

Media Advisory and Press Availability:

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International Coalition Warns: World Bank Driving Hazardous Development

***** Excellent visuals! Photo Opportunities! *****

WHAT: Demonstration - Civil society groups encircle the World Bank in "Caution" tape, demanding strong human rights safeguards
WHEN: **Friday April 17, 10:00 - 11:30am**
WHERE: Edward R Murrow Park, in front of the World Bank, H St and 18th St NW

Washington D.C. - As finance ministers from across the globe gather in Washington DC for the spring meetings of the World Bank April 17-19, human rights advocates urge their governments to prevent a watering down of social and environmental protections and to instead ensure that development respects human rights.

The Bank on Human Rights Coalition, a global coalition of social movements, civil society organizations, and grassroots groups working to ensure that all development finance institutions respect, protect, and fulfill human rights, is calling on the World Bank and its member states stop risking human lives and to change how they do development.

“The World Bank is trying to weaken its safeguards at the same time that it is increasing lending for extremely risky projects like massive infrastructure installations and financing in conflict zones,” explains Gretchen Gordon, Coordinator of the Bank on Human Rights Coalition. “It’s like racing a car through a crowded street with no headlights and no steering wheel – you can’t see the people or the potholes in the road. That’s not development, it’s insanity.”

“The World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank are responsible for grave violations of the human rights of thousands of indigenous peoples who were devastated by the construction of the Chixoy dam,” explained Juan de Dios Garcia Xajil, a member of the communities forcibly displaced to make way for a Guatemalan dam. “It seems that these banks don’t want to learn from their mistakes as they’re now promoting the Plan for Prosperity with Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras – a plan that imposes a model of development utterly opposed to the reality and necessities of those countries’ indigenous peoples, a plan constructed without their participation,” he said.

“When the Bank and the borrower country come up with a plan for investment in a given country, that process must focus not only on effective consultation with civil society, but also strong, sustainable monitoring of the real social and rights impact of the projects,” says Reem

Abdel Haliem, Economist on Poverty Issues, Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights. "Otherwise the Bank and the government end up funding projects that cause negative impacts, and they may not even realize it until the project is already implemented. This means the Bank is funding anti-development projects, which should not be its role."

"While the Bank reviews its social safeguard policies, it must listen more to those whose rights will most likely be negatively affected by future Bank lending, such as indigenous peoples," said Peter Kitelo, Coordinator, Forest Indigenous Peoples Network in Kenya, "rather than to the governments who have been overlooking and trampling on those rights. The Bank should also look at redressing past oversights, such as the Natural Resource Management Project in Kenya, which the Sengwer community believe has contributed to their being forcibly evicted from their homes."

The outcomes of the World Bank's safeguards review will inevitably influence the social and environmental frameworks of other development finance institutions, especially the recently created BRICS New Development Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank," said Caio Borges, attorney with the Brazilian organization, Conectas Direitos Humanos. "Despite their shortcomings, the safeguards set minimum requirements necessary to prevent development projects and policies from violating human rights or harming the environment. Civil society is closely monitoring the process and pushing governments to uphold the current safeguards, and more importantly, to make them more rights-respecting."

The Bank on Human Rights Coalition's concerns and recommendations regarding the World Bank Safeguards Review are available at: <http://bankonhumanrights.org/?p=64420>
Recommendations include: 1) require that Bank-financed activities respect human rights, 2) include robust due diligence measures to identify and address human rights risks, and 3) bring the safeguards in line with international human rights law and standards.

For further enquiries or to arrange an interview with a member of the Bank on Human Rights Coalition or our partners, please contact:

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SPECIFIC WORLD BANK-FINANCED PROJECTS

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Description of case: The World Bank-funded Cambodia Land Management and Administration Project (LMAP) was established to improve security of tenure and reduce land conflicts in Cambodia. However, a 2009 complaint to the Inspection Panel by representatives of the Boeung Kak Lake community in Phnom Penh alleged that the Bank's failure to supervise implementation of safeguards left them less secure and more vulnerable to forced eviction. More than 3500 families were forcibly evicted from their homes without resettlement assistance. Bank Management acknowledged "significant shortcomings in past Project implementation and supervision" and conceded, "supervision of safeguards and other social measures should have been more robust." The displaced Boeung Kak families have yet to receive any remedy for the grave harms they suffered.

Link for additional information: <http://www.inclusivedevelopment.net/cambodiacasestudy/>

Name: Peter Kitelo
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Description of case: The Kenya Natural Resource Management Project aimed to strengthen policies and practices to ensure the sustainable provision of water, improved irrigation, and enhanced forest management. However the NRMP ultimately empowered the Kenya Forest Service (KFS), who had shown a history of forced evictions against the Sengwer indigenous people, the resources to not only continue their practice of forced evictions but also substantially increase them. During the life of the project from 2007 until 2013, the Sengwer experienced forcible evictions in 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, and 2013. An Inspection Panel request was submitted in 2013 by community members and although the recently concluded Inspection Panel investigation could not prove a direct link between Bank funding and the KFS forced evictions of the Sengwer, the Panel found that: (1) The Bank failed its own Indigenous Peoples safeguard policy by not safeguarding the rights of indigenous peoples to their lands "because the proper steps to address the potential loss of customary rights were not taken as provided by the policy"; and (2) The Bank was non-compliant with its safeguard policies because the project sustained the conditions for further evictions by failing to adequately identify, address or mitigate the fact that the institution it was funding, KFS, was and still remains committed to eviction "before, during and after the conclusion of the NRMP". The Sengwer are hopeful that a real resolution can be found. They are hopeful that the Bank and the Government can recognise that, far from their being a threat to the forest, such peoples are best placed to protect their forests.

Link for additional information: <http://www.forestpeoples.org/topics/rights-land-natural-resources/news/2014/02/kenyan-government-s-forced-evictions-threaten-cult>

Name: Juan de Dios Garcia

Position: Director General

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Description of Case: The World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank funded Chixoy Hydroelectric Project was built on the Chixoy River in the Guatemalan highlands during the years of a repressive military dictatorship in the early 1980s. 33 communities, predominantly Maya Achí, were subjected to forced displacement at the hands of the Guatemalan government and civil patrols to make way for the dam. The Rio Negro community which refused to leave their lands suffered five separate massacres killing 444 of the 800 Maya Achí residents. In 2004, the affected communities reached an agreement with the Guatemalan government to assess the damages caused during construction of the Dam, and in 2010 a Reparations Plan was developed in a process involving the World Bank and IDB as observers. Four years later, the evicted and resettled communities continue to live in abject poverty, with 27 of the 33 resettled communities still without electricity. ADIVIMA is calling on the World Bank and IDB to fund the Reparations plan. The communities are now struggling to get information on a new economic development plan for Guatemala and its neighbors which has been developed by the World Bank and IDB in secret, without the participation of the communities that will be affected.

Link for additional information: <http://adivima.adivima.org.gt/>

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Description of case: The World Bank and the Nepal Electric Authority have planned a 75 km long, high capacity electricity transmission line as part of the Nepal Power Development Project funded by the World Bank. This transmission line goes through 5 districts and affects multiple indigenous groups, and it was designed without informing or consulting the peoples affected even though it will likely result in involuntary displacement, damage to cultural property, destruction of agricultural production, and division of communities. Furthermore, the project has caused high tensions in the region due to security forces repressing peaceful protests of the project, utilizing torture, detention, and violent attacks on women. The affected indigenous peoples have filed a complaint to the World Bank Inspection Panel, citing violations of conduct and consultation procedures and because there has been a lack of concrete assurances that there will be no negative impacts from this project. The main goal of the community is to reroute the transmission line away from the people's homes and to stop security forces from intimidating community leaders and committing human rights violations. The affected communities have employed various advocacy strategies to resolve the problem peacefully, including petitioning authorities and filing complaints to the National Human Rights Commission and the Supreme Court. The government however, has plans to deploy security forces.

Link for additional information: <http://www.aippnet.org/index.php/publication-sp-2697/human-rights/1418-briefing-paper-development-for-whom>