

## DECLARATION

### From the Regional Dialogue on

### **RIVER WATERS: PERSPECTIVES AND CHALLENGES FOR ASIA**

18-20 NOVEMBER, 2011 HELD AT THE INDIA INTERNATIONAL CENTRE, NEW DELHI

We recognise the right of the growing economies of the region to develop energy, resources and water for their development needs. However, in view of the unquantified risks – climate change, economic uncertainty and social and ecological damage, we call for a pause to reflect on further construction of large dams until all parties take full account of the balance of ecological, economic and human impacts along the entire length of the watercourse and prioritise the rights and interests of all riparian peoples in present and future projects.

The waters of the Third Pole, its glaciers and snow, its rivers and lakes, have importance and impacts, including far downstream, and thus constitute a common heritage of importance to all humanity. Their stewardship is a shared responsibility and the benefits they bring are a right held in common by all the inhabitants of the region, from the Qinghai-Tibet plateau to the estuaries, for present and future generations of the peoples of its watersheds.

Today the waters and cryosphere of the Himalayan and Trans-Himalayan Region (The Third Pole) are threatened by over-extraction, overambitious engineering, pollution and climate change. This in turn poses a threat to the stability of the region's weather systems and the health and livelihoods of the more than one billion people who depend on its rivers, and to the survival of the many other forms of life they support. Historic tensions and regional rivalries have impeded the full cooperation and creative thinking that is required to prevent further deterioration in the Third Pole. We urge all countries, especially the largest riparians India and China, to lead the effort, in cooperation with all the governments of the region, to institute the wide ranging and urgent collaboration that responsible stewardship and the restoration of the health of the region's transboundary rivers now demands.

#### **We respectfully propose to all riparian governments, scholars, experts and non-governmental organisations the following urgent steps:**

- To pledge to respect and protect the region's rich natural resources, ecological and cultural diversity and to give priority to the equitable sharing of the environmental, social and economic benefits of the region's transboundary rivers
- To adopt a holistic, cooperative and multilevel approach to the management of transboundary rivers, taking the health and flow of the river as the prime value.
- To institute and support confidence building exchanges across national boundaries, between upper and lower riparians and across all relevant sectors of society in pursuit of mutually beneficial development and resource stewardship, to include official, scientific, technological and civil society exchanges.
- To institute immediate cooperation on flood forecasting, water and soil conservation and the sharing of relevant scientific and technical data including the establishment of a cross border integrated digital platform for the Yarlung-Tsangpo/Brahmaputra basin
- To establish and develop a regional knowledge base, to include traditional, cultural, technical and scientific knowledge, open to all
- That all governments pledge to cooperate over development planning, promote transparency and to carry out full river assessments of all engineering projects
- To establish a regional communities forum to give expression to community interests, value to local and indigenous knowledge, and to safeguard the rights of vulnerable peoples and disadvantaged communities.