

Dated: 22nd March 2021

Mr. E. Nong Rong,
Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan
Chinese Embassy in Pakistan
3rd Avenue, Diplomatic Enclave
Islamabad
Islamic Republic of Pakistan

Subject: Request for reviewing coal power projects and addressing local communities' concerns in Thar (Sindh), Pakistan

Dear Mr. E. Nong Rong!

We represent the residents of the villages located in Thar Coalfield Block-I (TCB-I), TCB-II, TCB-VI and in the vicinity of Gorrano Reservoir in Sindh province of Pakistan. Against the backdrop of the challenges posed by climate change, we realize that international cooperation to maintain our planet earth healthy has become all the more important and urgent. It is the time for all the stakeholders, including the governments, financial institutions, banks, businesses, civil society organization and the native people, to come together and find common ground for ensuring social and environmental justice in national and international development.

Supporting China's commitment to fight climate change and initiative to make BRI green:

Earlier In September 2020, Chinese President Xi Jinping made a commitment to drastically reduce emissions. While speaking via a video link to UN general assembly in New York, he announced that China would aim to hit peak emissions before 2030 and for carbon neutrality by 2060¹. On the fifth anniversary of Paris Agreement on 12th December 2020, the Chinese president announced some further commitments for 2030: China will lower its carbon dioxide emissions per unit of GDP by over 65 percent from the 2005 level, increase the share of non-fossil fuels in primary energy consumption to around 25 percent, increase the forest stock volume by 6 billion cubic meters from the 2005 level, and bring its total installed capacity of wind and solar power to over 1.2 billion kilowatts². We welcome this commitment on the part of China to fight climate change. Earlier at the second Belt and Road Forum in April, 2019, Xi said: "We need to pursue open, green and clean cooperation. The Belt and Road is not an exclusive club; it aims to promote green development. We may launch green infrastructure projects, make green investment and provide green financing to protect the Earth which we all call home"³. We also appreciate and support the Chinese initiative for making the BRI green.

China's pledge to fight climate change and making BRI green is in line with Pakistan's commitment to Paris Agreement. While speaking at the recently held Climate Ambition Summit 2020, Imran Khan, Prime Minister of Pakistan, announced that Pakistan will not have 'any more power based on coal' to embrace renewable energy as part of its contribution in global efforts against climate change⁴. In light of Pakistani premier's announcement for developing clean energy and China's commitment to Paris Agreement and building a green BRI, we welcome the Chinese companies and banks to shore up support for Pakistan's renewable energy infrastructure deployment. We hope Sino-Pak cooperation to promote renewable energy under China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)—a project of BRI—will go a long way to ease local energy shortages, fight climate change and ensure sustainable development in Pakistan. We expect the green investments made under BRI will also be quite instrumental in ensuring social and environmental justice in Pakistan.

Welcoming China's decision to stop supporting coal power projects in Bangladesh:

In latter to government of Bangladesh dated 2nd February, Liu Zhenhua, Economic and Commercial Counsellor Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Bangladesh stated: "The Chinese side shall no longer consider

¹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-54256826>

² <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202012/13/WS5fd575a2a31024ad0ba9b7ac.html>

³ https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1658424.shtml

⁴ <https://gulffnews.com/world/asia/pakistan/pakistan-moves-towards-coal-free-future-with-focus-on-clean-energy-1.75900265>

projects with high pollution and high energy consumption such as coal mining, coal-fired power stations, etc.” We appreciate and welcome this decision to stop coal power projects in Bangladesh.

Social and environmental justice: a key to sustainable development

We believe that environmental and social justice is a must for sustainable development. Here in the following lines, we want to apprise you of our concerns regarding the ongoing projects of coal mining and installation of coal-fired power stations in our area, Thar.

Emissions from coal power projects posing serious health and environmental risks: Combustion of coal involves emissions of certain air pollutants, causing serious health and environmental risks. Notwithstanding the fact that it has already been suffering from the air pollution levels that are among the highest in the world, Pakistan has not developed any emission standards. Nor has any national clean air action plan been formulated to reduce air pollution in a time bound manner. Presently there isn't any clarity on the observance of any emission standards in the massive cluster of coal mines and power plants currently being developed in Thar. Against this backdrop of no effective environmental governance mechanisms in place, compliance of any emissions standards in the development and operations of coal mines and power doesn't seem possible. Emissions from Thar coal mines and power plants will expose local population to serious health risks besides causing severe environmental damage to the desert's physical and natural environment⁵. We are keen to know from the Embassy of China in Pakistan about the emission standards they have been maintaining to stop air pollution.

Extensive water requirements of coal mining and power plants to cause severe water and drainage crisis: Extensive groundwater extraction involved in dewatering for coalmining and huge supplies of water for cooling the boilers of coal-fired power plants will cause severe water and drainage crisis. Groundwater extraction will deplete water table in Thar while the proposed water supply scheme from Farsh Makhi Canal for coal power plants will adversely affect water rights of the farmers in the canal command area. Besides the brine water discharged from coal mines and chemical effluents from coal power plants will contaminate the groundwater. The water crisis thus caused will adversely impact both the lives and livelihoods of local people and indigenous flora and fauna in Thar. Besides the proposed water supply scheme is designed to pass through the bed of Puran River⁶, blocking the natural drainage and exposing the local communities to potential flood disaster during heavy rains in lower Sindh⁷. We ask the authorities concerned to share the measures they have been adopting to maintain the health of local hydrology in development of coal mining and power plant in Thar Coal Block-I.

Land degradation to be caused by open-pit mining will have serious implications on bio-diversity: The ongoing open-pit mining in Thar is oblivious to the social and environmental problems caused by it. Massive excavations of different layers of soil for open pit mining and then closing these pits after exhausting the coal reserves are likely to destroy the roots of many drought resilient plants of Thar Desert. In addition, disposal of brine water from mines and effluent water with coal ash from power plants will leachate underground and cause severe land degradation, negatively impacting the survival of indigenous plant species. Extinction of these plants, which provide fodder for the animals and habitat to wildlife, will have adverse impacts on bio-diversity. Loss of bio-diversity thus caused will induce ecological imbalance as well as food insecurity and impoverishment of the livestock dependent local communities. We ask the Embassy of Peoples Republic of China in Pakistan to share the system the authorities concerned have put in place to safeguard biological diversity, particularly in coal mining.

Land acquisition causing massive displacement, dispossession and disempowerment: The ongoing land acquisition and resettlement processes taking place in Thar without any official policy are characterized by arbitrariness, exclusionary decision-making, non-transparency and extraordinary delays in payment of compensation amounts. Moreover, there does not exist any system to proactively provide land acquisition and resettlement related official information to the affected communities. Blatant violations of United Nations' 'Basic

⁵ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1560332/thar-coal-power-plants-could-cause-29000-deaths-from-pollution-says-new-study>

⁶ Puran is a dead river, the bed of which serves as a natural drainage in Thar and lower Sindh

⁷ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1573293/thar-coal-power-projects-pose-serious-financial-environmental-risks-study>

Principles and Guidelines on Development Based Evictions and Displacement⁸ are made in the land acquisition for coal power projects in Thar. Forced evictions coupled with no compensation against the grazing land have been causing massive impoverishment among the displaced families, a significant number of which are landless. Massive irregularities and human rights violations in land acquisition process have been causing a sense of deprivation and anger among the local communities. We demand immediate stoppage of land acquisition in Thar coalfield blocks until an official policy, considerate to basic human and livelihood rights of the affected communities, is adopted.

Highhandedness with local workers by Chinese companies: We have been assured time and again that the coal power projects will usher in an era of unprecedented growth, progress and development for Thari people by creating job opportunities for the local communities. However as they started their operations in Thar, the coal power companies have been employing non-locals on priority basis. All the skilled and high paid jobs are meant for outsiders, most often belonging to other provinces or other parts of Sind province. If the local people of Thar are ever employed, they are offered unskilled, low-paid, menial and temporary jobs. Moreover, the workers hailing Thar are forced to work under exploitative conditions and laid off on one or the other petty pretext. Recently, as many as 150 workers have been sacked by a coal company without serving them any notice.⁹ We ask the government of China to ensure priority to local communities in employment by the coal power companies and compliance of labor rights.

Conclusion:

We believe that the environmental and social problems emanating from Thar coal projects are against the spirit of China's Green Credit Guidelines as well as the Paris Agreement and other international laws and treaties. They pose serious reputational risks to the government of China. We demand:

1. The government of China should review all the ongoing coal mining and coal-based power plants in Thar so as to ensure compliance of social and environmental standards
2. Following the precedence of Bangladesh, the government of China should support no more coal power project in Thar. Nor should it support scaling-up of any existing coal power project in Thar
3. The Embassy of China in Pakistan should immediately establish a transparent mechanism to redress the grievances of local communities affected by the ongoing coal power projects in Thar.

Hope you will positively consider our concerns and request. Please let us know if you have any questions or need more information regarding our concerns and request for pausing the project. We expect an open and positive communication with Chinese stakeholders.

Sincerely

Mr./Ms. Name of Village Representative,

Name of Village, Name of Block

Name of Taluka, Name of District

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⁸ https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Housing/Guidelines_en.pdf a

⁹ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1603998>