**THE NGO FORUM ON CAMBODIA AND SAVE THE MEKONG COALITION**

Friday 16 November

**MEDIA RELEASE**

**NGOs CALL FOR WORK ON XAYABURI DAM TO CEASE**

Today NGOs led by the Rivers Coalition in Cambodia and the NGO Forum called on the Cambodian Government, ASEAN members and the international community to oppose any further development of the Xayaburi Dam site in Laos.

The NGOs released a letter by Save the Mekong Coalition and the Rivers Coalition in Cambodia to the Prime Ministers of Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and Thailand, calling for immediate cessation of works on the dam and upholding of commitments to protect the Mekong River.

Mr Chhith Sam Ath, Executive Director of the NGO Forum, said that according to Reuters on November 7 2012, the Laos’ Government’s groundbreaking ceremony for the dam on 7th November signalled that it was preparing to build the dam despite its commitment in July that work was suspended.

“The Laos Government’s announcement that it will push ahead with the Xayaburi Dam is in direct violation of the Laos and Thai Government’s obligations under the 1995 Mekong Agreement to negotiate with other member countries regarding changes to the River,” he said.

“We call on the Cambodian Government to urgently express its opposition to this development.

“We also call on ASEAN members and the international community to act to stop this destruction of the Mekong River”, he said.

Representing the Rivers Coalition in Cambodia, Mr Youk Senglong said the proposed dam would have a disastrous impact on the livelihoods of those dependent on of the Mekong:

“More than 60 million people are affected by changes to the Mekong. It is vital that works on the dam cease so that the agreed joint study on the transboundary impacts of the Mekong mainstream dams can be carried out”, he said.

The Mekong River Basin is world’s greatest inland fishery and second most biodiverse river, supporting the region’s crucial fishery and agricultural economies.

In October 2010 a Strategic Environment Assesment Report, published under the auspices of the Mekong River Commission found that the 11 large dams planned on the Lower Mekong River’s mainstream would fundamentally affect the integrity and productivity of the Mekong aquatic system. It

said that mainstream dams would disrupt the world’s larges inland fisheries and result in economic losses of nearly $500 million per year.

The Report concluded that the dams would condemn millions of people to severe food shortages and increased poverty, and recommended that decisions be deferred for a decade.

Chhith Sam Ath said that NGOs are calling on the the Cambodian Government to seek commitment from the Laos Government to undertake appropriate transboundary studies as previously agreed.

Xayaburi Dam will be a 1280 Megawatt run-of-river dam. Most of the electricity will be sold to Thailand.

Claims made by the Government of Laos and its clients the Finnish company Poyry, which is blacklisted by the World Bank, and the French company Compagnie du Rhone, that the Xayaburi Dam will be sustainable and will not impact downstream countries are false and baseless. Despite repeated calls to the Government of Laos for further study and consultation, no transboundary environmental impact assesment has ever been carried out. The Mekong River is therefore soon to become the testing ground for new technologies, despite claims by scientists that many of these impacts can’t be effectively mitigated.

Over the past few years, civil society in the region and around the world have called on the Mekong countries to cancel plans to build the Xayaburi and other mainstream Mekong dams.

On the eve of ASEAN meetings in Cambodia, it is essential that the international community take swift action to protect the Mekong by agitating for an end to the Xayaburi Dam.

**MEDIA CONTACT**: Mr Chhith Sam Ath, NGO Forum, 012 928 585

Mr Youk Senglong, Rivers Coalition in Cambodia 012 768 609