

حملة إنقاذ نهر دجلة والاهوار العراقية

كهمةپهینی پاراستنی رووباری دجله و هوراهکانی عیراق

Save the Tigris and Iraqi Marshes Campaign



Press Kit

**Save the Tigris and Iraqi Marshes Campaign
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Save the Tigris and Iraqi Marshes Campaign



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PRESS BRIEFING

Rivers and Dams

The dam industry is trying to sell dam construction as a clean solution to our climate change challenges. In some of the world's last great free-flowing-river basins, such as the Amazon, the Mekong, the Congo, and the rivers of Patagonia, governments and industry are pushing forward with cascades of massive dams, all under the guise of clean energy. Dams emit 4% of the total green gas emissions; this figure is comparable to the carbon footprint of the aviation industry. Dams emit methane, which has 20 times more global warming potential than carbon dioxide.

Over 50,000 dams have been built on more than half of the world's major rivers. Freshwater ecosystems have lost 50 per cent of their populations, and over a third of remaining freshwater fish species are threatened with extinction. The negative impact of dams is not limited to wildlife as large-scale dams destroy cultural sites and the homes of tens of thousands of people.

In addition, dams are endangering our efforts to fight climate change by reducing water quality and quantity, drying up forests and wetlands, flooding productive land, and destroying fisheries. Dams fail to carry nutrients downstream in the watershed, resulting in more soil erosion, less percolation when it rains, more run off and increased desertification.

The Ilisu Dam in Turkey is an icon of the social, cultural and environmental cost of massive dams in Mesopotamia, the cradle of civilization. The legalities of its construction are questionable, but their impact on nature, culture and people is indisputable.

European companies are behind dam projects in developing countries. The Ilisu dam in Turkey involves a consortium that includes the Austrian corporation Andritz Hydro, which is also involved in Brazil's Belo Monte Dam and Laos Xayaburi dam.

They promote hydropower as a source of 'clean' energy. Yet scientific studies such as those by leading climate change scientist Philip Fearnside of the Amazon Research Institute (INPA), show many dams and reservoirs are a methane menace. Methane is a greenhouse gas 25 times more potent than carbon dioxide (CO₂), contributing to global warming.

“The river is the life-line of the eco-system, is like the veins in our organism that brings blood to the arteries, when you choke the arteries, you get a heart attack. Dams are like the choking arteries of the planet”.
Vandana Shiva

The Ilisu Dam

FACT BOX: IMPACTS IN TURKEY

People

- Involuntary displacement of over 78,000 people
- Destruction of the Kurd's most important cultural sites and consequently their social structure as a political tool to perpetuate injustice against them

Nature

- Turkey's last free-flowing river dammed
- Destruction of nesting and breeding grounds for an unknown number of plants and animals and dozens of endemic birds, mammal and aquatic species

Culture

- Flooding of the historical city of Hasankeyf, flooded which has been inhabited for 12,000 years and has been the seat of many empires
- Legacy of more than 20 cultures in Mesopotamia lost
- Destruction of more than 200 archeological sites and many ancient towns along a unique cultural mosaic that has endured for millenia

The Ilisu Dam forms part of one of the largest irrigation and hydropower projects worldwide, the South East Anatolian Project, known also as The GAP project . The Ilisu Dam would be the first on the Tigris River, the last free-flowing major river in Turkey. The Tigris Valley, with the ancient city of Hasankeyf at its center, is one of humanity's most valuable legacies in Mesopotamia. It laid the foundations of eastern and western civilization and hosts the legacy of more than 20 cultures. Settlement at Hasankeyf has persisted for 12,000 years.

The project was approved without an environmental impact assessment (EIA) or resettlement plan. In 2001 and 2005, after NGO pressure, EIAs were conducted for the ECA's in violation of Turkish law and have been criticized as deeply flawed by NGOs. The first consortium contracted to build the project withdrew in 2001, but was replaced by a second in 2004. This latter consortium has now also withdrawn, although a number of its individual companies remain in the project.

The dam would flood an area that meets nine out of 10 UNESCO World Heritage Site criteria, according to a report published by Istanbul University Professor Zeynep Ahunbay, also former President of ICOMOS Turkey. The Turkish government refuses to nominate the site for UNESCO protection.

Ilisu dam will result in the destruction of more than 200 archaeological sites and many ancient towns along with a unique cultural mosaic that has endured for millennia; it will require the involuntary resettlement of up to 78,000 people. The Turkish government says it seeks to develop this south east of Turkey, to create employment but in reality is using dam construction and water politics as a tool to destroy the Kurds' most important cultural sites and consequently their social structure.

Environmentally it will be a disaster as nesting and breeding grounds for an unknown number of plants and animals and dozens of endemic bird, mammal and aquatic

species will be destroyed.

Turkey's civil society has been working against the construction of the Ilisu dam; they believe that Ilisu is a threat to the shared culture and heritage of the Tigris River. Ercan Ayboga from the Initiative to Keep Hasankeyf Alive and partner in the Save the Tigris campaign affirms, "We do not want the Ilisu dam to destroy the culture, nature, and society on the two sides of the border. The Tigris should be a means to develop a partnership between people of Iraq and Turkey, but Ilisu is a big threat to our relationship"

FACT BOX: IMPACTS IN IRAQ

People

- Iraqi's right to water and Iraq water security is at risk, due to water scarcity and poor quality of water.
- Marsh Arab communities in Basra, Iraq, affected by water shortage
- Loss of about 40% of Iraq's good agricultural lands (about 696,000 Hec.) located along the reaches of the Tigris, which are a source of livelihoods to the people of Iraq.

Nature

- Restoration efforts of the Mesopotamian Marshes will be compromised

Culture

- UNESCO has expressed grave concerns about the adverse impacts of Ilisu on Iraq's southern marshes due to decreased water flow. The dam will affect the integrity of the marshes, threatening their biodiversity, causing serious changes to the marshland ecosystem and deterioration of local water and soil quality. Efforts to have the marshland listed as a World Heritage Site would therefore be compromised.

The Ilisu dam has an additional transboundary element; Turkey shares the Tigris river basin with Syria and Iraq. When all dam projects are implemented, Turkey's total storage capacity in the Euphrates will reach 94.78 BCM (three times the river's average annual discharge at the Syrian/Iraqi border). On the Tigris the storage will reach 17.6 BCM (about the average annual flow at the Turkish/Iraqi border).

Once the cradle of civilizations and agricultural haven, now Iraq's land has dried significantly mostly due to man-made causes. For the past 20 years upstream dams in the Euphrates have reduced Iraq's water income, and now the most important water lifeline in the country, the Tigris River, will be further reduced having catastrophic effects on the lives of Iraqis who suffer increased drought and loss of lands due to lack of water.



As the largest wetland in southwestern Asia, the marshes are the most important stopover for migratory birds flying from north-central Eurasia to Eastern Africa. They are home of numerous bird, mammal, amphibian and reptile species, many of which are globally threatened. The marshlands support fishery resources, which account for 60% of Iraq's fish catch

and have shown a 50% decline due to extensive upstream damming and water diversion projects.

The Marsh Arabs have a close connection between the water and their culture, yet water availability is affected by geopolitics of the region. The restoration of the marshes depends on two key elements: the Marsh Arabs and water availability.

The Ilisu dam will cause further drought in a country that has been severely hit during 2007-2009. Other significant effects include the socio-economical, cultural and environmental impacts, water pollution, degradation of water quality, and loss of agricultural land. Iraq will lose up to 47% of its annual water income and about 40% of its agricultural lands and in turn decrease its agricultural output causing unemployment and subsequent displacement of Iraqi farmers.

Through projects like GAP, and Ilisu dam, Turkey is strengthening its economic, political and securing its hegemonic position and will have full control over Iraqi water resources, placing Iraq in a vulnerable political position. The dam construction offers a potential for escalation and international conflict over water resources, yet is ongoing despite advocacy efforts in Turkey, Iraq and internationally.



Work on the Ilisu dam continues in defiance of court rulings halting the dam, and the withdrawal of funding from European Credit Agencies in 2009 when the Turkish government failed to meet almost all the criteria to protect the environment, cultural heritage and local communities. The Turkish State Council ordered an immediate halt to dam construction on January 7 - the second time the government lost a case because the project lacks an EIA. This time again, the government wants to enact legislation that excludes the dam from an EIA requirement.

LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Tigris River is the lifeline of Iraq, it is now being threatened by the construction of Ilisu dam within Turkey's GAP project in violation of international and Iraqi law. The Ilisu dam will cause adverse harm to neighboring states in contravention of Turkey's duty to prevent harm. In addition to the no harm principle, Turkey has failed to conduct a transboundary environmental impact assessment that is a threshold duty under international law and did not consult with the communities directly affected by the dam, which is also customary law. With its judgment of 2010 in the Pulp Mills case, the ICJ has recognized that prior assessment of transboundary impacts is a requirement of international law where there is a risk that a proposed industrial activity may have a significant transboundary impact. States also have a related duty to act on behalf of their citizens to redress and remedy the environmental and human rights harms experienced by their citizens, irrespective of where such harms originate. Accordingly, the Iraqi government should hold Turkey accountable to its international legal obligations.

Not only Turkey has violated international law, but it has failed to comply with general bilateral agreements signed by Iraq and Turkey. Turkey has engaged in bilateral agreements with Iraq on the use of shared watercourses, like the 1946 Treaty of Friendship and Neighbourly Relations states that the government of Turkey agrees to inform Iraq of any projects in order to render such projects to serve the interests of both Turkey and Iraq. Even, if there were no such treaties between the two countries, that does not excuse Turkey from its international obligations.

Private companies and banks should be held accountable for their engagement in projects that fail to comply with international law and violate human rights. These European companies, specifically the Austrian company Andritz has continued to provide services and products despite being advised of the human rights and environmental harms resulting from the project, the controversial nature of the dam and despite previous consortiums having been dissolved due to potential human rights violations. Iraqi law provides for the possibility to proceed legally against any private/public entity that causes harm.

The Ilisu dam case has not been resolved, and it is the responsibility of Iraq to deal with it wisely as the consequences of not doing so would mean giving Turkey a free ticket with respect to the construction of other dams on the Tigris River, that could result in a disaster to Iraq's economic development.

SAVE THE TIGRIS AND IRAQI MARSHES CAMPAIGN

Save the Tigris Campaign is a regional advocacy campaign with partners in Turkey, Iraq, and internationally that works to raise awareness about the economic and environmental impacts of the Ilisu dam on Turkey and Iraq. The coalition includes 7 national and international organisations from Turkey, Iraq, Italy, Germany and the UK.

Save the Tigris and the Iraqi Marshes is an advocacy campaign that was started in March 2012 by a coalition of civil society organizations from Iraq, Turkey. The campaign is part of an international effort to Save the World Heritage on the Tigris River from the impacts of the Ilisu Dam, a hydroelectric project being constructed on the Tigris River by the Turkish government.

The campaign seeks to link groups and movements concerned with the adverse impacts of dams and other development projects on the Tigris and Euphrates. We advocate for policies that secure the sustainable and equitable use of water for all who live in the region and we oppose the privatization and commodification of water supplies and natural resources.

Save the Tigris Campaign is part of a global solidarity movement of dam-affected communities. The coalition aims to draw attention to the negative impact of large-scale dams on Iraq and Turkey's nature, culture and people, and we advocate the Iraqi government to negotiate a sustainable transboundary water agreement between riparian states on the Euphrates-Tigris River basin.

The initial focus of the campaign is the protection of Hasankeyf, one of the worldwide ancient settlements located in the mainly Kurdish southeast Turkey, and the Mesopotamian Marshlands in southern Iraq. The campaign works to draw attention to the negative impact of the Ilisu Dam and other dams on the Mesopotamian heritage both in Turkey as well as in Iraq and to develop advocacy and awareness activities that involve all relevant actors: local communities; civil society organizations; media; national and local institutions; associations of experts and intellectuals; research centers; universities and others.

The Save the Tigris Campaign had events in Tunis, Jordan and participated in global solidarity with Ilisu dam affected communities in Turkey. The campaign had several awareness lectures in Basra, Amara, Missan, Dhi Qar and Suleimaniya, Iraq with speakers from academia, civil society and international activists.

For more information:

<http://www.iraqicivilsociety.org/campaigns/save-the-tigris-and-iraqi-marshes-campaign>



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Save the Tigris Campaign

Partners on the Campaign

1. Iraqi People Campaign to Save the Tigris, Iraq
2. Civil Development Organization, Iraq
3. Iraqi Civil Society Solidarity Initiative, ICSSI, Iraq
4. Initiative to Keep Hasankeyf Alive, Turkey
5. Corner House, UK
6. Counter Current, Germany
7. Un Ponte Per ..., Italy

Media Coverage

1. [International Voices Unite on Day of Action for Rivers \(International Rivers\)](#)
2. [The NGO s of Iraq as a Foreign Policy Tool: The Case of the Ilisu Dam \(Orsam Water Research Programme\)](#)
3. [The Tigris is yelling \(In Arabic\)](#)
4. [International Initiative for Solidarity with civic organizations raise the alarm to save the Tigris River from the Turkish threat Ilisu \(In Arabic\)](#)
5. [Iraq, the dam on the Tigris that Dies, Threats of drought and other disasters \(In Italian\)](#)