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To  
Smt. Sheila Dikshit  
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**Sub: Renuka Dam and Delhi**

Respected Smt Sheila Dixit ji,

The Delhi government has been promoting and funding the controversial 148 m high Renuka Dam in Sirmaur District of Himachal Pradesh. This dam on river Giri, a tributary of Yamuna River is basically meant to supply water to Delhi. The Rs 3900 crores (2006 price line) project is to be funded with 90% of the money coming from the Centre. In fact the Delhi government has already paid the Himachal Pradesh Power Corporation Limited (HPPCL) a sum of Rs. 215 crore for land acquisition and displacement related to this Renuka dam from which Delhi hopes to get 23 cubic meters per second water for nine post-monsoon months. We the citizens and groups of Delhi (some of us recently visited the valley) after study of the project and Delhi's water situation would like to raise the following points:

1. **Avoidable losses** According to a number of studies, including a recent ASSOCHAM<sup>1</sup> study and also the statements of Delhi Jal Board, water losses in Delhi during transmission and distribution are 35-40%, which should be no more than 10-15% even by developing country standards. 23% of the water supply connections remain unmetered. Most of the bulk water meters of the Delhi Jal Board have not been functioning for many years, so a disintegrated analysis as to where these losses are going is not possible. This state of affairs has been known to exist for over a decade, but there is no change in this state of affairs. Why is the DJB not able to install functioning bulk water meters at various inlets, including upto the colony level inlets? Why is the DJB not able to reduce the losses? If Delhi could reduce the losses from 40% to technically feasible 10%, the water saved would be almost the same quantity that Delhi hopes to get from the proposed Renuka dam at far less costs and impacts.

Similarly, why is Delhi not taking other possible demand side management options to discourage avoidable misuse of water? Here it is equally important to note that Delhi has been using its current water supply in a most inequitable way. While the vast majority of the population struggles to get water for their daily basic needs, there are islands that use water most wastefully. This is the known state of affairs for many years and Delhi government has achieved precious little improvement in this situation. Sooner, rather than later, we need to realize that Delhi cannot keep demanding more water for itself from far-off places when there are competing and justifiable demands on that water from local people.

2. **Non-essential activities** Delhi is basically dependent on water imported from long distances. Despite this a lot of avoidable water-intensive non essential activities are allowed to continue in Delhi, including licensed and other water bottling plants (including by the DJB and Railways), golf courses, water parks and so on. How can Delhi justify demands for more water from long distances when such non-essential water guzzling activities are allowed to go on here?

3. **Rainwater harvesting** Even as lip service is being paid and massive amounts spent ritualistically every year in advertisements, why there is so little progress on the ground in achieving Rain Water

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<sup>1</sup> <http://beta.thehindu.com/news/cities/Delhi/article76718.ece>, accessed on June 23, 2010

Harvesting (RWH) in Delhi? What proportion of Government (Centre, State and city government) buildings, embassies, commercial buildings, offices, malls, multiplexes, colleges, schools, institutional buildings, road surfaces, flyovers, parks and such other open spaces have installed RWH systems? Why should they all not be given say a two-year time limit to achieve this, failure in the end inviting punitive measures<sup>2</sup>? Without achieving such measures, can Delhi justify demanding more water from outside? Should not Delhi be protecting its local water systems of tanks, baolis, lakes and so on before it starts looking for additional water from far-off regions? Why is Delhi allowing the local water systems to be systematically destroyed year after year? The recent incident at Muradnagar where local farmers took over the control of the water supply to Delhi from the Ganga Canal is one of series of such incidents in the past where upstream demands have held Delhi's water use hostage. Such incidents underscore the need for Delhi to manage its water within limits that depend largely on local sources of water including rainwater harvests.

4. **Groundwater over use and recharge** It is well known that Delhi uses (as in 2004, it would have increased thereafter) about 480 Million Cubic Meters of Groundwater per annum, which is about 170% of annual recharge potential amounting to 280 MCM. These groundwater use figures are likely to be conservative estimates. The actual recharge potential is likely to be less than this considering the rapid pace at which we are destroying local water bodies, the Ridge, the floodplain and other recharge systems. However, considering the floodplains, Ridge and an extensive concrete built up area, there is huge unexplored recharge potential and Delhi government is taking very little effective action to achieve that potential. Is there any justification for Delhi demanding additional water from far-off sources before it realizes this huge potential, which may actually provide greater storage space in underground aquifers than proposed dams like Renuka may provide?

5. **Wastewater treatment and Recycle** Delhi is currently producing at least 800 MGD of wastewater (DJB claims to supply 800 MGD plus additional local groundwater use of at least 200 MGD, thus total water use of 1000 MGD, of as per standard assumption, 80% would be returning as sewage). But the Design capacity of Delhi's Sewage Treatment Plants (STP) is about 520 MGD, actual treatment happening is closer to 380 MGD. (DJB is claiming that it is selling about 100 MGD of treated sewage to bodies like Pragati Power project, NDPL, Jindal, MCD, among others.) This means that *by design* Delhi does not have capacity to treat the sewage it generates and untreated sewage is by design, destined to be dumped in the Yamuna River, in complete violation of the Water Pollution Control Act of 1974. If Delhi gets more freshwater, it will generate more sewage, worsening the situation of Yamuna River in Delhi and downstream of Delhi. This will be in violation of the law and the declared objective of the Prime Minister-headed National Ganga River Basin Authority. Should not Delhi be expected to put its house in order in terms of installing adequate capacity of operating STPs in Delhi for the current and future sewage that Delhi will generate? Should not all the industries, hotels, office complexes, malls, multiplexes and such units be asked to install functional STPs in their premises and recycle part of treated water in their units in say next two years, punitive measures kicking in if they fail to achieve that at the end of that term? Why should the hundreds of parks in Delhi continue to be irrigated with freshwater? Why should Delhi be demanding more freshwater from outside without achieving all this?

6. **Issues related to environmental and social costs/destruction due to Renuka Dam** Delhi seems to have got used to demanding water from far-off sources. Some of the sources that Delhi has used up in the process in the past include: Bhakra Dam (Sutlej River), Hathnikund barrage and Western Yamuna

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<sup>2</sup> In the past notifications and deadlines have been issued, but there was neither the declaration of consequences when these nor implemented, nor the will to implement them.

Canal (Yamuna River), Ramganga Dam (Ramganga River), Tehri Dam (Bhagirathi – Ganga River). The huge displacements and environmental destruction that these projects have created are fresh in people's minds and the number of sufferers keeps going up, they getting no benefits, only the costs. What right Delhi has to demand more of such displacement and destruction?

Now Delhi is saying that it wants to *purchase* more water and it claims that Himachal is the next *willing seller*<sup>3</sup> through the building of Renuka Dam. The trouble is, that the reality is quite complex and this attitude of Delhi rulers as buyers of water from such far off dams without bothering about the consequences thereof would be pretty shocking, if true. Renuka dam with live storage capacity of 498 MCM will displace at least 6000 people from 34 villages, submerge about 1600 ha of land, mostly very fertile land or dense biodiversity rich forest, implying uprooting of several lakh trees, thus destroying a huge carbon sink and implying huge climate change impact (in complete violation of the declared aim of the National Action Plan on Climate Change and National Green Mission), destruction of the river and so on. Briefly, it will create immense destruction which seems completely avoidable. There are many other related issues, including that of lack of legal memorandum of agreement, demand from the upper Yamuna basin states (Haryana, UP, Rajasthan) for share in benefits, the huge economic cost, the serious impact of the project on existing downstream hydropower project and other use of the river, inadequate EIA, public consultation and so on. In short, we do not think there is any case for Delhi to demand and facilitate building of Renuka dam for its use.

Under the circumstances, we do not think there is any justification in Delhi's demand for this dam. We urge you kindly give this issue serious thought and review Delhi government's position on the same. Delhi must give a lead to the entire country in managing its water within available limits rather than plan on poaching water from far flung areas, which provides the city dwellers with a false sense of unlimited and plentiful supplies, just because Delhi happens to be the nation's capital. Let Delhi under your stewardship set a shining example for other cities in the country to follow by withdrawing from the Dam project on river Giri at Renuka ji.

We would be happy to come and meet you and explain to you in detail why we are saying this.

We will await an early and point wise reply on this from you.

**Endorsed by:**

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<sup>3</sup> The phrases used by Delhi Chief Minister Smt Sheila Dixit when a delegation met her on July 23, 2009 on the issue of Renuka Dam.

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