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**Dynkur - In the threatened river of Thjórsá**

## Corporate Watch

January 26, 2005.

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# THREATENED PROTESTORS RAISE STAKES, CALL FOR INTERNATIONAL PROTEST.

"Nobody can afford to allow the divine Icelandic dragon of flowers and ice to be devastated by corporate greed"

People in Iceland are calling for an international protest against the building of a series of giant dams, currently under construction in the eastern highlands of Iceland. The dams are designated solely to generate energy for a massive aluminium smelter, which will be run by the US aluminium corporation Alcoa and built by Bechtel. Not a single kilowatt of energy produced by the dams will go for domestic use. Alcoa is seizing the chance to relocate to Iceland after costs of producing aluminium in the US soared.

The pristine environment - which campaigners say should be designated as a nature park - will be destroyed. Protected areas will be flooded, and rare and endangered plants and animals will be submerged and lost. Equally infamous aluminium corporations such as RTZ are lining up for future

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hydro-electric projects.

The Icelandic government is actively supporting these corporations. Environmentalists and local people opposed to the dams have been threatened and professionally persecuted.

However, say the Icelandic protestors, it is not too late to stop these projects. Which is why they are inviting international environmentalists and activists to gather in Iceland in July 2005 to oppose what they describe as an "environmental apocalypse". The gathering will take place in the dam affected area.

"Most people have no idea how primary aluminum is made, how rivers figure into the process, and who suffers as a result of damming. They do not connect their daily can of Pepsi with the mercury contamination of fish in James Bay rivers or the threatened extinction of wild salmon in tributaries of the Fraser River in British Columbia. They have not considered whether the aluminum siding on their houses might be responsible for the wholesale relocation of indigenous peoples from Egyptian

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Nubia to the Amazonian rainforest, or for the spread of diseases such as schistosomiasis and river-blindness along the Egyptian Nile and the Volta River basin in Ghana. "  
International Rivers Network [www.irn.org](http://www.irn.org)

## **WHAT ICELAND CAN EXPECT**

*ALCOA (Aluminium Company of America)*

Alcoa (also known as Alcoa-Reynolds) is a global corporation which operates 228 facilities in 32 countries. It is one of the world's largest aluminium manufacturers, producing aluminium for industry as well as household products like Baco (TM) foil. In 2000, its chairman and former CEO, Paul O'Neill, was invited to join the Bush administration as Secretary of the Treasury.

The company also has a long-term track record of toxic pollution and social destruction.

- In 2003, it was found guilty by the United States Justice

Department and the EPA of violating the Clean Air Act at its Rockdale Aluminum smelter near Austin, Texas. The Rockdale smelter was producing 260,000 tons of aluminum a year, while emitting the largest amount of nitrogen oxide and sulfur dioxide of any single source in the country, with the exception of electric utilities. One hundred and four thousand tons of emissions (calculated from Alcoa's own estimates) were pouring annually from the plant; including 40,000 tons of smog-producing nitrogen dioxide and 60,000 tons of acid-rain-generating sulphur dioxide, as well as highly toxic metals such as mercury, copper, lead, and others, which eventually accumulated in Texas lakes and rivers.

- Alcoa's aluminium smelter at Massena, New York, was one of three plants which poisoned the St Lawrence river - a river which for centuries sustained the Mohawk indigenous community of Akwesasne. After being used as a dumping ground through much of the twentieth century, the river and its ecosystem became so contaminated that in 1986, the Mohawk community was advised to eat a minimal amount of fish from the river. Their traditional economy collapsed.

In addition, the PCBs, dioxins, heavy metals, and other pollutants left the Mohawk community with birth defects, miscarriages, and cancer. Mothers are advised not to breastfeed their children because of industrial contaminants in the food chain.

The slow process of environmental litigation and cleanup eventually revealed some of the scope of corporate abuse of the St. Lawrence. The Alcoa refinery eventually received a \$3.75 million fine, the largest criminal penalty ever assessed in the history of the United States, for a hazardous waste violation.

- In the period between 1987 and 1999, more than 47 Alcoa facilities were cited by US state and federal anti-pollution regulators. In March 1999, Alcoa agreed to an \$8.8-million settlement with the Environmental Protection Agency after being charged with illegally discharging inadequately treated wastewater from its Warrick County plant into the Ohio River between 1994 and 1999. In September 1999, Discovery Aluminas Inc., an Alcoa subsidiary, agreed to plea guilty to

similar discharge violations and to pay more than \$1 million in fines.

- On May 2, 2002, it was reported that Alcoa Inc. had offered to pay nine Australian workers \$A350,000 each (US\$187,337) in compensation for injuries allegedly caused by exposure to pollutants while working at the firm's Wagerup plant. The workers allege that their illnesses were caused by exposure to heavy chemicals and chemicals while working at the facility. Injuries alleged include multiple chemical sensitivity, reactive airways dysfunction and renal failure. Alcoa offered the settlement on the condition that the workers drop their lawsuits seeking compensation and damages. Eight of the workers accepted the settlement offer.

- In November 2004, Alcoa reported the eighth waste spill at its Western Australian Kwinana refinery in the space of five months.

- In Surinam, 6,000 people were recently forced to move from their ancestral communities in the tropical rainforest to make

way for an Alcoa/Billiton dam and smelter. A proposed new dam for a smelter in Sarawak, Malaysia, could force the resettlement of 10,000 indigenous people. Dr. Kua Kia Soong, head of a non-governmental coalition in Sarawak asks: "Why do we want toxic and energy-hungry industries such as aluminum smelters? Aluminum smelting is one industry that the developed countries want to dump on suckers like us because it is environmentally toxic and it consumes voracious amounts of energy."

### *SMELTERS AND DAMS*

"With the exception of those who work in or study the aluminum or hydroelectric industries, almost no one is aware of the connection between aluminum production and the damming of free-flowing rivers."

International Rivers Network

Dams and smelters go together. And the use of both is increasing. The World Wildlife Fund report, *Rivers at Risk*, published in June 2004, shows that over 60 per cent of the world's 227 largest rivers have been fragmented by dams,

which has led to the destruction of wetlands, a decline in freshwater species - including river dolphins, fish, and birds - and the forced displacement of tens of millions of people.

The report concludes that the benefits that dams provide - such as hydropower, irrigation, and flood control services - are often overtaken by negative environmental and social impacts. For example, much of the water provided by dams is lost, mainly due to inefficient agriculture irrigation systems - which globally waste up to 1,500 trillion litres of water annually. This is equivalent to 10 times the annual water consumption of the entire African continent.

"Dams are both a blessing and a curse - the benefits they provide often come at high environmental and social costs," said Dr. Ute Collier, head of WWF's Dams Initiative. "Those most affected by dams rarely benefit from them or gain access to power and clean water."

According to the report, downstream communities suffer most from dams, with rivers running dry and fish stocks decimated.

Dams disrupt the ecological balance of rivers by depleting them of oxygen and nutrients, and affecting the migration and reproduction of fish and other freshwater species.

The dams are often built purely to supply aluminium smelters, which aggregate around sources of "cheap" energy because 45% of the cost of aluminum smelting is electricity. In small countries like Tajikistan, Bahrain, and Ghana, smelters consume a third or more of the national power supply.

The industry also exacts steep tolls from surrounding communities and ecosystems. Fluoride emissions from the Nalco smelter in India plague local villagers with brittle bones, tooth and gum diseases, and lumps of dead skin. Their cattle, more prone to fluoride contamination, commonly suffer from bone deformities and rising death rates. In one village within a kilometer of the plant, the local herd of cattle dropped from 3,000 to 100 head in a ten year period. Similar symptoms of fluorosis are apparent in villages around the world's fourth largest smelter, in Tursunzade, Tajikistan.

According to the American environmental scientist, Philip Fearnside:

‘It’s a question of who is profiting. If that profit, and the costs, were evenly distributed, it wouldn’t be happening. It wouldn’t be worth the candle for anyone individually. The fact is that influential people are making money and poor people are paying the price. It’s all perfectly logical - from the point of view of the people who are making the money.’

<http://www.corporatewatch.org.uk/news/icelandunderattack.htm>

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