



1<sup>st</sup> December 2009

**Your Excellency Dr Pham Khoi Nguyen**

**Re: Submission of 23,110 signature petition to VNMC and call for local-led process on Mekong mainstream dams decisions**

The Save the Mekong coalition is a network of non-governmental organizations, community groups, academics, journalists, artists, lawyers, fishers, farmers and ordinary people from within the Mekong countries and internationally. Alongside many riverbank communities and the general public, we share a deep concern regarding proposals to build eleven dams on the Mekong River's mainstream.

Mekong mainstream dams threaten serious social and environmental impacts, and to undermine regional food security, economy and existing efforts to alleviate poverty and meet the Millennium Development Goals. Rather than sharing the Mekong River for regional peace and prosperity, these dams are likely to create serious cross-border conflict between the dams' proponents and the region's people who rely on the river as a source of livelihood, and among local people who will be competing for the river's diminishing resources.

**With this letter, we would like to present to Your Excellency a 23,110 signature petition from our Save the Mekong postcard campaign.**

On 19<sup>th</sup> October 2009, the enclosed petition was delivered to H.E. Samdech Akkak Moha Sena Padei Techo Hun Sen, the Prime Minister of Cambodia, H.E. Bouasone Bouphavanh, the Prime Minister of Lao PDR, H.E. Abhisit Vejjajiva, the Prime Minister of Thailand and H.E. Nguyễn Tấn Dũng, the Prime Minister of Vietnam.

The postcards request the Prime Ministers of Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam, as well as the Mekong River Commission Council and international donors, to listen to the voice of Mekong People and keep the Mekong flowing freely, and to consider better ways to meet the region's electricity needs that avoid creating cross-border impacts and disputes.

The petition was signed by 15,282 people from within the Mekong region, including 352 people from China, 30 from Burma, 616 from Laos, 7,797 from Thailand, 2,682 from Cambodia and 3,805 from Vietnam. Many of these signatories live alongside the Mekong River. The remaining 7,828 signatures came from people from fifty countries around the world.<sup>1</sup>

We hold the understanding that Your Excellency is already well aware that any dams built on the Mekong River's mainstream will hold significant impacts for the Mekong River's ecosystems, Vietnam and neighboring countries' peoples. We are submitting this letter and

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<sup>1</sup> Please find enclosed a DVD containing scans of the postcards and online petition signatures, a copy of the letter sent to H.E. Samdech Akkak Moha Sena Padei Techo Hun Sen, the Prime Minister of Cambodia, and other supporting materials.

petition to Your Excellency as Minister of Natural Resources and Environment and Chairman of Vietnam's National Mekong Committee for consideration within Vietnam's decision-making processes on Mekong mainstream dams and national water planning, and to better the process of the Mekong River Commission (MRC).

Over the past three years, the major issues regarding Mekong mainstream dam plans have been stated in many public forums, which have been hosted by both Mekong governments and civil society organizations at the local, national and regional levels. At these meetings, where representatives from the National Mekong Committees (NMCs) and the Mekong River Commission (MRC) Secretariat have often been present, civil society groups have called for full transparency and public participation in decision-making processes, and urged for action to protect regional food security, ensure sustainable environmental, social and economic development, and to promote regional peace and prosperity.

Reflecting on our experience over this period of time, it has become increasingly apparent to us that issues surrounding the Mekong mainstream dams need to be resolved through strong national-level and local-level processes, informed by regional considerations. Yet, the MRC Secretariat has failed to listen and respond to peoples' requests and kept the assessment process on Mekong mainstream dams separate from the actual realities on the ground.

**We believe that the NMCs need to urgently facilitate a strong and trusted consultative process both at the national and local level on development options for the river, and that guarantees the participation of riparian communities who would be affected by any proposed project.** This is a necessary precursor to the MRC itself becoming the credible regional river basin organization it aspires to be.

Recognizing the urgency of the Mekong mainstream dams issue, and the call from 23,110 signatures from the Mekong region and around the world to "Save the Mekong", we would therefore like to request the following:

- The Vietnam National Mekong Committee should urge for all reports prepared by the MRC Secretariat regarding the Mekong mainstream dams to be released to the public, thus initiating a more transparent and accountable process for discussing options for the development of the Mekong River basin, including about the Mekong mainstream dams
- Incorporate these signatures and their individual requests into processes initiated by Vietnam's Government and the MRC on Mekong mainstream dams as you deem appropriate
- Each Mekong country's NMCs to facilitate full and public consultations with riparian communities regarding their aspirations for future development of the Mekong River, including each proposed mainstream dam.

Thank you for your time and attention. In consideration of the importance of these issues, representatives from the Save the Mekong Coalition would greatly appreciate the opportunity to meet with you and to discuss our concerns about the Mekong mainstream dam plans and the importance of having a healthy free-flowing Mekong River.

Yours Sincerely,

Burma Rivers Network, Burma  
Towards Ecological Recovery and Regional Alliance (TERRA), Thailand  
Thai People's Network for Mekong, Thailand

Living Rivers Siam (SEARIN), Thailand  
Palang Thai, Thailand  
Salween Watch Coalition, Thailand  
EarthRights International, USA  
The NGO Forum on Cambodia (NGOF), Cambodia  
Sesan-Srepok-Sekong Rivers Protection Network (3SPN), Cambodia  
Conservation and Development on Cambodia (CDCam), Cambodia  
People and Nature Reconciliation (PanNature), Vietnam  
Manna Gum, Australia  
Mekong Monitor Tasmania, Australia  
Probe International, Canada  
Both ENDS, The Netherlands  
International Rivers, USA  
The Mangrove Action Project (MAP), USA  
Bank Information Center (BIC), USA  
World Rainforest Movement (WRM), Uruguay

Copy To:

H.E. Mr Lim Kean Hor  
Minister of Water Resources and Meteorology  
Chairman of Cambodia National Mekong Committee  
Member of the MRC Council for Cambodia

H.E. Mr Suwit Khunkitti  
Minister of Natural Resources and Environment  
Chairman of Thai National Mekong Committee  
Member of the MRC Council for Thailand  
Chairman of the MRC Council for 2009/2010

H.E. Ms Khempheng Pholsena  
Minister to the Prime Minister's Office  
President of Water Resources and Environment Administration (WREA)  
Chairperson of Lao National Mekong Committee  
Chairperson of the MRC Council for 2008/2009

Mr. Jeremy Bird,  
Chief Executive Officer, Mekong River Commission

Mr. Jeremy Carew-Reid  
Lead Consultant, "SEA of Proposed Hydropower Development on the Mekong Mainstream in the Lower Mekong Basin," Mekong River Commission

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