

Mr. Kishore Rao  
Director  
World Heritage Centre  
7, place de fontenoy  
75352 Paris  
France

June 10, 2011

**Subject: Dams an Increasing Threat to World Heritage Sites in Asia, Africa and Latin America**

Dear Mr. Kishore Rao,

We appreciate the work that the UNESCO World Heritage Committee continues to do to protect the world's cultural and natural heritage for future generations.

We, the undersigned, represent civil society organizations that work to protect the world's most endangered rivers and the communities and ecosystems that depend on them. We are writing to express our grave concern regarding the increasing number of World Heritage Sites in Asia, Africa and Latin America that are facing the threat of proposed and existing large dam projects.

Among the current list of World Heritage Sites, the following are Sites that we have identified as being threatened by both proposed dams and those currently under construction and operation. It is by no means a comprehensive list:

- China: Three Parallel Rivers of Yunnan Protected Areas (*up to 13 dams proposed on the Nu River adjacent to the Site*)
- Kenya: Lake Turkana (*Gibe III Dam under construction on the Omo River in Ethiopia, which flows into the Site*)
- Ethiopia: Lower Omo Valley (*Gibe III Dam under construction on the Omo River*)
- Panama/Costa Rica: Talamanca Range-La Amistad Reserves/La Amistad National Park (*several dams within the watersheds of La Amistad are being constructed or proposed in both Panama and Costa Rica*)
- Honduras: Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve (*three dams on the Patuca River, which flows into the Site*)
- Russia: Lake Baikal (*three existing, one constructed and two proposed large dams in the Lake Baikal-Angara River threaten the Site's hydrological regime*)
- India: Manas Wildlife Sanctuary (*Kurichhu Dam on Manas River and Mangdecchu Dam on Mangde Chhu River, a tributary of the Manas, in Bhutan will affect the Site*)
- India: Kaziranga National Park (*cumulative impact of dams on the Brahmaputra river basin, including the Lower Subansiri Dam and the Lower Siang Dam*)

- India: Nanda Devi and Valley of Flowers National Park (*three proposed dams on the Rishi Ganga river catchment within the Site*)
- Thailand: Dong Phrayayen-Khao Yai Forest Complex (*Huay Samong Dam on the Huay Samong River is located in the Site in Prajeen Buri Province*)
- Bangladesh: The Sundarbans (*sediment flow changes due to existing dams have stunted the growth of the Sundarbans*)
- Tanzania: Selous Game Reserve (*proposed dam on the Rufiji River at Stiegler's Gorge within the Site*)
- Zimbabwe/Zambia: Victoria Falls (*proposed dam below the Falls at Batoka Gorge*)

Free-flowing rivers lie at the core of the watersheds within these Sites, acting as both biological corridors and sustenance for indigenous communities downstream. A large body of evidence at existing dams worldwide suggests that dams outside World Heritages have a significant detrimental effect on these Sites by fragmenting ecosystems and obstructing the movement of aquatic organisms. In addition to habitat loss in areas occupied by reservoirs, the effects of downstream alterations in flow, sediment transport, temperature, and water chemistry will be exacerbated by biological impoverishment of the upper reaches of rivers. Dam construction will also lead to road building, land conversion and development, pollution and possibly poaching by relocated communities.

In the attached briefing sheet, we describe in greater detail the current threats to the above sites. Given the serious impacts to biological diversity that dams pose to all the aforementioned sites, we ask that the Committee consider the following actions during its 35<sup>th</sup> Session:

1. List the above sites on the Endangered List if they are not already listed;
2. Commission IUCN to conduct a comprehensive report on the threat of dams to all World Heritage Sites; and
3. Urge the relevant State Parties to suspend all dam plans and construction activities until Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) of individual dams and Cumulative EIAs of river basins with several dams are published and public participation processes involving affected communities, experts, IUCN, UNESCO and civil society are initiated in the affected basins.

If you would like to request further information regarding any of the projects in the briefing sheets, please do not hesitate to contact us through [katy@internationalrivers.org](mailto:katy@internationalrivers.org).

We thank you for your attention in this matter and stand ready to support you in the protection of the above World Heritage Sites. We look forward to learning about your decision on this matter.

Sincerely,

Mr. Derec Davies, Friends of the Earth Australia, Australia

Ms. Lyndon Schneiders, The Wilderness Society, Australia

Dr. Yu Xiaogang, Green Watershed, China

Dr. William O. McLarney, Programa de Biomonitorio de Rios, Asociación ANAI, Costa Rica

Ms. Miriam Miranda, Fraternal African-Honduran Organization (OFRANEH), Honduras

Mr. Himanshu Thakkar, SANDRP, India

Ms. Ikal Angelei, Friends of Lake Turkana, Kenya

Mr. Marco Von Borstel, Movimiento Mexicano de Afectados por las Presas y en Defensa de los Ríos (MAPDER), México

Mr. Gustavo Castro, Otros Mundos AC/Amigos de la Tierra, México

Mr. Hope E. Ogbeide, Society for Water and Public Health Protection (SWAPHEP), Nigeria

Mr. Osvaldo Jordan, Alliance for Conservation and Development (ACD), Panama

Mr. Eugene Simonov, Rivers without Boundaries Coalition, Russia/China/USA

Ms. Liane Greeff, EcoDoc Africa, South Africa

Mr. Peter Galvin, Center for Biological Diversity, USA

Ms. Audrey Wood, Pacific Environment, USA

Ms. Katy Yan, International Rivers, USA

Prof. Dr. Wolfgang H. Thome, Uganda

Ms. Sally Wynn, The Zambezi Society, Zimbabwe

**Enclosed:** “Damming Our World Heritage,” briefing sheet on known dam-affected World Heritage Sites

**Cc:** Mr. Kishore Rao  
Director  
UNESCO World Heritage Centre

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