

# National Conference on Indus Delta: Declaration

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- We, the participants representing civil society, NGOS, water experts, researchers, activists, environmentalists, politicians and deltaic and fishing communities from across the country, which have concern regarding the depletion of Indus Delta, having gathered at National conference on Indus Delta with the theme of Release of water to downstream Kotri on 19<sup>th</sup> January, 2009. At hotel Regent Plaza, Karachi.
- The degradation of the Indus Delta has a multidimensional effect on people, language, ecology, biodiversity and the region's overall environment. Reduction of fresh water flows, and fertile silt, 'has, tremendously affected the Indus Delta. Sea intrusion has inundated more than 2.2 million acres of farm land of Thatta and Badin districts. The resulting degradation manifested itself in reduction of mangroves coverage (important fish habitat), declining fish stocks, shrinking agricultural land and vegetation, vertical and horizontal intrusion of sea, degraded ground water, and significant reduction in livestock's grazing areas.
- Mangrove forests are steadily depleted, leaving the region vulnerable to greater damage from storm flooding. Thousands of people who were surviving on water of Indus Delta have migrated from area.
- Declaring that water is a fundamental element of life on the land, and thus access to water is Human Right that must be protected equally for all people, in all places, at all times. As such, the water should not be treated as a commodity for trade, control and sale, but as a resource belonging to the people who depend on it for their lives.
- Recognizing that The restoration of rivers, delta, springs, lakes, estuaries, coastal waters and protection of wetlands and aquifers as a heritage of the biosphere, including its values of collective identity, aesthetic beauty, and quality of life, will pose a significant challenge. Further, We believe that the highest priority is to adopt a new ethical approach based on the recognition of the different functions and values of water in order to prioritize the rights involved.
- Recognizing that there is a huge economic cost associated with degradation of delta. The water managers have only project the cost of water in agriculture and dam building, they have never realized the economic benefits of environmental services which were being provided by Delta including shield to floods, carbon sunk, and fishing, protection of coastal land from erosion, sustaining food chain in the coastal zones, fisheries and many more benefits. Now all these benefits are lost, there must a calculation of these costs.
- Recognizing that Water is a life and the basic function of water of providing survival for humans must be acknowledged as a top priority, a universal, human right. The sustainability of the biosphere and the exercise of human rights must be guaranteed on the basis of the principle of efficacy.
- Thus we support the General Comment No. 15 of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (29<sup>th</sup> session, Geneva, 11-29 November 2002 ), which recognizes in paragraph 1 that "Water

is a limited natural resource and public good fundamental for life and health. The human right to water is indispensable for leading a life in human Dignity”.

- An Integrated New Water Paradigm approach should be adopted in the Indus river basin. However, before this can be tackled effectively, peoples’ fundamental human right to water, and an equitable distribution of water rights must be established for people living along all reaches of the Indus River, especially for those communities located in the lower Indus Delta. This should be established as the foundation of any water- management planning.
- Further, Conference’s participants understand that Achieving sustainability, equity and democratic governance in water management is one of the main challenges for the international community in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and we believe that the scientific community must become involved in this debate through an inter-disciplinary effort.
- An Integrated New Water Paradigm approach should bring together ground water, surface water and land management aspects and consider environment as an essential user of water. Moreover it must strike a fair and sustainable balance between social, environmental and economic considerations. Finally, it should include not only larger water allocations, but should also ensure that no more water cuts are made in the upstream of Indus nor any such scheme be pursued that necessitates FURTHER DIVERSION OF WATER. It is essential to rehabilitate the tail-end of Indus River that is the INDUS DELTA. This means no more dams on INDUS including the contemplated Kalabagh Dam. Besides, the gross damage so far caused in the Indus Delta as a result of water cuts for decades be compensated fully in the light of a comprehensive study of the damage to lives, livelihoods, mangroves, fisheries, livestock and other manifestations of bio-diversity in the Indus Delta.
- Considering the dire environmental conditions facing the Indus Delta Eco-region and their negative effect on the communities’ livelihood; all future plans, constructions, and policies should ensure significant and adequate flow of water through the Indus Delta (below Kotri Barrage). Adequate flows are considered to be sufficient releases to maintain ecological health and human wellbeing along all reaches of the Indus river, at all time of the year, during all years. In this context, 10MAF is recommended by the 1991 Water Accord signed by both Punjab and Sindh; 27MAF has been recommended by IUCN Pakistan Chapter only for rehabilitation of Mangroves, and at least 35MAF being demanded by coastal communities of Pakistan’s Sindh Coast. This is a necessary precondition to ensure the realization of the Human Rights of deltaic communities, and to provide a basis for developing future water policy and plans.
- There should be an independent study conducted through national and international universities. This study will determine the flow of fresh water downstream Kotri and the actual need of fresh water for the rehabilitation of Indus Delta and its future survival needs. This study should also determine about the ecological, environmental, economical and social losses of Indus Deltaic people from the upstream diversion, cuts and constructions of dams and barrages prior the partition of India to onward. In the light of above study federal government should be compensate to all affected.
- Climate change is likely to increase water-related hazards and threats and must be confronted through a serious application of the Precautionary Principle. In particular, there is a need to priorities alternative strategies to the traditional large-scale Engineering solutions, and recover the good ecological state of aquatic ecosystem. Social conflict originating in the lack of respect for the human right to essential water service or in the displacement of huge populations from their land by Large-scale hydraulic schemes, among their issues.

- All the participants of conference declare and to bring the issue to the notice of all stakeholders including government, that is, to make them realize that the flow of water downstream Kotri is not a waste but an exigent need through resurfacing the concocted perception and inhuman stance and statements of so-called rulers over the water distribution and management.
- We urge to this democratic government to constitute an Indus Delta rehabilitation and revival commission and allocate adequate resources for the revival of all forms of life that has been damaged and provide an alternate livelihood to all the communities who have largely been victim of this inequitable distribution of water and lost their means of livelihood.