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PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF ALL HUMAN RIGHTS, CIVIL, POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS, INCLUDING THE RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT

**Written statement* submitted by Society for Threatened Peoples,
a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[20 August 2008]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

People's Republic of China

The Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) is home to 40 known species of endangered plants and 141 known species of endangered animals makes this sufficient cause for alarm. A recent study conducted by U.S. and Chinese scientists reported that global warming could cause a dramatic decline in plant species diversity on the rangelands of the Tibetan Plateau, in particular. Furthermore, climate change and large-scale developments are continuously leading to desertification, glacial melt, and flood.

The Tibetan Plateau is the source of many Asia's major rivers. Currently 90% of the runoff of these rivers flows downstream to eleven countries, providing water resources for 47% of the world's total population. China, however, has plans to divert many of these rivers to meet the increasing water demands of its farming and tourism industries, despite the fact that several are already drying up due to climate change.

Since 1985, the Yellow River has run dry for progressively longer periods each year. Likewise, in 2006, the Yangtze River, which serves approximately 500 million people along its course, had the lowest water level in its upper reaches since 1920. Nonetheless, many of China's new development projects under construction or scheduled to begin in the future will magnify the damage already done to the natural ecosystems along these rivers. Chinese plans for a new nationwide power grid, involving the construction of 14 new hydro-dams on the Mekong and the Yangtze rivers, and adding to the 22,000 large dams already existing, seem to exemplify Chinese unwillingness to halt 'progress' in consideration of the environment.

According to the official newspaper "People's Daily", "Water shortage has become a problem, restricting the development of China's western region. It is estimated that areas in the upper and middle reaches of [the] Yellow River will face a water shortage of four billion cubic meters by the year 2010. And the figure will skyrocket to 11 billion cubic meters in 2030." The Chinese government's efforts to divert rivers from their natural courses and the areas naturally sustained by them, demonstrates a disregard for not only the wildlife along the rivers, but also the people.

Development is the major factor influencing the quality of Tibet's ecosystem. According to Dawa Tsering, Head of World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF) China's Program Office in Lhasa, " [Once Tibet's ecosystem is] damaged, [the effects will be] extremely difficult to reverse," therefore, "integrating the needs of local development with conserving Tibet's biodiversity is in need of urgent attention."

In recent years, the Chinese government has made significant efforts to protect the plateau's fragile environment by implementing wildlife conservation policies, but a troubling gap between official policies and their actual implementation remains. In early 2007, several skinned chiru carcasses, whose shahtoosh wool is a precious commodity on the black market, were found after poachers had been spotted along the Khunu Mountain range. Additionally, Chinese authorities are enticing Tibetans to wear traditional clothes, trimmed with animal skins, at public gatherings and official functions.

Since the early 1960s, China's misguided approach to agriculture and economic development has accelerated the deterioration of the Tibetan rangeland. Policies supporting infrastructure development, the reclamation of communal land for commercial

development, fencing, and widespread harvesting of wild medicinal herbs, uncontrolled gold mining, and the permanent settlement of nomads have all contributed to grassland degradation, even though each of these policies conflict with China's stated interest in protecting Tibet's natural environment.

Under China's 'Western Development Strategy,' the new 1,142 km Golmud-Lhasa railway was built on 550 km of continuous permafrost. Hundreds of millions of dollars were spent to provide environmental safeguards along the railway. According to the U.S. Embassy's research, the constant maintenance work on the highway parallel to the railroad has had a much more devastating effect on the plateau's environment than the railway.

The concerns occasioning this new railway are not, however, limited to environmental issues. The new railway will facilitate immigration of Han Chinese in TAR and therefore contribute to more ethnic tensions and to a profound change of the ethnic composition of TAR:

In 2006, following large-scale government initiatives to exploit Tibet's natural resources, a total of 194 mining permits and 249 prospecting permits were granted to foreign investor-involved projects. The British company, Central China Goldfield, and Canada's, Continental Minerals Corporation, among others, have received such permits and are currently conducting mining operations in Tibet. In February 2007, the official Chinese press announced that there are reserves of several billion tons of iron ore, 30-40 million tons of copper, 40 million tons of lead and zinc, and 600 new potential sites for mines on the Tibetan Plateau.

The mining operations will endanger Tibet's fragile environment. Improved infrastructure will bring more Chinese to Tibet and displace ethnic Tibetan populations to extract the mineral resources. Herders are already being forcibly evicted to make room for new dams and roads.

Many had been relocated away from their native homes and forced to slaughter their livestock. In January 2008, there were plans to move more than 52,000 Tibetan herders and farmers to new homes. In most cases, their lack of marketable skills prevents them from finding alternate means of making a living.

In 2006 alone, there was a 36 percent increase in the number of tourists in Tibet. Of these, 93 percent were from China. In the first ten months of 2007, Tibet received 3.72 million tourists, a 64 percent increase from the previous year. Of these, only 350,000 were overseas visitors. Chinese tourism bureaus have attributed this trend of systemic growth in tourism to the construction of the new railway.

Although we lack official data recording the number of Chinese people who arrive in Tibet by rail for purposes other than tourism, it is safe to assume that the new railroad will have impacts similar to those of other railroads connecting China to Inner Mongolia and Xinjiang, where the original inhabitants became minority by outnumbering Han Chinese. In Inner Mongolia, experts estimate that the population in the region increased some five times from 1912-1949. By 1949, the Han Chinese outnumbered the Mongolians by 11 to 1. Such migration has not only marginalized the native Mongolian population, diluting its political significance and overshadowing its particular concerns with those of the Han

Chinese, but it has also forced Mongolians to abandon their “age-old nomadic traditions,” and led to grassland degradation.

Based on a survey of 270,000 passengers over a period of approximately 75 days, or about 3,600 passengers per day, the Director of the TAR Development and Reform Committee, Jin Shixun, asserted that 60% of those using the Qinghai-Tibet railway were businesspersons, students, transient workers, traders, and individuals visiting relatives, and only 40 % were tourists. ICT estimates that if a similar proportion prevailed throughout the remainder of the first year of operation, then approximately 900,000 passengers of the 1.5 million who took the train that year could have been non-Tibetan businesspersons, workers, and traders, who intended to remain in the TAR for a period.

Society for Threatened Peoples urges the HRC to call on the People's Republic of China to:

- Reinvest revenues generated by the Qinghai-Tibet railway to empower local Tibetans by improving already existing schools, providing new vocational training institutions and establishing healthcare institutions in rural areas.
- Include local Tibetans as active stakeholders in all strategic development programs.
- Allow nomads to manage livestock without imposing restrictions on mobility and enforce an immediate moratorium on nomad resettlement.
- Enforce strictly existing regulations and implement further environmental protection policies, specifically with regard to Tibet’s endangered species.
- Cease mining activities in ecologically fragile areas in TAR and mostly Tibetan populated areas, including the Yarlung Tsangpo and other regions in the proximity of nature reserves.
- Abandon all development projects potentially damaging vitally important Tibetan river systems.
- Exert further conservation efforts in existing nature reserves by providing sufficient funds, professionally-trained staff and resources to train current employees.
- Allocate more funds on conducting researches vital to conservation of little-known Tibetan species.
- Construct new parks and protected areas to preserve threatened and endangered species.

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