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LOWER SESAN II DAM DEVELOPERS URGED TO ENSURE ACCOUNTABILITY
FOR SEVERE IMPACTS

MAY 27, 2014 - A group of 15 civil society organizations (CSOs) and lawyers from Cambodia and the region yesterday issued letters to the Chinese government and the corporate stakeholders developing the Lower Sesan II Hydropower Dam in Stung Treng Province, Cambodia, warning of the severe environmental and social impacts of the project together with a need for greater accountability by all stakeholders.

The letters, addressed to the Chinese Ministries of Commerce, Environmental Protection and Foreign Affairs, Chinese state-owned-enterprises (SOEs) Huaneng Group and Hydrolancang, Cambodian companies the Royal Group and Hydropower Lower Sesan II Dam Co. and Vietnam Electricity (EVN), highlight the risks of proceeding with the Lower Sesan II Dam, as the project's 2008 environmental impact assessment (EIA) has yet to consider findings from recent studies which point to extremely serious downstream and transboundary impacts.

The letters follow a meeting in China last week between Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen and Cao Peixi, Chairman of China Huaneng Group, during which Hun Sen reportedly 'implored' the company to minimize the project's environmental and social footprint.¹

Preparation for construction of the Lower Sesan II Dam is already underway, with rapid clearing of natural forest and development of a ferry to transport machinery. "Communities are reporting problems at the dam site which raise questions about legal compliance, such as logging outside of the reservoir area, unlawful fishing activities, use of child labour and deteriorating water quality downstream," said Meach Mean, Coordinator of the 3S Rivers Protection Network (3SPN). Proceeding without properly identifying and addressing damage in Cambodia, as well as in Vietnam, Laos and Thailand, may carry reputational risks for the companies and dire consequences for ecosystems and communities, and could even threaten regional security.

As the Sesan and Srepok rivers are crucial for fish migration and breeding, the dam will mean a 9.3% reduction in fish biomass across the Mekong River Basin. For Cambodians and communities along the river in neighbouring countries, many of them indigenous groups who rely on fish as an essential source of food and livelihoods, the resulting poverty and malnutrition will be devastating. Together with other dams on the 3S tributaries, the project will contribute to significant changes to water flows and loss of sediment in the Mekong River, harming ecosystems and agricultural productivity downstream.

"As one of the most damaging tributary projects in the Mekong River Basin, the Lower Sesan II Dam's effects on biodiversity, food security, livelihoods and agriculture will be felt not only in Cambodia, but across the entire Lower Mekong region", said Ms Ame Trandem, Southeast Asia

Program Director for International Rivers. “The scale of the dam’s impacts alone demands immediate reconsideration and places the reputation of all involved stakeholders at great risk.”

Despite the severity of the predicted impacts, relatively few people from affected areas have been consulted about the project. Many of those who did join consultation meetings reported that they were not given enough information or a chance to voice their concerns at hearings conducted by project developers and Cambodian authorities. “The Lower Sesan II has proceeded to date without adequate accountability. There is an ongoing lack of transparency about the dam’s impacts and resettlement plans and there have been no meaningful attempts to consult communities, or to enable them to participate in decision-making,” said Ms Maureen Harris, Mekong Legal Coordinator with EarthRights International.

The letters support a statement by more than 75,000 villagers living along the Sesan, Srepok and Sekong rivers, which was delivered to Madam Bu Jianguo, Chinese Ambassador to Cambodia, in December 2013.ⁱⁱ “Thousands of villagers from the affected area implored the Ambassador and the Chinese Government to look into their concerns, yet they are still waiting for a response. With so much at risk this is not acceptable or responsible,” said Mr Tek Vannara, Executive Director of the NGO Forum on Cambodia. The statement notes: “We anticipate that the Lower Sesan II Dam will cause serious negative impacts on the food and protein sources we rely on to feed our children and families. The dam will harm our livelihoods, traditional practices, agricultural land, and destroy large areas of forest and natural resources which we depend on for our survival.”

The letters sent today urge an immediate halt to the Lower Sesan II Dam and call on the project developers and Chinese Government to ensure that the project does not proceed without comprehensive study of environmental and social impacts, including those in neighbouring countries. The letters further demand disclosure of project information, participation in decision-making and consent of affected communities, and full compliance with national and international laws. This includes the Chinese Government’s own recently issued *Guidelines for Environmental Protection in Foreign Investment and Cooperation*,ⁱⁱⁱ which exhort Chinese companies to promote environmental protection, sustainable development and a positive image for Chinese companies in their overseas investments.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Lower Sesan II Dam is located just below the confluence of the major Sesan and Srepok tributaries and about 25km from the Mekong River. Pre-construction activities have already commenced. When complete, the dam will be 70m high and 8m wide, creating a 33,560 hectare reservoir, with a generating capacity of 400 MW. More than 5,000 people, most of whom are indigenous, will be forcibly resettled if the dam proceeds.

ⁱ Henderson, Simon, ‘Hun Sen Attends Dinner, Presentation in China’ *The Cambodia Daily*, 22 May 2014, available at: <http://www.cambodiadaily.com/news/hun-sen-attends-dinner-presentation-in-china-59355/>.

ⁱⁱ Kuch Naren, ‘Villagers Ask Chinese Embassy to Intervene Against Dam Investors,’ *The Cambodia Daily*, 12 December 2013, available at: <http://www.cambodiadaily.com/archives/villagers-ask-chinese-embassy-to-intervene-against-dam-investors-49144/>.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Guidelines for Environmental Protection in Foreign Investment and Cooperation*, issued by Ministry of Commerce of the People’s Republic of China and Ministry of Environmental Protection of the People’s Republic of China, Shang He Han [2013] No. 74, Date of Issuance: February 18, 2013.

International Rivers works to stop destructive dams, improve decision-making processes in the water and energy sectors, and promote water and energy solutions for a just and sustainable world. Since 1994 International Rivers has been working to protect the Mekong River Basin. As an active member of the Save the Mekong Coalition, International Rivers works with partners in the region to advocate against destructive dams on the Mekong River and promote more sensible options for meeting the region's energy and development needs. More information on International Rivers is available at: <http://www.internationalrivers.org>.

EarthRights International (ERI) is a nongovernmental, nonprofit organization that combines the power of law and the power of people in defense of human rights and the environment, which we define as "earth rights." We specialize in fact-finding, legal actions against perpetrators of earth rights abuses, training grassroots and community leaders, and advocacy campaigns, and have offices in Southeast Asia, the United States and Peru. More information on ERI is available at <http://www.earthrights.org>.

3S Rivers Protection Network (3SPN) is a local coordinating body in the form of a civil society organization representing thousands of indigenous people living along the Sesan, Srepok and Sekong Rivers in Cambodia. We work in close collaboration with many partners locally, nationally and internationally in order to restore the socio-economic and environmental situation and the rights of indigenous people along the 3S rivers that have been negatively affected by hydropower dam development. 3SPN was officially registered in 2005 with Cambodia's Ministry of Interior. More information on 3SPN is available at: <http://www.3spn.org/>.

NGO Forum on Cambodia works to improve life for poor and vulnerable people in Cambodia. It is a membership organisation that builds NGO cooperation and capacity, supporting NGO networks and other civil society organizations to engage in policy dialogue, debate and advocacy. The goal of NGO Forum is that the rights of the poor and vulnerable are recognized and supported by the policies and practices of Cambodia's government and development partners, and the wider community. More information on NGO Forum is available at: <http://www.ngoforum.org.kh>.