



Statement: 3 May 2011

Civil Society Calls on ASEAN: Cancel Xayaburi Dam

On the occasion of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Summit from 7-8 May 2011 in Jakarta, Indonesia, the Save the Mekong coalition urgently calls on ASEAN, and the Lao PDR and Thai governments, to immediately halt construction work at the proposed Xayaburi dam site in northern Lao PDR, cancel plans to buy electricity, and to cancel this first dam proposed for the lower Mekong mainstream, which we believe will cause severe cross-boundary conflict among the ASEAN member countries, especially in the Mekong region.

On 19 April 2011, in a Special Joint Committee meeting of the Mekong River Commission (MRC), government representatives from Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam agreed that a decision on the Xayaburi Dam should be deferred until Ministerial-level government representatives could meet. According to a press release from the MRC, whilst Lao PDR proposed to proceed with the dam, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam called for an extension to the decision-making process, citing concerns about transboundary impacts and knowledge gaps that require both further study and public consultation. Subsequently, at a meeting in Phnom Penh on 23rd April, the Prime Ministers of Vietnam and Cambodia jointly expressed concern about the Xayaburi Dam's impacts, including on rice and fish production, and urged the Lao PDR and Thai governments to conduct further studies on the project's downstream consequences.

Yet, an investigative report published on 17th April in the Bangkok Post revealed that preliminary construction work has already started at the Xayaburi Dam site. Furthermore, following the MRC meeting, the Lao PDR government publicly indicated its plans to approve the Xayaburi Dam's construction, and the lead project developer, Thailand's Ch Karnchang, has stated that it expects to receive this approval within 30 days. Ch. Karnchang's insistence to proceed immediately with the project contradicts the Thai government's position at the MRC Special Joint Committee meeting. These actions are contrary to a regional commitment by the governments to cooperate in sharing the Mekong River, ignore extensive scientific evidence about the project's severe social and environmental impacts, are against the clear demands of civil society and the public that the project be cancelled, and threaten to increase regional tension.

The Xayaburi Dam, if built, will affect the livelihoods and food security of millions of people in the region through changes to the river's ecosystem, sediment flows and fisheries. The dam will threaten 23 to 100 migratory fish species by blocking these fishes' migration route. The dam also threatens the extinction of approximately 41 fish species, including the critically endangered Mekong Giant Catfish. Furthermore, the dam will forcibly resettle over 2,100 people and directly affect over 202,000 people. Numerous world-renowned experts have criticized the project and its Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). Fisheries scientists, for example, unanimously agree that the dam's impacts on fisheries cannot be mitigated.

The Mekong River provides the people of the region with an abundance of natural resources, making it central to the livelihoods of millions of people and the lifeline of Southeast Asia. The Mekong River's central role in the lives, ecology and cultures of the region should place the river's protection as a top priority for decision-makers to ensure sustainable economic growth, protect food security and promote regional peace and prosperity.

Widespread public opposition to the dam has been expressed both regionally and internationally over the past two years through various petitions and letters submitted to the regional governments and MRC. On 18th April, a letter from nearly 10,000 Thai villagers from eight provinces was submitted to the Lao Embassy in Bangkok and the Thai Prime Minister raising concerns about the project's transboundary impacts and calling on the Lao and Thai governments to cancel the Xayaburi Dam. At the same time, a petition signed by more than 15,000 people from around the world was presented to the Embassies of Lao PDR and Thailand in Berlin and Paris calling for the cancellation of the Xayaburi Dam, while a second petition signed by more than 2,300 people globally was also presented to members of the MRC's Council. An earlier Save the Mekong petition of 23,110 signatures was submitted to the region's Prime Ministers in October 2009, and in March 2011 a letter from 263 non-governmental organizations to the Prime Ministers of Lao PDR and Thailand also called for the cancellation of the Xayaburi Dam.

The Xayaburi Dam is a cross-border investment project between Thailand and Lao PDR that represents a serious threat to hundreds of thousands of people, the environment, and security region-wide. We therefore urge ASEAN to call on Lao PDR to cancel the Xayaburi Dam project and on Thailand to commit to not buy its electricity. We also urge ASEAN, as a mechanism of regional cooperation that should ensure regional sustainable development and peaceful cooperation between countries, to acknowledge the Xayaburi dam and other dams on the Mekong mainstream as examples of projects that contain a high potential for creating irreversible cross-border impacts and that should have no place in ASEAN's future development. The role of the governments and the private sector in such projects should be reviewed in the light of acceptable regional and international standards. We furthermore urge the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) to investigate the project.

Since 2009, civil society groups from the ASEAN member countries have been calling for a Fourth Strategic Pillar on the Environment through the ASEAN Civil Society Conference (ACSC)/ ASEAN Peoples' Forum (APF) process. Our call on ASEAN to act to cancel the Xayabourri dam exemplifies the need for the establishment of the Environment Pillar, and also stands in solidarity with the ACSC/APF 2011 that will be held in Jakarta, Indonesia during 3-5 May, prior to the ASEAN Summit.

The Save the Mekong coalition is a network of non-government organizations, community groups, academics, journalists, artists, fishers, farmers and ordinary people from within the Mekong countries and internationally. For more information on the coalition and the impacts of the planned Mekong mainstream dams in English and regional languages, please visit: www.SavetheMekong.org.