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Press Release

22 July, 2009- Colombo. Centre for Environmental Justice is very concern about the recent auction of the river bed of Kaluganga in Kahangama area for gem mining. Despite the tug of war among different ministries we noticed that the Ministry of Environment and the Central Environmental Authority have approved the auction on the basis that no mechanical mining and no environmental harm.

We are unable to understand how they made such a conclusion without conducting an Environmental Impact Assessment. The regulations in Gazette No.722/22 dated 24th of June 1993 under the National Environmental Act, No. 47 of 1980, Section 23 Y, it is required to conduct an Environmental Impact Assessment for a project within "60 meters from the bank of a public stream having a width of more than 25 metres at any point of its course, as defined in the Crown Lands Ordinance (Chapter 454) . This shows that the auction is in violation of the NEA.

A project proposed in 1992 by a South African company to engage in mechanical gem mining led the then government to ban any mechanical gem mining in a river bed in Sri Lanka. Whether it is a mechanical mining or non mechanical mining it will have similar impacts on this sensitive riverine eco-system.

Therefore we urge the Central Environmental Authority and Divisional Secretary, Rathnepura to suspend the river bed mining immediately and follow the EIA guidelines and enforce due procedures in the name of environment.

Signed

Hemantha Withanage,
Executive Director