



Call for Action !

Tourism Leave Our Coasts Alone!

A Call to Protect India's Coastal Ecology from Irresponsible and Unregulated Tourism

EQUATIONS statement on World Tourism Day
27 September 2010

On World Tourism Day 2010, EQUATIONS calls for a re-examination of the claim that tourism and biodiversity are mutually dependent. Documenting numerous instances of tourism's irresponsible development on the coast, we reiterate the urgent need for stringent regulation to protect our coasts and the rights and livelihoods of coastal communities. To endorse this statement please send a mail to campaigns@equitabletourism.org.

Speaking on the theme of World Tourism Day 2010 "Tourism and Biodiversity" UNWTO (World Tourism Organisation) Secretary-General Taleb Rifai, claims, "Tourism and biodiversity are mutually dependent. UNWTO wishes to raise awareness and calls upon the tourism stakeholders and travellers themselves to contribute their part of the global responsibility to safeguard the intricate web of unique species and ecosystems that make up our planet". The High Level Dialogue on Tourism, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development, in the southern Chinese city of Guangzhou, the host of the WTD celebrations, will reportedly debate issues ranging from the economic value of biodiversity for tourism, to how to integrate biodiversity protection into planning for sustainable tourism. We wonder, if apart from the UNWTO itself, anyone else actually believes its propaganda!

Cashing in on Biodiversity

That tourism and biodiversity are mutually dependent is a myth increasingly being propagated. The UN International Year of Ecotourism in 2002 was an earlier global attempt to do this. The purpose these myths serve is to open the doors to the global tourism industry in ecologically fragile areas, and establish tourism as the new patron of conservation, dislodging the role and rights of indigenous people and nature dependent communities. Concepts such as the economic value of biodiversity promote the idea of nature as a tradable commodity, which suits very well a consumptive industry such as tourism.

Tourism is the only industry that sells a product it does not own! The coasts, the rivers, the mountains, the forests and the deserts – are all sold as tourism products – without acknowledging that these exist only because they have been revered as sacred, and protected in sustainable ways, by indigenous and nature dependent communities through their cultural, social and economic practices and their choices of lifestyle and livelihood.

A sorry tale

When one considers the coastal ecosystem holistically, both sea and landward, it is a miracle of rich biodiversity with varied degree of life forms - the sand dunes, beaches, wetlands, mangroves, estuaries, backwater lagoons and coral reefs.

- **Mangrove theme park at Pappinissery Panchayat, Kannur, Kerala**

Constructed on tidal flats, mangroves and abandoned filtration ponds of thick mangrove vegetation, the site falls within a coastal zone, which is ecologically fragile. The plan involves construction of health clubs, watchtower, food court, recreation centre, conference hall, biotech toilets all proposed to be constructed within the mangrove and inter tidal area.

- **Velaghar-Shiroda, Sindhudurg district, Maharashtra**

Earmarked for tourism development by the government, the local fisher folk are presently contesting land acquisition and eviction notices served by the Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation (MTDC) on behalf of a prominent Indian hotel group, which plans to build a five-star hotel and beach resort with aqua-sports.

- **Andaman Islands**

Most tourism development here particularly in the popular Havelock and Neil Islands is in contravention of the CRZ Notification, 1991. A private resort in Corbyn's Cove Port Blair is located so close to the beach, that sea sand accumulates on the road and in the premises of the resort, which needs to be cleared periodically.

- **Seaside resorts at Mandarmani , Purbo Medinipur district, West Bengal**

According to the local District Magistrate, construction and running of these hotels has resulted in an ecological disaster. Sandbanks were flattened and the natural vegetation, screw pines, were cut down for construction. Since roads cannot access most of the hotels, cars ply on the beach for tourists to enter or leave the resorts. Red crabs that abound on the beach, as well as other fauna, are crushed under the unregulated vehicular traffic. A rise in pollution has also affected the coastal marine life and dwindling of catch of the local fishing community. Despite the Calcutta High Court issuing a directive that no future construction would be permitted at any place in Mandarmani that fell within the CRZ, construction continues in violation of the court's order.

- **Kanyakumari, Tamil Nadu**

Rampant tourism development has left no space along the beach and the immediate stretches of land adjoining the sea towards the southern side are completely occupied by the hotel industry. Amusement parks and water theme parks are the recent additions to attract domestic tourists. A theme park, which has planned its operation to cover 4000 visitors a day, has levelled the sand dunes to have an elevated structure for a clear view of sunrise and sunset.

This sorry tale continues along the coast- in Goa, in Andhra Pradesh, in Orissa, in Pondicherry and in Gujarat. Violations involve not just construction in no-construction zones, but flattening sand dunes; rapid coastal erosion; privatising beaches pushing out fisher folk and traditional occupations; letting untreated sewage into the sea, estuaries and backwaters; dismal solid waste management; use of unsuitable building materials and unsustainable energy practices; overburdening fragile ecosystems such as coral reefs and backwaters by increased tourist visitation; and pushing in consumptive models that leave heavy ecological footprints on fragile ecosystems.

Travelling the length of India's 7500 km coastline is testimony to how tourism development in the pursuit of profits has failed to demonstrate stewardship towards either coastal ecology or the rights of coastal communities.

Coastal Regulation- a battle of two decades to protect the coast

The only notification for the protection of the Indian coast is the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Notification of 1991. No sooner was CRZ notified, than the attempts to dilute it began!

The first amendment to the CRZ Notification was because of pressure from the tourism lobby. The tourism industry argued that the prescribed 200 meters of "No Development Zone" restricted them from competing with beach hotels of countries where no such restrictions existed. They claimed the tourism industry would require only 25 to 30 kms of India's 7500 km coastline, and hence relaxing the NDZ from 200m to 50m in CRZ Notification would not harm India's coastal ecosystem! Under pressure, the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) amended the CRZ Notification in 1994 reducing the NDZ area all along tidal water bodies. On being challenged, the Supreme Court quashed the amendment terming the step taken by MoEF as ultra vires, and restored the NDZ. This was a short-lived victory as the CRZ has been amended 21 times between 1994 and 2005, each dilution weakening the regulatory regime, many of these at the behest of the tourism industry.

In the last, few years there has been an attempt to replace the CRZ Notification with a management oriented Coastal Management Zone Notification (CMZ), a move that drew wide protests from coastal movements and civil society organisations, whose key concerns have not been taken into account in recent versions of the notification.

The recent move to exclude the ecologically fragile Andaman & Nicobar and Lakshadweep Islands from the ambit of CRZ Notification 1991 and to bring them under a separate Island Protection Zone Notification is another retrograde step, as it contains no specific regulatory provisions for tourism at all. Up to the year 2003, the construction of tourism establishments within 200m from the High Tide Line in the Islands was prohibited. Under pressure from the tourism lobby, this was reduced to 50m. Even with the diluted provisions, the violations by the tourism industry in the Islands are rife. We wonder what the case will be when tourism does not come stringently under the scanner for violations, past and future.

Sadly, there is little evidence along the Indian coast of tourism industry's intent to be law abiding, let alone its claim of being a steward of biodiversity.

On World Tourism Day our call is "Tourism – leave our Coasts alone!"

To endorse this statement, contact us at campaigns@equitabletourism.org

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Endorsed as on 27th September 2010

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