



Press Release: For Immediate Release

Save the Mekong Coalition Calls on ASEAN Leaders:

Cancel the Xayaburi Dam

[6 May 2011] As ASEAN leaders meet for the 18th ASEAN Summit in Jakarta, Indonesia, the Save the Mekong coalition calls on ASEAN leaders to act immediately to cancel the Xayaburi Dam in Lao PDR. The call is made in close cooperation with the ASEAN Civil Society Conference (ACSC)/ASEAN People's Forum (APF) 2011 held from 2-5 May, where 1,300 people have gathered in Jakarta, Indonesia.

The Save the Mekong coalition and its alliances have called on the Government of Lao PDR to immediately halt construction activity at the dam site and for the Government of Thailand to cancel its plans to purchase the dam's electricity. This call has received strong support from many civil society organizations at the ACSC/APF 2011 who have also been demanding since 2009 that ASEAN adopt a Fourth Pillar on the Environment.

Two weeks ago, the inter-governmental Mekong River Commission (MRC) held a Special Joint Committee meeting to decide whether to approve the proposed Xayaburi Dam, located on the Mekong River's mainstream in Northern Lao PDR. At the meeting, 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 further study and public consultation. The four governments agreed to defer the decision to a future Ministerial-level meeting. Yet, the Save the Mekong coalition fears that the project is in fact continuing to move forward given a recent investigative report by the Bangkok Post on 17 April, which revealed that preliminary construction work had already started at the dam site and the process for further regional discussion remains unclear.

Joining a public hearing on Corporate Social Responsibility and ASEAN organized at the ACSC/APF 2011 on 2 May, Sodsai Sangsok of Thailand's Northeastern Environmental Network stated to the public forum that "ASEAN's Human Rights Mechanism should acknowledge the fact that the Xayaburi Dam is the main threat to the livelihoods of Mekong people, and take action upon it."

Furthermore, at a forum at the ACSC/APF 2011 on the ASEAN experience of protecting rivers and people's livelihoods, Nguy Thi Khanh, the Coordinator of the Vietnam Rivers Network stated "The Mekong mainstream should never be used as a test case for proving and improving large dam hydropower technologies. Rather, ASEAN should play a role in facilitating development partners to promote alternative solutions for the region's water and energy needs, thus helping to ensure sustainable development and the prosperity of the region."

Another key issue discussed at the ACSC/APF 2011 was the need to review national power development plans and strategies, especially the proposed ASEAN Power Grid. ACSC/APF 2011 participants suggested that the ASEAN Power Grid plan should focus on the sustainability of ASEAN states and ASEAN as a whole, rather than only serving the private sector's benefit.

Many groups from around the Mekong region have called for the Xayaburi Dam to be cancelled and for ASEAN to play more of a role in resolving differences between Mekong countries.

“The Xayaburi Dam will have enormous impacts on the livelihoods and food security of millions of people in the region who depend upon the Mekong River's rich resources,” said Chhith Sam Ath of The NGO Forum on Cambodia. “For this reason, we ask the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights to investigate the Xayaburi Dam.”

“We urge ASEAN's leaders to demonstrate their commitment to regional cooperation by calling for the cancelation of the Xayaburi Dam,” said Trinh Le Nguyen of Vietnam's People and Nature Reconciliation. “Regional cooperation within ASEAN and the Mekong River Commission will not be realized if member nations do not follow the agreed decision-making process and respect the need for mutual benefits.”

“The rhetoric and actions of the Government of Laos suggest they intend to push forward with this dam, despite all of the concerns raised by neighboring countries about the transboundary impacts of the dam and the recent regional agreement to defer the decision to the ministerial level,” said Niwat Roykaew of the Chiang Khong Conservation Group. “By ignoring this agreement and the public's opposition to the dam, regional tensions may rise and the livelihoods of millions of people living along the river may be doomed.”

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.

To read the Save the Mekong statement to ASEAN, see:

http://www.savethemekong.org/admin_controls/js/tiny_mce/plugins/imagemanager/files/ASEAN.pdf

For more information on the Save the Mekong coalition, visit: www.savethemekong.org

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Supporting information

The Xayaburi Dam was first proposed in May 2007, when the Government of Laos signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the project's lead developer, Thailand's Ch. Karnchang Public Company. A Project Development Agreement was later signed between the Lao government and Ch. Karnchang in November 2008. The dam is proposed to be built near the Kaeng Luang rapids, approximately 30 kilometers east of Xayaboury town in Northern Laos. The dam would take eight years to build and would cost approximately US\$ 3.5 billion. The project is expected to generate 1,260 megawatts of electricity, around 95% of which will be exported to Thailand. Major Thai banks, including Kasikorn Bank, Bangkok Bank, Siam Commercial Bank, and Krung Thai Bank have expressed interest in financing the dam.

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.

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. Since March 2009, the coalition has been calling on the region's Prime Ministers and the Mekong River Commission to cancel its plans to build a cascade of eleven large dams planned for the lower Mekong River's mainstream.