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MEDIA RELEASE

Mekong and 3S people from 3 countries gathered to voice concern on dams and cross-border impacts

Today in Phnom Penh, around 200 people, mainly the representatives of local people living along Mekong mainstream and tributaries from Thailand, Vietnam and Cambodia gathered with civil society groups in the public regional forum to express their concerns over current Mekong and 3S Hydropower Dams, and to develop recommendations to invited relevant actors. Representatives of land and forest networks in Cambodia and relevant actors on hydropower development were also present.

Local people from the Mekong mainstream, Mekong delta, Sekong, Sesan and Srepok Rivers in Cambodia and Vietnam are joining with local people who live along the Mekong River and Mun River in Thailand for a two day regional public forum, **“Mekong and 3S Hydropower Dams: People’s Voice across borders on river crisis and the way forward”**.

The forum, which is the first of its kind, is being supported and joined by numbers of national, regional and international NGOs including the **The NGO Forum on Cambodia, Towards Ecological Recovery and Regional Alliance (TERRA), 3S Protection Network (3SPN), Buddhist Association for Environmental Development (BAED), Fishery Action Coalition Team (FACT), Culture and Environment Preservation Association (CEPA), Vietnam River Network (VRN) and Rivers Coalition in Cambodia (RCC)**.

Present were also local people from well-known networks on land such as Bueng Kak Lake, National Highway one, Koh Kong and Odor Meanchey.

“We are very concerned about the impacts of hydropower dams on Mekong communities, especially the decline in fish and forest stocks and the destruction of peoples’ livelihoods. This meeting provides an important opportunity for community representatives to share experiences and join together to seek redress and reform”, said Mr Chhith Sam Ath, Executive Director of NGO Forum.

“We hope that MIME representatives will take note of the findings here today and work with us to address energy issues in our country. We (communities in 3S Rivers) are already affected by Yali Fall Dam, and are concerned about the other new dams proposed on the Sesan River. If these dams are built, how will the communities living along Sesan River survive, and will there be compensation?” said by Mr. Trang Tham, community representative from 3S rivers, Ratanakiri province, Cambodia.

The regional forum will highlight the current cross-border situation and concerns of a very critical situation on large dams in the Mekong Basin. The construction of Xayaburi Dam in Laos is of grave concern for downstream communities.

Along with 12 proposed Mekong mainstream dams, most of the major Mekong tributaries in the region are now full with many existing and proposed dams. Yet, no meaningful dialogue to solve existing problems and prevent future destruction has yet occurred in the region.

“The Mekong is the mother to us all. The 3S rivers also relate directly to the Mekong and share the life of the Mekong. To work to protect the Mekong is the mission of all of us, the people of this region. I’m glad we are meeting to share our spirit in this forum” said Ms. Oumboun Thipsuna, representative of the Thai Peoples’ Network, Nongkhai province, northeastern Thailand.

" The Mekong and 3 S are all important for Vietnam food security and development. While the information about the region is not always available (at least on mass media and in Vietnamese), coming to the meeting will help Vietnamese activist groups such as Vietnam River Network (VRN) and Vietnamese journalists understand holistically the problem and risk. This will help VRN to have a better idea of what to do next to ensure justice and sustainable development in the region" Said Ms. Lam Thi Thu Suu, Coordinator of Vietnam River Network (VRN).

Over the past two decades, local people from two Mekong countries (Thailand and Cambodia) have learned from each other on hydropower issues. Many parties have worked tirelessly since early 2011 to demand the cessation of Xayaburi Dam.

The Dam will have severe negative impacts on Cambodians who depend on the Mekong and Tonle Sap for fishing. The Dam will likely increase flooding of forests, agricultural land, and biologically productive wetlands, and will capture silt needed to maintain soil fertility downstream and sustain the Mekong Delta.

The Dam’s Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process has been seriously flawed, with the Mekong River Commission reporting that significant trans-boundary impacts will occur. Nonetheless, the Laos Government has decided to proceed with the Dam with construction by a Thai company. Electricity from Xayaburi and another 11 dams is expected to be sold mainly to Thailand.

In Cambodia, the impacts of existing dams in Vietnam sited on the Sesan and Srepok Rivers have been known for years. Presently, the emergence of new dam plans in Cambodia, especially Lower Sesan 2 Dam has increased concerns for the survival of communities along the river.

A recent research project by NGO Forum on Cambodia and partners commenced in March 2013 over 3S communities. It already shows that hydropower dams in 3S areas are ruining local livelihoods and natural resources, with fish stocks and natural habitats dwindling severely. Communities which are already marginalised are becoming extremely vulnerable in the face of dam development.

Local people and civil society groups in the region believe that full participation, and full assessments of environment and livelihood impacts are still much needed, with the willingness of all to take part.

This two day public forum will provide an important opportunity for experience to be shared among local people and civil society groups across the border.

Other relevant actors in Cambodia and in the region to be present include Mr. Hans Guttman, Chief Executive Officer, the Mekong River Commission Secretariat (MRCS) and Dr. Nirun Pitakwachara, Thai Human Rights Commissioner. Representatives from Cambodian Government offices and the development partners of Mekong countries are also invited to attend.

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