Press Release : Bangalore : 2nd November 2018

**Following protest, Karnataka Forest Department Cancels Workshop to evolve its Vision Document-2030 in collaboration with KPMG**

The Karnataka Forest Department has decided to put together a ‘Vision Document-2030’ that would outline the governing principles of its efforts for the next several years. While the initiative itself is laudable –and unprecedented amongst our country’s states- the process in which it is being undertaken has caused serious alarm amongst concerned sections of the public.

On 30th of October, a mail was sent out inviting a few organizations and individuals to a workshop on the 2nd of November to help draft this document. Two key issues were: that less than a dozen organizations were invited to the workshop and this ‘Vision Document-2030’ is to be drafted by the Forest Department in collaboration with Dutch based consultancy KPMG, an agency that has been mired in controversy due to fraudulent entanglements in South Africa and elsewhere. The process of enlisting KPMG appears to have overlooked many Government agencies (Eg. EMPRI – Environmental Management Policy Research Institute, or Administrative Training Institute) and publicly funded research and academic institutions (Institute for Social Economic Change, for eg.) who have conducted such exercises in the past.

Leo F. Saldanha of Environment Support Group, who was invited to the workshop, raised these concerns in reply to the invitation email sent by the Forest Department. Considering the critical importance of the task, he shared these concerns with the offices of the Chief Minister of Karnataka, Chief Secretary, the Union Ministries of Tribal Affairs and Environment and Forests, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Environment and Forests, and various research and civil society organizations, as well as retired forest officials. These concerns gained considerable traction.

Dr. Nitin Rai of the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and Environment, Dr. Kshithij Urs and Diya Deb of Greenpeace India, Nayana Udayashankar of Equations, Santosh Martin former Hon. Wildlife Warden (Bellary), naturalist Sheshadri Ramaswamy and several others were not invited to the consultation, but nevertheless came to participate in the discussion at Aranya Bhavan this morning. Twelve minutes before the meeting was to commence, the Forest Department sent an email which read, *“In continuation to the email sent on the 31-10-2018, this is to inform that due to administrative reasons, the Workshop on the Forest Vision Document previously scheduled on 02nd of November … has been cancelled.”*

In any case, those present met with Mr. Rajiv Ranjan, IFS, Addl. Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Personnel and Recruitment) who anchored the process, and listed their concerns about the overall undemocratic manner in which this Document is being drafted. The senior official was receptive to the concerns raised and stated these would be noted and discussed with senior officers. The concerns raised were that:

1. The terms of contract with KPMG, and the process by which the agency was selected, must be shared *suo moto* by the Karnataka Forest Department,
2. The shallow understanding of forests and dependencies on forests and natural resources, is exhibited in the questionnaire circulated (possibly developed by KPMG)
3. A rational, transparent, accountable and democratic process must be instituted, in compliance with Constitutional requirement (Art. 243ZD/ZE), to accommodate divergent and scientifically rigorous views, and thus produce a Vision Document that secures the interests of all publics and future generations as well,
4. The agency tasked with assisting the Forest Dept. in so developing the Vision Document should have no ‘conflict of interest’, such as representing clientele who have active engagement in forest destruction and industrial extraction of natural resources.

Enclosed is the correspondence leading to the cancellation of the workshop on the developing of Karnataka Forest Department’s Vision Document - 2030.

Ahan Bezbaroa

Environment Support Group

ahan@esgindia.org (for clarifications)

Encl.: As above.

Address for contact: Environment Support Group, 1572, Ring Road, Banashankari II Stage, Bangalore 560070. Tel: (1-80-26713560~61 Email: esg@esgindia.org Web: [www.esgindia.org](http://www.esgindia.org)

**Annexures**

## Karnataka Forest Department Message Cancelling Workshop

Begin forwarded message:

**From:**APCCF PR <apccfpnr@aranya.gov.in>

**Subject: RE- Invitation for workshop on Karnataka Forest Department 'Vision Document-2030'-reg**

**Date:**2 November 2018 at 10:48:22 AM IST

**To:**leosaldanha@esgindia.org, esg@esgindia.org, purvachadha@kpmg.com

**Cc:**anushasridhar@kpmg.com, aparnav@kpmg.com, prasadunnikrishnan@kpmg.com

Respected Sir/Madam,

In continuation to the email sent on the 31-10-2018, this is to inform that due to administrative reasons, the Workshop on the Forest Vision Document previously scheduled on 02nd of November at Aranya Bhavan, Malleswaram, 18th Cross, Bengaluru has been cancelled.

In this regard, your understanding is greatly appreciated.

## Letter of Invitation:

**From:**APCCF PR <apccfpnr@aranya.gov.in>

**Subject: Invitation for workshop on Karnataka Forest Department 'Vision Document-2030'-reg**

**Date:**30 October 2018 at 1:59:33 PM IST

**To:**esg@esgindia.org, leosaldanha@esgindia.org

**Cc:**aparnav@kpmg.com, purvachadha@kpmg.com, prasadunnikrishnan@kpmg.com, pratikkhulbe@kpmg.com, anushasridhar@kpmg.com

Dear Sir/Madam,

                Karnataka Forest department has been enshrined with the responsibility of Conservation, Management and Development of Forests and wildlife on sustainable basis in the state of Karnataka.

                In this regard the Karnataka Forest department has decided to have a ‘Vision Document’ which would provide a governance strategy for management of Forests and wildlife of Karnataka for next 20 years in a sustainable manner. ‘Vision Document’ would interalia provide a way forward both in short and long terms.

                In this endeavor, the department has decided to take the service from the agency, M/s KPMG to prepare a futuristic compendium. The Department, in collaboration with the agency, has organized a Workshop on the **2nd of November 2018 at 11.00 A.M at  Aranya Bhavan, Malleswaram 18th Cross, Bengaluru**to invite necessary ideas and inputs across the sectors in preparation of this grandiose document.

              Therefore, I would like to take this opportunity to invite you to participate in the workshop and confirmation of your participation is highly appreciated. **Also, provided along with this mail is a link to a questionnaire**. You are requested to please spare sometime out of your busy schedule to fill in your valuable responses and submit the same.

Link to the Questionnaire - <https://goo.gl/forms/xuuNIlH64DZ8VIV53>

## Letter from Leo Saldanha to Karnataka Forest Department:

Mr. Rajiv Ranjan, IFS

Addl. Principal Chief Conservator of Forests

Karnataka Forest Department

Aranya Bhavan

Bangalore 560003

01 November 2018

Dear Mr. Ranjan,

Thank you for inviting me to a consultation to be held in Aranya Bhavan tomorrow for developing a 'Vision Document 2030' for the Karnataka Forest Department.  I thank you for privileging me with this invitation   However, I must  express my deep trepidation over what this consultation process indicates, the manner in which it is being conducted and the quality of agency which is entrusted with this critical task.

As someone who has worked with several leading foresters over the decades, I never imagined a day would come when the task of developing a Vision Document for conserving Karnataka's forests, forest resources and protecting forest rights, would be outsourced by the Forest Department to an international corporation - KPMG. Even if the task has to be outsourced, there are several leading public funded institutions that should have been requested to take up the task. An alternative could be to trust serving officers of the Department to develop the policy - for it is their duty to work with people to develop such polices. If even they were not considered capable of this job, then retired officers of the Forest Department could have been entrusted with the task.  Needless to state, several of us who work with independent and autonomous research and civil society bodies, and who work to protect forests and wildlife tirelessly, could have been asked to assist the Department in this task.

None of these obvious choices seem to have been considered. Instead, it is KPMG which has been chosen to develop Karnataka's Forest and Forest Rights Protection and Wildlife Conservation 'Vision Document 2030'.  And we are not even aware if there was a due process involved in selecting this agency for the task.

KPMG is a global consulting firm mired in controversy in South Africa over its collusion in corrupt and fraudulent deals involving the former South African President Jacob Zuma (who was forced to step down) and the Guptas family which is close to Zuma.  (Please see: KPMG South Africa woes continue after Nedbank bails on embattled auditors, South Africa's Nedbank becomes latest firm to drop KPMG, KPMG South Africa loses clients over audit scandal - Accountancy Agehttps://[www.accountancyage.com/.../kpmg-south-africa-hit-hard-as-more-clients-sever..](http://www.accountancyage.com/.../kpmg-south-africa-hit-hard-as-more-clients-sever..)., New report highlights scale of KPMG's losses in South Africahttps://[businesstech.co.za](http://businesstech.co.za) › News › Banking, and <https://www.ft.com/content/7c46819e-c6df-11e8-ba8f-ee390057b8c9>)

In India too, the firm has been accused of serious crimes and fraud. In Kerala, the Congress party has urged the Kerala Government to not engage the firm, even if it offers its consultancy services free, in the rehabilitation efforts post flood as "numerous complaints .. have surfaced against the KPGM" (<https://www.msn.com/en-in/news/south-india/kerala-congress-opposes-kpmgs-free-service/ar-BBMOcgm?li=AAggbRN&%253Bocid=wispr>). The Caravan magazine has also reported earlier this year that a senior officer of the Government of India has written a letter to Prime Minister Modi providing details of fraud and corruption this firm has been engaged in. (<https://caravanmagazine.in/vantage/kpmg-unnamed-ias-officer-corruption-letter-modi>)

Even if the firm was in no way involved in any controversy, we must be very worried of their understanding of the forests, of forest rights, of biodiversity conservation, of wildlife protection and management, etc., as the questionnaire prepared by them in preparation for this Consultation reveals the agency is quite ill-equipped for the task. Please see a sample that I have received, which is copied below, along with my comments in parenthesis.

It is clear to me that this consultation is being conducted as a ritual.  I urge you to stop this consultation. Most importantly, it is crucial that you take a decision today to not proceed in any manner in entrusting KPMG in developing the Vision Document. The quality of the questionnaire is sufficient for us to deduce the firm knows next to nothing about Karnataka's forests. It is also indicative of the firm's, and also the Forest Department's, ignorance, of the extraordinary efforts that have been invested in protecting forests, wildlife, forest rights, natural resource, rivers, lakes, coastal commons, etc, across these state, and over decades.

It is because of the largely unacknowledged services rendered by the foot soldiers of the Forest Dept. (the watch and ward staff, mainly, who rarely get paid and are rarely taken care of, and yet are overworked) and several dedicated officers of the Dept., that much of Karnataka's forests remain today.  Equally importantly, we must not forget the sincerity and dedication with which hundreds of village and urban communities, civil society organisations, researchers, etc. have worked to protect  and conserve forests and wildlife, and for protecting the rights of tribals and forest/natural resource dependent communities.

If Karnataka Forest Department needs a Vision Document, it must be evolved in consonance with the existing National Forest Policy, Forest Rights Act, Forest Conservation Act, Wildlife Act, Environment Protection Act and Biodiversity Act, Convention on Biological Diversity, etc., and following the procedures laid down in Art. 243 ZD/ZE of the Constitution of India.  Only such an exercise will serve in truthfully surveying the state of our forests and wildlife, and in developing a Vision that will truly help develop resilient methods for protecting our forests and wildlife, for its own sake, and in the process safeguarding the rights of Adivasis and natural resource dependent communities whose lives and livelihoods are intricately linked to forests and natural resources.  Future generations will look back with considerable regard and acknowledge the wisdom with which you and your colleagues undertook the task of guiding such a democratic public consultation process, in which the interests of the future generations were considered above those of the present generation. But that would entail you must now abandon the current process of developing the Vision Document guided by KPMG.

I am copying my response to your letter of invitation to the Chief Minister of Karnataka and Forest Minister of Karnataka, and to Mr. Anand Sharma, MP, Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Forests and Environment. Former Indian Environment Minister Mr. Jairam Ramesh and Dr. Rajeev Gowda, MP, are copied.  Also copied is Dr. Shashi Tharoor, MP, who is developing the Environment Manifesto for the Congress Party.

This letter is also shared with Secretaries of Tribal Affairs and Environment and Forests Ministries of India, and with the Chief Secretary and others Senior Officers of the Government of Karnataka. Besides, officials of the Ministry of Environment and Forests, researchers, civil society organisations and the media are copied.  I find it necessary to share this correspondence so all copied are aware of the seriousness of this matter, and may guide you appropriately.

In the event tomorrow's meeting is not called off, and a new process is not instituted in democratically evolving Karnataka Forest Department's Vision Document, several of us will participate in the proceedings to hopefully persuade you to take the right decision.

Thank you for your cooperation and support.

Yours truly,

Leo F. Saldanha

Coordinator/Trustee

Environment Support Group (Trust)