



16 November 2015

Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia
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Concern regarding Saudi Arabia's Support for Dam Projects in Sudan

Your Excellency,

International Rivers is an international environmental and human rights organization with offices in six countries. For 30 years, our mission has been to protect rivers and the populations who depend on them. We are engaged in an active dialogue with government institutions, companies and international organizations around the world. In 2013, we were awarded the prestigious MacArthur Award for Creative and Effective Institutions for our work.

We are gravely concerned about the completed dam projects and those proposed to be built on the Nile in Northern Sudan, which I had the chance to visit in 2005. The Merowe Dam on the Nile's fourth cataract has already been completed. As is often the case with such projects, its costs were higher than projected, and the benefits remained below expectation.

An independent Environmental Impact Assessment for the Merowe Dam was never carried out, and the internal company assessment that was prepared was never approved by Sudan's Environmental Ministry, in violation of national law. More than 50,000 people were displaced from the fertile Nile Valley to arid desert locations, and were impoverished in the process. The local populations were never consulted about the project, and their protests were met with serious repression, including the killing of at least three protesters. The UN Special Rapporteur on Housing Rights, Mr. Miloon Kothari, in 2007 expressed serious concerns about the human rights violations in the Merowe Dam Project.

It is with grave concern that we recently learned about an offer by the Government of Saudi Arabia to fund the Dal, Kajbar and Shereik dams, to be located at the Nile's second, third and fifth cataract in Sudan, respectively. As in the case of the Merowe Dam, no adequate replacement land has been identified for the numerous people who would be displaced by these dams. As with the Merowe Dam, the local populations have never been consulted and are strongly opposed to the projects. Again as with Merowe, the dams would submerge invaluable archeological treasures, which form a crucial part of the legacy and identity of the Nubian people.

As in the case of the Merowe Dam, the Government of Sudan has responded to peaceful protests of the local population with serious repression. On June 13, 2007, security officers killed four peaceful protestors against the Kajbar and Dal dams in an ambush and wounded more than 15 others.

Based on 30 years of experience, we are convinced that the Dal, Kajbar and Shereik dams cannot be built in line with good international practice and with international human rights obligations. We urge the Government of Saudi Arabia to reconsider support for the projects while there is still time. We are also in a dialogue with the Chinese companies that have received contracts for these projects, and have conveyed the same message to them.

Should the projects move forward, we will closely monitor them, and will support the local populations in their justified demands. We will expose any violations of good international practice and human rights abuses in the international media, and will hold the Government of Sudan and the projects' funders to account in the appropriate international human rights bodies.

We will appreciate it if you can convey our concerns to the Government of Saudi Arabia. We will be happy to answer any questions that you may have. Thank you for your attention.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peter Bosshard". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr. Peter Bosshard
Interim Executive Director