



**The London Resolution on the Gulf of Mannar
as a UNESCO World Heritage Site
Linnean Society of London, 25-26 November 2008**

1. We, a group of concerned citizens, some of us representing Hindu organisations in our own countries and coming from many nations and academic disciplines, met at the Linnean Society of London on November 25th and 26th, 2008, to discuss our shared concerns about the impact of the Sethusamudram Shipping Canal Project (SSCP) on the Gulf of Mannar region.
2. The following resolutions represent the consensus of our deliberations:
 - a) we call upon the Government of India to order the immediate cessation of all dredging and related activities in the Gulf of Mannar region;
 - b) we call upon the governments of India and Sri Lanka to initiate the application process for the recognition of the Gulf of Mannar region for a mixed Cultural and Natural World Heritage Site (UNESCO), given its outstanding universal value as a biodiversity hotspot and a place of deep religious and sacred significance.
3. The following are the reasons for this urgent call for action:
 - a) in recognition of the extraordinary qualities of the region in terms of its biodiversity, and with the approval of the Indian government, UNESCO was able to declare the Gulf of Mannar as a biosphere reserve under the *Man and Biosphere Programme* in 1989. Furthermore, in its report of September 2005, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) warned that, as a site of outstanding biodiversity, the Gulf of Mannar would be severely impacted were the SSCP to go ahead.
 - b) We are therefore deeply concerned at the patently flawed Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), which was carried out in haste, and with a failure to comply with the requirements of Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration of 1992, which states that environmental issues are best handled with participation of all concerned citizens, at the relevant level. Equally, at the national level, each individual should have appropriate access to information held by public authorities concerning the potential impacts of projects on the environment. The affected communities should be granted

the opportunity to participate in the decision-making processes.

c) This obligation to inform local communities should apply in particular to the fisher folk communities whose livelihood will be threatened owing to the construction and operation of the ship canal.

d) Furthermore, the Government of India has an obligation under Article 13(d) of the Convention on Biological Diversity to notify Sri Lanka immediately of any danger and damage likely to be caused through the construction and operation of the ship canal and to prevent such damage. That consultation process was not carried out.

e) The operation and maintenance of the SSCP will have the following inevitable and disastrous ecological and social impacts:

i) the disruption and damage to the productive marine ecosystem through a massive increase in the burden of silting and sedimentation, in particular affecting the coral reefs, the sea grass beds, oyster beds, and food fisheries;

ii) the salinization of the shallow aquifers on both sides of the channel as a consequence of hydraulic pressure acting on the vesicular limestone basin, thereby contaminating and disrupting the freshwater supply to the coastal communities in both countries;

iii) the endangering and even local extinction of important species such as the dugong, sea snake (at least 25 different species) from the region; and, as consequence,

iv) the likely collapse of the entire ecosystem.

4. The Gulf of Mannar, encompassing Ram Sethu (Adam's Bridge) has outstanding universal value for millions of Hindus throughout the world as a place of profound religious and sacred significance. The Awké: Kon guidelines under the Convention of Biological Diversity, which has been accepted by India, obligates the State to conduct impact assessments on a proposed development that may affect 'the values, belief systems, customs, the relationship with the local environment and particular species'.

5. The Supreme Court of India holds the State to be the trustee of all natural resources, which are by nature meant for public use and enjoyment. The public at large is beneficiary of the seashore, running waters, airs, forests and ecologically fragile lands. The State as a trustee is under a legal duty to protect the natural resources.

Hence, in the matter of the building and intended operation of the ship canal, the State of India has abdicated its obligation to be a trustee of India's cultural and natural resources. It is therefore incumbent on the government of India to ordain that further work on the ship canal be terminated and that the Gulf of Mannar should be restored to its condition prior to the commencement of dredging.

6. Considering the diversity of under utilised renewable resources in a region that has undergone conflict over the past 20 years, the government of India, together with that of Sri Lanka, has the opportunity to build a sustainable future in line with the requirements of the Commission for Sustainable Development and thereby to foster peace and cooperation in the region.

Original signed by:

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Regent of Ubud

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Author, Environmentalist, Expert on Climate Change

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Guest at the last four General Assemblies of the World Council of Churches

Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue at the Vatican

Member of the International Advisory Council for the Tony Blair Faith Foundation

Dr. I Gusti Ngurah Arya Wedakarna (Bali, Indonesia)

Prince of Dalem Benculuh Tegeh Kori

General Chairman, The Foundation of the Indonesian Tourism Envoy Association

(ADWINDO); President, The Sukarno Center, Leader, the Mahendradata Foundation IGN

Representing 3.2 million Hindus of Bali & 15 million Hindus of Indonesia

Somduth Dolthuman (Mauritius)

President, Mauritius Sanatan Dharma Temples Federation

Representing 270 Mandirs in Mauritius and 600,000 individual members.

Officer of the Star and Key of the Indian Ocean (GOSK)

Katherine Goldsmith (UK)

Shalina Bhaboeti (The Netherlands)

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Herpetologist and Wildlife Conservationist

Dr Rajesh Parmar

Founder & Spiritual Leader, International Siddhashram Shakti Centre

7,000 members (UK, India and Malaysia)

P. Waytha Moorthy (UK/Malaysia)
HINDRAF Malaysia – 200,000 members

Mrs. Joan Sikand (USA/Kenya)
Friends of Nairobi National Park – 1300 members

Anant Vyas (UK)
Executive Representative, Hindu Council UK (HCUK)

Nalin Parekh (UK)
World Council of Hindus – 1200 members

Raj Chanan (UK)
VHP (East London) UK – 600 members

Douglas Wickramaratne (UK)
Sinhala Association of Sri Lanka in the UK – 1200 members

Ram Gupta (UK)

Rajendra Rastogi (UK)

Kushla Shukla (UK)

Dr Sudarshan Kapur (UK)
Jag Janani Pariwar, UK

A. Pradhan (UK)

Prem Nath Fing (UK)
Radha Krishna Temple – 500 members

Satish Gautham (UK)
Sewa International – 50 members

Dharamjay Sundhoo (UK)
Arya Samaj – 600 members

Boopendre Sundhoo (UK)
Mauritius Hindu Association – 600 members

Satish Gautam (UK)
Hindu Swayam Sevak Sangh – 350 members

Venilal Vaghela (UK)
Hindu Council UK – 10,000 members, 500 affiliate organisations

Rakhal Saha (UK)
Gaudiya Mission UK – 500 members

Chhaya Rani Saha (UK)

Overseas Women's Aid UK – 100 members

Prem Kumarvohra (UK)

Hindu Cultural Society – 1,000 members

B.N. Bhanot (UK)

Hindu Elderly Associations – 46 members

Prem Modgil

Hindu Cultural Society/Barnet Hindu Forum

Vinaya Sharma

Vinod & Sudha Kapashi

Mahavir Foundation