental Clearance] shall be stopped...”

Orissa State Pollution Control Board Memo to Vedanta Aluminium, 12 January 2009

In its regular inspection reports of the refinery, the Pollution Control Board has found evidence of raised alkaline levels and risk of contamination in the Vamsadhara river, caused by the discharge of alkaline waste water from the refinery's red mud pond. The Vamsadhara river, which flows next to the existing refinery, is the main water source in the area.



The Pollution Control Board documented a failure to avoid seepage or overflow from the red mud pond to nearby areas, raising the risk of contamination of the river water. The Board began to highlight concerns arising from the improper lining of the red mud pond in 2006 when the refinery commenced trial operations. These concerns have not been fully addressed. Air and noise levels were also found to be above the stipulated limits.

Local communities say they can no longer rely on the river for drinking, washing, bathing and other purposes, but are forced to do so because there is no other water source they can use. Communities living next to the refinery must suffer the dust, air and noise pollution generated by its operations which run non-stop, day and night.

These communities also complained of respiratory discomfort, coughing and other health conditions which they believe are linked to inhaling dust and other emissions

Above: Vedanta Aluminium's refinery as seen from Kenduguda village, where farmlands were taken over and residents, having lost access to the Vamsadhara river, must now rely on a hand-pump for their water supply.

from the refinery. Some people described suffering from skin problems and other health conditions after bathing in the river. None of these negative health effects, which the communities have been describing, have been investigated or monitored by any public medical authority.

STILL NO CLEAN-UP

The Pollution Control Board's last inspection report dated 12 January 2009 highlighted continuing pollution and lack of compliance with its previous directions. Vedanta Aluminium's failure to effectively comply with the board's directions and clean up any pollution is a grave concern – all the more so because this failure appears to be linked to potentially serious human rights consequences, including

“THE REFINERY HAS BUILT ITS WALLS RIGHT HERE MAKING OUR ACCESS TO THE RIVER VERY DIFFICULT. THE WATER WE USE NOW IS CONTAMINATED WITH ASH POND WASTE. OUR CHILDREN HAVE BLISTERS AND SKIN PROBLEMS.”

A resident of Kendugudha, Lanjigarh

harm to human health. The Orissa state authorities, too, have failed to follow up these findings and to assess the impact of the pollution on the communities' rights to water and to health.

There was no process in place to discuss these concerns with the communities at the official public hearing, held 25 April 2009, on the proposed expansion of the refinery.

“WHAT HAPPENED TO US IS UNIMAGINABLE. HAVING GIVEN UP OUR LANDS, WE LIVE IN THE SHADOW OF THIS GIGANTIC REFINERY AND ITS WASTES.”

A resident of Chatrapur, Lanjigarh



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Above: One of the villages, barely 100 metres from the refinery, hit by its noise and dust.

Above right: Vedanta Aluminium's red mud pond which contains waste material from the refinery. Run-off from the pond, which has been improperly sealed, is contaminating the Vamsadhara river, the main water source for local communities in Lanjigarh.

Front cover: A Majhi Kondh woman whose family farmland was acquired for the refinery at Lanjigarh.

ACT NOW!

Write to the Government of India and the Orissa state authorities.

- Urge them to refuse environmental clearance for Vedanta Aluminium's proposed expansion of its refinery at Lanjigarh until ongoing human rights concerns in relation to the refinery's current operations are effectively addressed by the authorities and Vedanta Aluminium.
- Ask them to ensure that Vedanta Aluminium immediately cleans up any pollution that has occurred and stops any further pollution of air, water and soil.
- Request them to take all necessary measures to follow up on the State Pollution Control Board's recommendations and to address the impact of the pollution on the communities' rights to water and health.

■ Call on them to undertake an independent and impartial human rights and environmental impact assessment of the proposed expansion in genuine and open consultation with the affected communities.

PLEASE WRITE TO:

Mr Jairam Ramesh
Minister of State for Environment
and Forests
Government of India
New Delhi 110003, India
Fax: +91 11 2436 0519
Salutation: Dear Minister

Mr Naveen Patnaik
Chief Minister
Government of Orissa
Bhubaneswar
Orissa, India
Fax: +91 674 2400 100
Salutation: Dear Chief Minister

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Amnesty International is a global movement of 2.2 million people in more than 150 countries and territories who campaign to end grave abuses of human rights.

Our vision is for every person to enjoy all the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards.

We are independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion – funded mainly by our membership and public donations.

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