



General Assembly

Distr.: General
17 February 2025

English only

Human Rights Council

Fifty-eighth session

24 February–4 April 2025

Agenda item 3

**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.

[31 January 2025]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



China approved the World's Largest Hydropower Project in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), China

Water is the lifeblood of Earth, and the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), China's rivers function as its vital arteries, transporting water, nutrients and sediments from their origin to oceans. Unsustainable management of freshwater ecosystems not only degrades biodiversity, but also severely affects the lives and rights of marginalized communities. Large dams disrupt the aquatic ecosystem, devastate riparian communities' resources and force widespread displacement.

The Medog Hydropower Project is central to China's 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) and its long-term goals through 2035 made by the Chinese government. On 25 December, 2024, Xinhua, the official state news agency of China announced the project approval making it the world's largest hydropower initiative.¹⁾

The dam is to be built at a "Great Bend" of the Yarlung Tsangpo River in Medog County in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), China where the river makes a sharp turn before entering India and Bangladesh. The project will be developed by The Power Construction Corporation of China also known as PowerChina, a state-owned enterprise. According to estimates by the Chongyi Water Resources Bureau, the project could cost as much as a trillion Yuan (\$127 billion).²⁾

The project is part of China's broader ambition, with 11 proposed hydropower dams on the Yarlung Tsangpo (known as Brahmaputra River and Jamuna in Bangladesh) and hundreds more across the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), China. While China frames the project as a cornerstone of its carbon neutrality and climate mitigation strategy, it will come at significant social and environmental costs.

Former Power China chairman Yan Zhiyong claims that the dams would have a combined generating capacity of 60 gigawatt, or almost three times that of the three gorges dam on the Yangzi River in China.

The electricity generated from this dam is slated for transfer to major Chinese cities under the "West to East Electricity Transfer Project" with little to no benefit for the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), China.

Impact on Local and Downstream Communities

The NGO International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) reports that the project will forcibly displace over 24,217 residents living within a 50 km radius of the dam site, ignoring the rights and traditions of Tibetan communities who have coexisted with these rivers for generations. Additionally, more than more than 130 million people downstream in India and Bangladesh will face severe livelihood disruptions. Minorities and Indigenous peoples will be disproportionately suffered from these impacts in addition to the loss of their territories and cultural integrity. The greatest difficulties in accessing safe water often end up being borne disproportionately by women and girls, who are often the ones who take on the work of supplying families and communities with water on a daily basis.

The dam will also irreversibly harm the Tibetan plateau, one of earth's most biodiverse regions, its ecological destruction jeopardizes water and food security for downstream nations and undermines the stability of a region already vulnerable to climate change.

Violating its Protection Areas and Regulations

The Yarlung Tsangpo Grand Canyon was designated a national nature reserve in 1985. In April 27, 2000, the government of China decided to extend the Modog National Nature Reserves and rename it as the Yarlung Zangbo Grand Canyon National Natural Reserve. The total area of the reserve is more than 900,000 hectares, covering four counties and districts.

Because of its enormous challenges and uncertainty to the future to its rich treasure of biodiversity from human activities, climate change and potential large scale engineering construction. The Chinese government had designate this area as nature reserves in order to ensure to protect the area. However, the Chinese government is violating its own regulation that are formulated in order to strengthen the construction and management of nature reserves and protect the natural environment and resources.

According to Article 32 of China's Regulations on Nature Reserves, no production facilities are permitted in core or buffer zones. Yet, the dam's construction is set to proceed in these protected areas, disregarding both national and international environmental commitment. Likewise, the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), China has more than 60 regulations and laws involving environmental and ecological protection.³⁾

Human Rights and Transparency Concerns

China has failed to uphold its commitments to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) which guarantees free, prior and informed consent (FPIC). Local Tibetans have not been adequately informed or consulted.

Downstream countries like India and Bangladesh were also not adequately informed, consulted related to the dam construction. As a lower riparian state with established user rights to the waters of the river, India has consistently expressed, through expert level as well as diplomatic channels, their views and concerns to the Chinese side over mega projects on river emphasizing the need for transparency and consultation with downstream countries. The Chinese side has been urged to ensure that the interests of downstream states of the Brahmaputra are not harmed by activities in upstream area.

The lack of a comprehensive environmental impact assessment (EIA) and public participation highlights china's disregard for international norms. This parallel human rights violations observed during the Kamtok Dam construction on the Drichu River, where forced displacements and the criminalization of peaceful protests violated basic rights to self-determination.

Broader Implications and Geopolitical Risks

The Medog dam is central to China's hydropower ambitions but raises critical issues:

- Lack of Transparency: No public participation, Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), or Free, Prior, Informed Consent (FPIC).
- Forced Displacement: Local Tibetan communities face relocation without adequate compensation or consultation.
- Unsustainable development: the dam's environmental and social cost undermine long-term sustainability.
- Water Insecurity: Dams disrupt water flows in a region vulnerable to climate-induced scarcity, affecting political stability.

Today, many rivers in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), China along with the livelihood of Tibetans communities, remain under constant threat due to rapid expansion of hydropower projects. Under the argument of promoting energy transition in the face of climate change, the Chinese government with its large hydropower industry is promoting new wave of large hydropower dams in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), China. Despite the existence of less impactful renewable energy options, China's relentless pursuit of large scale hydropower disregards the ecological, social and human costs.

1) <https://english.news.cn/20241225/3b1298a2f02d4428bd76e65929571cd3/c.html>

2) <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/crmn127kmr4o>

3) <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202111/1239612.shtml>