

National Consultation on Renewable and Sustainable Energy

February 25-26, 2012

(India Islamic Culture Centre, 87-88, Lodhi Estate, Lodhi Road, New Delhi- 110003)

Popular struggles in India against inappropriate and environmentally destructive energy generation projects have powerfully challenged a number of official assumptions and plans based on fossil fuel (coal or gas)-based electricity and nuclear power and on hydroelectricity from large dams.

Peaceful mass resistance movements against nuclear power projects have been under way for years in Koodankulam (Tamil Nadu) in the South, Jaitapur (Maharashtra) in the West, Gorakhpur (Haryana) in the North, and Haripur in the East. They received a tremendous boost in strength and popular support after the March 2011 multi-reactor nuclear catastrophe at Fukushima in Japan, and the observance of the 25th anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear meltdown in Ukraine, whose effects continue to unfold to this day.

Such movements are playing a vital role in resisting the government's ill-conceived plans to expand India's nuclear power generation capacity manifold by undemocratically imposing nuclear projects on an unwilling people, regardless of the grave safety and cost problems they pose.

All such campaigns and movements have brought the question of energy choices and options to the centre-stage of public debate amidst impressive recent advances in the deployment of renewable energy sources in India. The "renewables revolution", now under way, offers safe, environmentally benign, and increasing affordable alternatives both to fossil fuel-based and nuclear energy, without leaving toxic residues that remain hazardous for thousands of years.

"New renewables" such as solar power, wind generation, small hydroelectricity and biomass-based energy now have an installed capacity in excess of 20,000 megawatts (MW), more than four times the cumulative nuclear power capacity built over more than 40 years. These are safe, clean, sustainable, abundant and versatile sources ideally suited for distributed generation and decentralised consumption.

Their value as low- or zero-carbon energy sources cannot be overemphasised in the context of climate change and the need to transit to green energy paths. Nor can their direct relevance for people's needs and equitable development be ignored.

Yet, there has been very little discussion on how best and how rapidly renewable sources can be promoted to create a new energy system with decentralised two-way grids, in which consumers can also become small electricity producers. The potential of renewables, already spectacular in sun-blessed India, can be further multiplied with energy efficiency improvement, for which there is great scope in every sector of activity—from domestic use to agriculture, and from industry to housing.

We need to launch just such a discussion at this critical point, before India gets locked into large-scale centralised electricity generation based on huge, costly, national and

regional grids. It is imperative to develop a framework for an effective strategy of intervention in the energy discourse, which will also strengthen people's struggles against nuclear and fossil fuel-based power projects.

The Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace (CNDP) and the National Alliance of Antinuclear Movements (NAAM) are jointly organising a Consultation on this issue on Feb 25-26, 2012 at Delhi. This meeting will bring together several key players in the ongoing discourse on Energy. These will include leaders of protest movements against Nuclear energy from different parts of India; energy planners and entrepreneurs, and those from state and non-state sectors who have worked on renewable energy, in the region and outside.

We are looking forward to involve a broad range of organisations with a commitment to renewable energy, such as Greenpeace, Heinrich Boell Foundation, PRAYAS, Popular Education and Action Centre (PEACE) and the Indian National Social Action Forum (INSAF) and secure the participation of experts, analysts and activists from other countries too, who can share their experience and enrich the discussion.

The consultation is expected to go beyond a purely technical understanding of the issues, and evolve a set of policy level recommendations intended to lead to a comprehensive, carbon free and nuclear free road map for India. Such a road map must prioritise meeting the energy needs of all our people sustainably and equitably. Whilst recognising the urgency and imperatives of climate change and global warming and its impact in our region.

We write this to solicit your support, sponsorship and participation in this consultation. Please indicate if you wish to prepare a paper on a particular topic. The organisers will decide on the final format and sessions once we hear from you. A list of invitees will also be circulated and your additional suggestions are welcome.

With warm regards,

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