



Save the Mekong coalition statement to H.E. Abhisit Vejjajiva, Prime Minister of Thailand

Delivered by Mr. Chhith Sam Ath, Executive Director of the NGO Forum on Cambodia on 18 June 2009 at Parliament House, Bangkok, Thailand.

Thank you, Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva for meeting with us today. I am delivering this statement on behalf of the Save the Mekong coalition, a network of non-government organizations, community groups, academics, journalists, artists, fishers, farmers and ordinary people from within the Mekong countries and internationally.

Today we would like to present to you our concerns regarding plans to build eleven hydropower dams on the Mekong River's lower mainstream and to deliver a petition that asks the region's Prime Ministers to keep the Mekong River free flowing.

This petition has been signed by 16,380 people from within the Mekong Region and around the world.

First, I will briefly outline for you the background to the proposed mainstream dams and our principle concerns.

Since March 2006, hydropower companies from Thailand, China, Vietnam, Lao, Malaysia and Russia have proposed eleven big hydropower dams for the Mekong River's lower mainstream. Seven of the dam sites are in Laos, two are in Cambodia, and two are on the Thai-Lao border.

There is already wide-spread concern amongst riverbank communities and the general public about the severe consequences these dams will have.

The Mekong River is host to the world's largest inland fishery. The commercial fish catch is currently worth US\$3 billion annually. Not only are these fisheries an important source of income for local fishers, which include many of the region's poorest people, but they are also vital in ensuring regional food security. Between half and four fifths of the animal protein consumed by the 60 million people in the lower Mekong basin come from the river's fisheries.

Building dams on the river's mainstream will block the major fish migrations that accounts for up to 70% of the commercial catch. Scientific opinion is agreed on the importance of the Mekong's migratory fisheries, the impact of the dams on them, and that there is no way to mitigate these impacts.

The Save the Mekong coalition has been formed in response to the growing public concern about the impacts of these dams. Since March 2009, the coalition has collected signatures and personal messages from concerned citizens through a postcard and online petition.

On behalf of the signatories today we would like to deliver to you this petition.

It states:

To the Prime Ministers of Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam.

CC: Mekong River Commission Council
: Mekong country donors

I am writing to express my concern about plans to build hydropower dams on the Mekong River's mainstream that will impact the river's environment and natural resources, including natural flow, biodiversity and ecosystem. Please listen to the voice of the Mekong's people and keep the Mekong flowing freely, saving this critical source of food and income for millions of us. Please consider better ways to meet our electricity needs and avoid creating cross-border impacts and disputes.

In total 16,380 people signed the postcards and the online petition. 11,757 signatures are from Mekong citizens, including many people who live along the Mekong River.

Many people left personal messages on the postcards and we hope that you will find time to read some of them.

For example, a villager from Stung Treng province of Cambodia wrote "If the dams happen, where will all of us go to live?"

The Mekong River is nature's gift to the Mekong region, shared between China, Burma, Thailand, Lao, Cambodia, Vietnam, and between all citizens. Acting to protect this natural wealth will in turn ensure sustainable economic growth, protect food security and promote regional peace and prosperity.

In a world facing a growing food and water crisis, we are asking region's leaders to work together to protect the Mekong River for the benefit of all the region's peoples and to pursue better ways to meet the region's electricity needs.

Thank you for your time and attention and we look forward to hearing your opinion on these concerns, as an influential leader in the Mekong region.

<i>Save the Mekong petition signatures</i>		
	Printed postcard	Online petition
Burma	26	4
Cambodia	2625	48
China	338	12
Lao PDR	583	28
Thailand	7389	367
Vietnam	240	97
Regional subtotal	11,201	556
International	1164	3459
Subtotals	12,365	4,015
Grand Total	16,380 signatures	