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RIVERS COALITION IN CAMBODIA

(Formerly known as the 3S Working Group)



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With six proposed dams threatening the sustainability of the Lower Mekong River, Cambodian civil society calls for the MRC to address its shortcomings

In light of the recent reports that feasibility studies for six hydropower dams are underway on the Lower Mekong River, the Rivers Coalition in Cambodia (RCC) would like to respectfully call on the Mekong River Commission (MRC) and its international donors to address the shortcomings of the MRC in failing to prevent these potentially devastating projects from moving ahead and by failing to adhere to its regional responsibilities as outlined in the 1995 Mekong Agreement. We request that open and transparent dialogue on these issues commence with the MRC's annual governance meeting now being held in Siem Reap, Cambodia.

Given the importance of the MRC as a regional water governance institution responsible for ensuring sustainable development and the management of the river and its resources, we urge the MRC to end its silence on the major social and environmental impacts these six dams will produce while also fulfilling its obligations as outlined by the Agreement. Under the Agreement, the MRC is to conduct "assessment for the protection of the environment and the maintenance of the ecological balance of the Mekong River Basin" (Article 24) and should "make every effort to avoid, minimize and mitigate harmful effects that might occur to the environment...from the development and use of the Mekong River Basin water resources" (Article 7).

Feasibility studies are now being conducted by Thai, Malaysian and Chinese companies for six hydropower dams, one of which is the Sambor dam located in Cambodia. Another - the Don Sahong dam- would be located only one kilometer from the Cambodia - Laos border. The MRC should act quickly to ensure that regional studies, dialogue, and consultation are initiated and carried out. As the livelihoods of millions of Cambodians are strongly linked to the vitality of the Mekong River, the MRC should utilize its information and research to inform decision makers and the public of the environmental, social and economic risks of these projects.

Lastly, we would like to call on the MRC to recognize the severity and complexity of adverse transboundary impacts which have occurred from past hydropower development projects within the basin. The unresolved case of the Yali Falls dam on the Sesan River is just one example of how the MRC has not been able to prevent, ameliorate or mitigate the harmful transboundary impacts of hydropower development. While the case of Yali Falls has highlighted the urgent need for greater accountability and transparency among stakeholders and the need for improved public participation within a project's decision-making processes, other dams on the Sesan have continued to be developed in a non-transparent manner without adequate consideration for downstream impacts. Until remedy is brought to the communities living along the Sesan River and there are institutional mechanisms established to ensure compliance of the Agreement along with conflict resolution, among others, within the MRC, we fear further hydropower development in the region will continue following this unsustainable and avoidable path.

The RCC is a coalition of civil society organizations working to protect and restore river ecosystems and river-based livelihoods in Cambodia and is composed of the following Cambodian organizations: 3S Rivers Protection Network, Cambodian Volunteers for Society, Conservation and Development on Cambodia, Cultural and Environmental Preservation Association, Fisheries Action Coalition Team, and NGO Forum on Cambodia. For more information, contact:

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