

Mr. Kishida Fumio  
Minister for Foreign Affairs  
Japanese Government  
January 14, 2013

**Re: Large dams constructed along the Mekong River and their negative impacts on 60 million people: The Japanese Government should play a proactive role in MRC meetings on January 16 and 17, 2013**

Dear Mr. Kishida,

We wish you a very happy new year for 2013 and would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you on your appointment as the new Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Japanese Government.

We are NGO staff, academics, and journalists from various countries concerned about the construction of large-scale hydropower dams along the mainstream of the Mekong River, which runs through China, Burma/Myanmar, the Lao PDR, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam. The 4,900 kilometer Mekong River, as a ground for the world's largest fresh-water fish catch, especially in Cambodia's Tonle Sap Lake, and a source of nutrition-rich sediments to support agriculture, especially in Vietnam's Delta, is an extremely important source of food and income for 60 million people, especially the socially vulnerable, living in the river basin. To these people, changes in the river flow regime and ecosystems, most typically caused by large hydropower dams, seriously affect their life.

Currently, up to 11 mainstream dams are being planned with some dams in preparatory stages and/or under construction, most notably the Xayaburi Dam in northern Lao PDR. At the inter-governmental Mekong River Commission (MRC), of which the Japanese Government is a development partner, the four member governments have been discussing the Xayaburi Dam according to MRC's Procedures for Notification, Prior Consultation, and Agreement (PNPCA). The Governments of Cambodia and Vietnam expressed particularly strong concerns. The 2010 MRC-commissioned *Strategic Environmental Assessment of Hydropower on the Mekong Mainstream* report, drawing upon among others the devastating trans-boundary environmental and social impacts, has recommended that no mainstream dams should proceed for the next 10 years until further assessments have been made. In December 2011, the four governments, including the Lao PDR, agreed to carry out further study on the mainstream dams and ask

development partners, especially the Japanese Government, to fund the study. However, not much progress has been made on this and to date, only a concept note has been agreed upon by the MRC Governments.

On December 14, 2012, we met two representatives from your Ministry – Mr. Shiota Takahiro, Deputy Director of First Southeast Asia Division and Mr. Kuroishi Ryo, Deputy Director of Country Assistance Planning Division 1 and Development Assistance Policy Coordination Division – at a public seminar at the House of Councilors Members' Office Building, National Diet of Japan in Tokyo, which your Ministry kindly co-sponsored, to discuss most of the issues we have laid out above. As the next MRC Council meeting is scheduled to be held on January 16 and 17, 2013 in the Lao PDR, we wanted to send this letter to highlight the major points that we raised at the seminar and urge the Japanese Government to take a more proactive role on issues relating to the Mekong mainstream dams and for the upcoming MRC meeting in particular:

- 1) Large-scale hydropower dams devastate people's life. We have witnessed many cases all over the world, especially in the Mekong where so many people's lives and livelihoods depend on the river and natural resources it can provide;
- 2) When dams' impacts are trans-boundary, they complicate the matter. Consequently, affected people, often the most vulnerable, end up unfairly shouldering the risks and costs of negative impacts, as most typically seen in the case of the Sesan-Sekong-Srepok (3S) River Basins in northeastern Cambodia. Effective mechanisms to address trans-boundary impacts of dams have yet to be developed in the Mekong;
- 3) Mekong countries still face challenges in terms of effective public participation, the freedom of expression, and accountability of governments and developers, which are all indispensable in decision-making processes on large infrastructure projects such as the Mekong mainstream dams. MRC's PNPCA has proven to be ineffective, especially to reflect affected communities' voices in decision-making processes. No further Mekong mainstream dam project should be allowed to undergo the PNPCA process, until a four-country review of the process is carried out, with the participation of affected people and civil society in the region;
- 4) Alternative energy plans have been extensively discussed in countries such as Thailand, which would import much of the electricity produced by the planned mainstream dams. Independent analysis has shown that the government plans often overestimate future demand and that future needs can be met without building any of the mainstream dams and by adopting viable energy alternatives, such as demand-side management and renewable

every sources;

- 5) Design features and modifications, such as fish passages and “transparent” dam, are proposed by the Government of Lao PDR to mitigate the Xayaburi Dam’s negative impacts. However, these technologies are not well-tested and/or have in fact proven to be ineffective in the Mekong, as seen most typically in the case of the World Bank-funded Pak Mun Dam in northeastern Thailand. The Xayaburi Dam, with its potential devastating impacts, should not become a testing ground for these new technologies;
- 6) The Japanese Government should fund the proposed MRC study, only if a) meaningful public consultation and participation is ensured; b) the study aids the regional decision-making on the mainstream dams; and c) no other dams enter PNPCA until the study is completed; and
- 7) The Lao Government held a groundbreaking ceremony for the Xayaburi Dam despite a lack of regional agreement and without conducting a trans-boundary impact assessment on the project as requested by the Cambodian and Vietnamese Governments at the MRC’s Joint Committee Meeting on the Xayaburi Dam in April 2011. The Japanese Government should call for the Government of Lao PDR to uphold its obligations to negotiate in good faith in the Xayaburi Dam’s PNPCA process, by immediately halting construction on the Xayaburi Dam, until a trans-boundary impact assessment is carried out for the project and the four governments have reached agreement on whether to build the dam.

We would be more than happy to provide you with more information on these issues. Please feel free to let us know.

Sincerely yours,

Participants at the December 14, 2012 public seminar in Tokyo, Japan:

- Channarong Wongla (Tuk), Northeast Community Network in 7 Provinces of Mekong River Basin, Thailand;
- Kanokwan Manorom, Ubon Ratchathani University, Thailand;
- Niwat Rongkaew (Khru Tee), Natural Resources and Culture Conservation Network in Mekong-Lanna River Basin, Thailand;
- Sor Rattanamanee Polka, Community Resource Centre, Thailand;
- Meach Mean, Sesan-Sekong-Srepok River Protection Network (3SPN), Cambodia;
- Souket Nen, Sesan-Sekong-Srepok River Protection Network (3SPN), Cambodia;
- Le Anh Tuan, Research Institute for Climate Change (DRAGON Institute - Mekong) - Can

Tho University, Vietnam;

- Cho Boyoung, Energy and Climate Policy Institute for Just Transition (ECPI), Korea;
- Eom Eun Hui, Energy and Climate Policy Institute for Just Transition (ECPI), Korea;
- Kim Woori, ODA Watch, Korea;
- Yun Jiyoung, ODA Watch, Korea;
- Ame Trandem, International Rivers, USA;
- Michael Simon, Oxfam Australia, Australia;
- Doi Toshiyuki, Mekong Watch, Japan;
- Higashi Satomi, Mekong Watch, Japan;
- Kiguchi Yuka, Mekong Watch, Japan;
- Mitsuta Kanna, Mekong Watch, Japan; and
- Takahashi Fumiko, Mekong Watch, Japan.

CC: Mr. Shiota Takahiro, Deputy Director of First Southeast Asia Division; and  
Mr. Kuroishi Ryo, Deputy Director of Country Assistance Planning Division 1 and  
Development Assistance Policy Coordination Division.