



H.E. Samdech Akkak Moha Sena Padei Techo Hun Sen,
The Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia

H.E. Thongsing Thammavong,
The Prime Minister of the Lao People's Democratic Republic

H.E. Nguyễn Tấn Dũng,
The Prime Minister of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam

H.E. Yingluck Shinawatra,
The Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Thailand

1 November 2013

Re: Mekong under Threat: Urgent Moratorium by Heads of Government on Don Sahong Dam is Required"

Dear Excellencies,

We, the Save the Mekong Coalition, are appalled by Lao PDR's plan to build the Don Sahong Dam right at the heart of the Khone Falls, which we consider absolutely vital to the ecosystem of the Mekong River. The Don Sahong Project will irreparably damage the Khone Falls and our mother river – the Mekong.

Even the Mekong River Commission Secretariat once described the Khone Falls as "an ecologically unique area that is essentially a microcosm of the entire lower Mekong River," and concluded that "such a site is so rare in nature that every effort should be made to preserve all of Khone Falls from any development."

The Don Sahong Dam will irreversibly alter the Khone Falls and Mekong River basin. It will create a non-passable barrier across the Hou Sahong channel, recognized by fishery experts as one of the worst possible sites to build a dam, as it is the passage of maximum fish migration on the Mekong, which supports the world's largest inland fisheries. Additionally, more than two million cubic meters of riverbed will be excavated from the Mekong River to increase flows into the Hou Sahong channel.

Thus, with an installed capacity of 260 MW, the benefits from the Don Sahong Dam will be minimal in comparison to the serious negative repercussions on fisheries and local livelihoods, as well as the food security of millions of people within the Lao PDR and in the neighboring countries of Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam. The project will also threaten such rare and internationally recognized giant migratory fishes as *Pangasius krempfi*, *Pangasianodon gigas*, *Probarbus jullieni*, and *Probarbus labeamajor*. Threats to regional harmony will also become a serious matter as tensions which currently exist between and within nations are likely to be exacerbated.

We have little faith in the Mekong River Commission (MRC) or the 1995 Mekong Agreement's ability to adequately address the threat from the Don Sahong Dam and other projects on the Mekong mainstream. One clear indication is the MRC's failure to resolve disagreement among the four member governments over whether the 'prior consultation' process for the Xayaburi Dam remains open or closed.

Moreover, the Lao Government has claimed that the Don Sahong Dam is "not on the Mekong mainstream" and will hence engage the 'prior notification' process instead of the 'prior consultation' process. We totally reject this claim, for there is absolutely no question that the Don Sahong Dam is a mainstream project that will deeply impact flows and fish migration, and have immense transboundary implications. For these reasons, we believe that the MRC will once again fail, should resolution of the Don Sahong Dam controversy remain solely in the hands of the Lao Government.

We share the concerns raised by various Mekong country government officials regarding the many possible impacts and lack of transparency around the Don Sahong Dam. These figures include the Vietnam Minister of Natural Resources and Environment, the former Cambodian Minister of Environment, and members of the Thailand National Mekong River Committee. To fully realize such concerns, we urge the Mekong country governments to demand the Laos PDR to respect an authentic spirit of cooperation.

In light of the many ambiguities around the Don Sahong Dam, as well as other projects on the Mekong mainstream, deliberations over all these projects must be halted. The new Joint Platform is urgently needed to review, clarify, and resolve outstanding issues through regional-level decision-making based on the principles of transparency and full participation of all stakeholders. Necessary studies, including transboundary impact assessments for all projects, must also be carried out in order to allow for informed decision-making.

Thus, we, the Save the Mekong Coalition, urge Your Excellencies' cooperation in realising the spirit of the Mekong Agreement, and intervention to demand the *immediate cancellation of the Don Sahong Dam* and moratorium on decisions over other mainstream projects for the overall benefit of people throughout the Mekong region.

To build large-scale hydropower projects in the Mekong basin is to sacrifice Mother Nature and the livelihoods of tens of millions of people in the name of 'development.' Thus, the decisions should not be the sole responsibility of states. The Mekong country governments must recognize the rights of the people of the Mekong River basin as an equal stake in such decisions.

Yours respectfully,

Members of the Save the Mekong Coalition

3S Protection Network

Both ENDS

Centre for Social Research and Development (CSR D)

Culture and Environment Preservation Association (CEPA)

Fisheries Action Coalition Team (FACT)

Focus on the Global South

GreenID

Ian Baird, Department of Geography, University of Wisconsin-Madison

International Rivers

Mekong Watch

Mekong Watch Tasmania

NGO Forum on Cambodia

PanNature

The Corner House

Mekong Energy and Ecology Network (MEE Net)

Towards Ecological Recovery and Regional Alliance (TERRA)

Vietnam River Network (VRN)

WARECOD (Center for Water Resources Conservation and Development)

World Rainforest Movement (WRM)