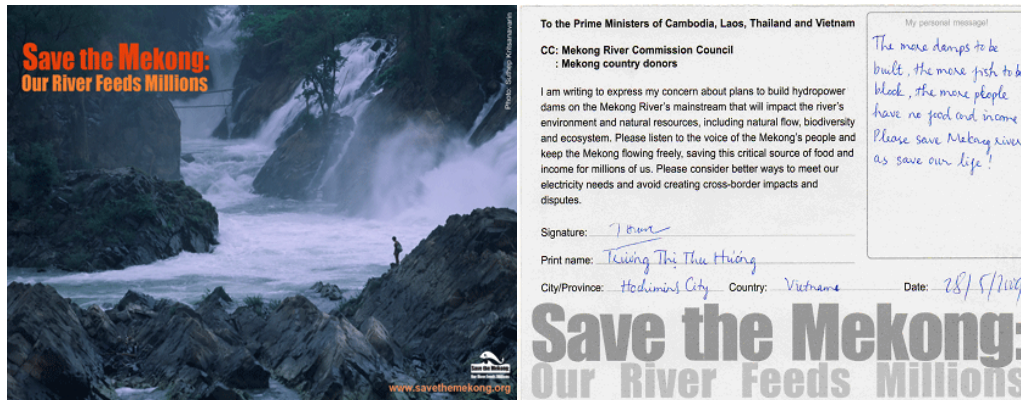




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At ASEAN People's Forum, 23,000 Signature Petition to Protect Mekong River from Mainstream Dams sent to Region's Leaders



[Cha-am, Thailand] Today, at the ASEAN People's Forum, the Save the Mekong coalition sends to the Prime Ministers of Cambodia, Lao, Thailand and Vietnam a 23,110 signature petition urging the Mekong region's leaders to abandon plans for hydropower development on the Mekong River's mainstream and to work together to protect the river and pursue less damaging electricity options.

The petition is 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.

The governments of Cambodia, Lao and Thailand are currently considering plans by Thai, Malaysian, Vietnamese, Russian and Chinese companies to build eleven dams on the Mekong River's mainstream. These plans are inconsistent with the ASEAN charter, including commitments to protect the environment, to use natural resources sustainably, and to preserve cultural heritage. They are also inconsistent with ASEAN's commitment to sustainable development and attaining the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), especially MDG1 on eradicating extreme hunger and poverty and MDG7 to ensure environmental sustainability.

At the ASEAN People's Forum, civil society groups will call for a new ASEAN Strategic Pillar on Environment that commits the member states to place international best practices on environmental sustainability at the center of decision-making. Proposals to build dams on the Mekong River's mainstream epitomize an out-dated and unsustainable mode of development that violates affected people's rights and fails to ensure equitable and sustainable development. Yet, with revised energy policies in place, ASEAN could leapfrog the 1950s-era of big dams and start growing sustainable, modern economies without losing the benefits that healthy rivers bring.

The Mekong River is the world's most productive inland freshwater fishery. Wild fish and other aquatic resources harvested from the Mekong are worth up to US\$9.4 billion per year taking into account secondary industries. The fisheries contribute significantly to the region's economy and secure the incomes and livelihoods of millions of local fishers throughout the region, which include many of the region's poorest people.

Building mainstream dams would block the migratory fisheries that constitute around seventy percent of the total commercial catch, consequently jeopardizing regional food security, nutrition and health and seriously setting back other initiatives aimed at alleviating poverty and meeting development targets. Experience around the world demonstrates that there is no way to mitigate the fisheries impacts of such large dams.

On 18 June 2009, representatives from the Save the Mekong coalition met with H.E. Abhisit Vejjajiva, the Prime Minister of Thailand, who agreed that ASEAN has a role to play as a forum to discuss issues related to plans for dam development and impacts.

Despite the limited space for public debate, the Save the Mekong petition aims to make heard the people's voices for protecting the Mekong as a giant food chain and cultural lifeline for millions of people.

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More information on the Save the Mekong initiative and government-backed plans to dam the Mekong is available in English, Burmese, Chinese, Khmer, Lao, Thai and Vietnamese on the coalition's web site www.SavetheMekong.org.