

### **International Fact Finding Mission visits Kalpitiya Islands**

Placed 150 km north of the capital, Colombo, the Kalpitiya region is one of the most beautiful coastal areas located in the Western Province of Sri Lanka. Kalpitiya is a peninsular that separates the Puttalam lagoon from the Indian Ocean and is a marine sanctuary with a diversity of habitats ranging from bar reefs, flat coastal plains, salt pans, mangroves swamps, salt marshes and vast sand dune beaches. Given the investment opportunities available, in 2008 the Sri Lanka Tourism launched the Kalpitiya Dutch Bay Resort Development Project.

An International Fact Finding Mission (IFFM) with members from India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand visited Kalpitiya islands from the 23rd to the 27th of February, 2011 with the objective of studying the ramifications of the Kalpitiya Integrated Tourism Resort Project. During its visit, the IFFM met with representatives of state departments, religious institutions and civil society, political leaders and members of the affected communities. The main contact groups for the IFFM were the Food Sovereignty Network of South Asia (FSNSA), NAFSO (Sri Lanka), Praja Abhilasha Network (Sri Lanka) and IMSE (India).

On the basis of its extensive interactions with a wide spectrum of stakeholders, the IFFM has made the following observations:-

- The project today is adversely affecting the livelihoods of the people and will surely have a negative impact on their social and cultural realities as well.
- Already, the project has caused some land alienation resulting in considerable restrictions on people's access to sea, fishing and other activities.
- Entire communities face an imminent threat of displacement which appears to be already under way.

- The process is suffering from a comprehensive absence of precise and timely information for communities.
- While a study of the environmental impact of the project has been (EIA) has been done, no such study on its socio-cultural and economic impact has been conducted. Even the EIA report was not available in the public domain in a timely fashion.
- There is a groundswell of resentment and resistance against the project. However, resistance has been weak so far due to lack of information, coordination and apprehensions of reprisal by the state.

In light of the above observations, the IFFM recommends the following:

- The project must be stopped with immediate effect and a review carried out.
- A National Commission must be set up to conduct the said review.
- The review should respect the social, economic, cultural and political rights of the people and emphasize information flow, transparency and participation thereby ensuring accountability on the state's part.
- To address the issue of land alienation, legal land titles should be given.
- People's livelihoods must not be disturbed on any account. Necessary measures to ensure this, such as unimpeded access to the coast and sea, must be taken.
- Food sovereignty must be recognized as a fundamental right not to be compromised in the name of development.