

Mekong governments: Listen to the people! - Statement by local people on dams in the Mekong Region

Monday 14 December 2015, by [Collective / Multiple signers](#) (Date first published: 5 November 2015).

Statement by local people on dams in the Mekong Region

We are people from local communities in the Mekong region, who depend on the eco-systems created by the Mekong river and numerous other rivers and lakes in the region, especially, the Tonle Sap, Sesan and Mekong Delta, for our food, health, livelihood, culture, society and incomes. The waters and resources of the Mekong region sustain our lives and economic security.

The dams built on the Mekong mainstream and other rivers in the region have resulted in severe changes in the Mekong's ecosystems, endangering life, livelihoods and the economy of the entire region. Indigenous peoples, women and children are most affected by these changes. The dams have also worsened the impacts of climate change that we are already facing. These dams include Pak Mun, Yali Falls, Nam Theun 2, Theun-Hinboun, Xayaburi and the series of dams on the Lancang river in China.

We have witnessed and experienced the destruction caused by the dams. For us, who live by the river and experience every change in the water systems, there is no question that such dams result in serious negative impacts for present and future generations, and should not be built.

We have very serious concern about the Don Sahong Dam in Laos, which is located at a critical area for fish migration between the upper and lower Mekong, and will severely reduce fish species and numbers in the whole Mekong river basin. The dam presents special dangers to the Mekong giant catfish and the Irrawaddy Dolphin. The Don Sahong Dam will also negatively affect agriculture and fisheries in the Mekong delta. Despite the destruction that this dam will cause, the Lao Government has not listened to the concerns that have been repeatedly publicly expressed by local people from other Mekong countries.

We have never received full information about any of these dams, never been properly consulted about them, and never been provided the opportunity to participate in decision making about them. We are being forced to bear the increasingly unbearable impacts of these hydropower projects. It is time for our governments to hear our voices and respect our rights to make decision about the future of our rivers and our lives.

We request:

- Direct dialogue between Mekong region governments and peoples' representatives through public forums: governments must come to the public forum which will be soon be organized and attended by Mekong local peoples' representatives, listen to us and learn from us about the impacts of the dams.
- Studies to understand the full value of the rivers, and social and environmental impacts of dam

projects: these studies must be conducted by independent actors, with full participation of all affected communities, and with enough time to gather the evidence needed to make appropriate decisions about the projects. If the studies show that the negative impacts outweigh the benefits, the dams must be stopped.

- Urgent studies and actions on the Don Sahong dam because of its critical location and status of the project. The full costs and impacts of this project must be made public and recognized by all Mekong region governments.

Once again, we remind our governments that we, the people of the Mekong region, have protected these rivers for generations and must be involved in decision making about them.

Signed by:

Cambodia

Mr. Long Sochet, Coalition of Cambodia Fishers (CFF), Pursat Province

Ms. Phoem Sokun, Community Based Organisation (CBO), Kampong Chhnang Province

Ms. Chheng Kimheng, Community Based Organisation (CBO), Kampong Thom Province

Mr. Eang Eangnaim, Cambodia Community Fishery, Kampong Cham Province

Mr. Dam Samnang, Community Based Organisation (CBO), Stung Treng Province

Ms. Saron Sokhom, Community Based Organisation (CBO), Stung Treng Province

Thailand

Mr. Nichon Pholchan, Village person, Bungkarn Province

Mr. Veera Wongsuwan, Village person, Amnart Charoen Province

Mr. Amnart Trichak, Village person, Nakhonpanom Province

Mr. Channarong Wongla, Hug Chaingkhon Group, Loei Province

Vietnam

Mr. Vo Thanh Trang, Village person, An Giang Province

Mr. Truong Van Khoi, Village person, An Giang Province

Ms. Nguyen Thi To, Nguyen Village person, An Giang Province

Mrs. Huynh Kim Duyen, Village person, Ca mau Province

Mr. Nguyen Hoang Cau, Village person, Ca Mau province

Supporting Organisations

Community Resources Centre (CRC), Thailand

Fishery Action Coalition Team (FACT), Cambodia

Focus on the Global South, Thailand and Cambodia

Green ID, Vietnam

International Rivers (IR)

My Village (Mvi), Cambodia

Rachna Satrei Organization, Cambodia

Towards Ecological Recovery and Regional Alliance (TERRA)

Vietnam River Network

WARECOD, Vietnam

Supporting Individuals

Mr. Pham Xuan Phu academic An Giang University, Vietnam

More than 4,500 Mekong local people sign the statement on Mekong dams: Awaiting governments to confirm their attendance at the Mekong People's Forum next week
Key Issues: Lower Mekong Mainstream and Tributary Dams

5 November 2015 – On 25 September 2015, local people's networks in Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam released a joint statement entitled: "Mekong governments: Listen to the people! - Statement by local people on dams in the Mekong Region" (attached). The statement calls on the governments of the Mekong region to recognize the severe impacts of large-scale hydropower dams on the Mekong mainstream and tributaries within the Mekong basin and to listen to the concerns of local communities who would be affected by these projects.

"We request direct dialogue between the Mekong region's governments and peoples' representatives through public forums," reads the statement. "We call on governments to come to a public forum which will be organized and attended by Mekong local peoples' representatives; to listen and learn from us about the impacts of the dams."

The original statement was signed by 15 local representatives from three countries plus 10 supporting organisations and one academic as an individual supporter. One month later, the statement has received recognition and support from more than 4,500 signatories. Among all those who signed, over 4,000 signatures and thumbprints come from the local people who live along the Mekong River and have directly experienced the changes in the Mekong River in recent years.

All the signatures, with the total to be counted early next week, will be presented to government ministers from all four lower Mekong countries; those who are directly responsible for decision-making over the future of the Mekong Basin. Invitations were sent, together with copies of the statement, to Ministers of Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam, to invite them to the Mekong People's Public Forum, which will take place on 11 November at An Giang University, An Giang Province in the Mekong Delta in Vietnam.

The Regional Public Forum, "Local Mekong people's voices: the message to Mekong governments on Mekong dams"(program attached), will be a gathering of nearly one hundred participants. Among them will be at least twenty representatives from local Mekong communities from Cambodia and Thailand. The majority of participants will be Vietnamese local communities, civil society groups and academic groups from Vietnam. This event is highly significant: it will be the first public forum of its kind, bringing together local people across the region to share their concerns over hydropower dams.

The Mekong local groups, however, until now are still waiting for the formal reply from the Mekong governments as to whether they are willing to join the historic Mekong People's Forum.

"This forum belongs to us, the local Mekong people's communities and citizens. I believe that the gathering will get bigger and bigger from now on. The problems from Mekong dams have been too severe for all of us, and without any real solution and understanding from Mekong governments, we the people will no longer be able to protect our rivers from the aggressive encroachment of those dam builders. We will therefore continue to call until we have the government representatives really come, listen and admit their responsibility in protecting the Mekong basin, our livelihoods and the security of the region overall" states Mr. Channarong Wongla, from the local group Hug Chiang Khan in the Northeastern Mekong provinces in Thailand.

For more information - please contact

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P.S.

* <http://www.terraper.org/web/en/node/1716>