

إنقاذ نهر دجلة واجبك و واجبي
بهاناوهاتنى زى دجله نهركي من و تويه

SAVE THE TIGRIS RIVER
YOUR RESPONSABILITY AND MINE

SAVE THE TIGRIS AND IRAQI MARSHES CAMPAIGN

#SAVE_TIGRIS

Al-Mesalla Organization for Human Resources Development and Un ponte per... , with the participation of the Iraqi Social Forum and the Iraqi Civil Society Solidarity Initiative, with financial support of Fondation Assistance Internationale and Karibu Foundation.



Save the Tigris and Iraqi Marshes Campaign
Strategy Meeting Report
Erbil, May 10-12, 2015

1. Agenda

More than 20 participants, international and from all over Iraq gathered in Erbil, Iraq for the Save the Tigris Campaign's strategy meeting. The goal was to work out the strategy of the campaign for the next 1.5 years.

May 10: Strategy Meeting
May 11: Advocacy meetings
May 12: Press conference

2. Strategy meeting discussions

Current strategy

The Campaign agreed earlier to develop and strengthen its strategy in two dimensions:

1. Regionally: Iraq and all its neighboring states must be pressured to collaborate, according to the principles of international law, in making all decisions related to the construction of the Ilisu Dam, or other dams and projects affecting Iraqis' right to water from the rivers that flow through their country.
 - Specifically, to pressure Turkey and Syria to sign agreements that guarantee a fair share of the waters of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers to Iraq.
 - Increase international dialogue and diplomacy with Turkey, and develop solidarity between civil society in the two nations.
2. Internally: The Iraqi government must be pressured to fulfill its obligations to protect its citizens' water rights.

- Especially to guarantee the protection of the infrastructure and to ensure that water is not used as a tool of war or political conflict between different factions within Iraq.
- Iraqi and international civil society activists must expand their advocacy work on water rights with the new Iraqi government and the new Parliament.

Legal dimension

An important part of our campaign has been the use of International Law and legal instruments that could be used by Iraq against Ilisu Dam. The most important treaty available is the 1997 Convention for the Non-Navigational Use of Water. It entered into force in August 2014, ratified by Iraq and Syria but not by Turkey. Yet this does not exempt Turkey from its international responsibilities. We commissioned an analysis on the instruments of international law available to the Iraqi Government, to make Turkey accountable for the impacts of Ilisu dam downstream. The analysis resulted in a paper, which concluded that, the lack of consultation with downstream stakeholders and the lack of a trans-boundary environmental impact assessment is a violation of international law by Turkey. Our legal paper was presented to government officials in Baghdad, in March 2014 and contained a set of recommendations consisting of three steps: 1. Direct negotiations between Turkey and Iraq, 2. Mediation by an outsider, and 3. Arbitration by the United Nations or the International Court of Justice.

The issue with international law is that, unlike domestic law, it is not very specific. A wide latitude of arguments can be made, however without clear answers or enforcement mechanisms. However, if Iraq would take the case to the UN Security Council, the international community would have a more active role. Even if Iraq is unwilling to go to the UN, we as civil society can simulate international arbitration over Ilisu Dam and publicize the event.

Political and security dimension

The security crisis exacerbates the issue of Ilisu Dam, and makes it all the more important for the countries over the Tigris-Euphrates river basin to work together to equitably share the resource. Water is a priority because of the way the resource has been used by all parties in the current conflict. According to international law, Iraq has a duty to protect its own citizens' right to water. This includes an obligation to move Turkey to equitably share the water resources. Both countries need to consult together when they plan water related projects. Any long-term solution to the water issue requires building political will. However, one can question the reliance of our campaign on governments, as their priorities are not the priorities of the people. As such, it is important to build the capacity of civil society.

Our campaign has been advocating against Ilisu Dam with relevant government officials. Some of the present challenges to the work of the campaign come from the failure of the Ministry of Water Resources to prioritize the issue of Ilisu. The campaign would like to see more action from the part of the Iraqi Government, but seems that is not a priority. Recently, a new government has been installed, which means that the Campaign has to invest again building a new relationship. Moreover, we want to have the Iraqi government to talk the language of water rights, not just water shares. We see their current language as problematic, as it only addresses water shares (or needs) without talking about rights, which include consultation with downstream neighbors before new structures are built. This gives the wrong message to Turkey:

that Iraq does not care how many dams they build as long as they release a pre-determined amount of water.

In addition, there is juxtaposition between the Kurdish region and the rest of Iraq. There are conflicts within Iraq over water shares that includes fears about future water sharing between KRG and Iraq. There is also internal disagreement within Iraqi provinces over the distribution of water and how the priorities for this distribution are established. The KRG's vision is to continue building large water infrastructure as a way to overcome the inability of Iraq and Turkey to negotiate fair water shares. They see Ilisu as a threat, but they want to continue the construction of dams in the Kurdish region. We need to challenge this vision. Furthermore, the Kurdish authorities plan to privatize water provision. From our experience, this implies the commodification of water: water is seen as a good to sell and prevents people to make decisions on their own water resources. Another important issue for our strategy is whether to focus on Ilisu or dams in general. This is an issue especially in Kurdistan where the impact of water scarcity is mostly due to Iranian dams, since the Tigris River only flows through a small part of the Kurdish region in the west. The Kurdish politicians our campaign spoke with acknowledged this, while one of our partners in Sulaymaniyah, Civil Development Organization (CDO) views the fight against Iranian dams as essential to their participation.

Cultural dimension

Another big challenge is the protection of Iraqi cultural and natural heritage, which is becoming more complex. Daesh attacked a number of Iraqi archaeological sites, threatening to erase the cultural heritage of Nineveh in the North of Iraq, something Iraq has never witnessed before in its recent history.

From the start, the inclusion of the Iraqi Marshes to the UNESCO World Heritage List has been one of our top priorities. We continue to follow up on the Iraqi Marshes file to the World Heritage committee. The next meeting of the World Heritage Committee (WHC) will be in June in Germany; in a critical time for Iraqi heritage. It is necessary to issue a renewed call to UNESCO to not only focus on the events in Nineveh and other parts of Iraq, but to follow up the submission of the Iraqi Marshes as well. There is also the need to involve civil society in the efforts to protect these sites. Our campaign demands the Iraqi government and the UNESCO to install mechanisms to protect the archeological sites and to apply Security Council Resolution 2199. This resolution, condemning the destruction of cultural heritage in Iraq and Syria, particularly by Daesh and the Al-Nusra Front, decided that all Member States should take steps, in cooperation with Interpol, UNESCO and other international organizations, to prevent the trade in items of cultural, scientific and religious importance illegally removed from either country during periods of conflict.

Impact study

For some time our campaign has been advocating for an impact assessment of Ilisu Dam for Iraq, which is currently lacking. Future projections with regards to water quality and quantity need to be established in order to advance to transboundary water cooperation. Furthermore, an impact assessment will pressure the government to get actively involved while at the same time provide an important tool in negotiations, strengthening Iraq's position vis-à-vis Turkey.

3 Strategy plan

There were 3 working groups during the Strategy Meeting, one for each region of the campaign. In each region the campaign has its own vision and politics.

KRG

Field research on the impact of dams: Data has to be collected and a literature review needs to be done. The research in the Kurdistan region is targeted at the local government. For this research, it is recommended to focus as well on Iranian dams, which have a huge impact on the eastern part of the KRG (Sulemani). In any case, the impact assessment should be interdisciplinary and should take into account the impact of Ilisu and other dams in all aspects (environmental, social, cultural, political). The researcher will have to keep in mind that the target audience is the authorities. A researcher has been appointed and the plan is to complete the study over the summer.

Legal and academic seminar: The legal seminar will focus on law instruments, while the academic seminar will present the outcome of the research. This is planned but we did not discuss this into details.

Advocacy meetings: It will be essential to follow-up in the KRG with more advocacy meetings.

Iraq

Youth camp in the Marshes (Chibayish): Some of the ideas were to ask sheikhs to offer their muddhifs. Others proposed to screen documentaries of other communities who lack access to water (such as the people in Sinjar). Proposed dates for the youth camp: October 8-10, December 3-5, December 10-12.

Field research on the impact of dams: Data has to be collected and a literature review needs to be done of the current sources related to Ilisu and other dams. In the south of Iraq, there is no direct causal link between Ilisu Dam and water quality/quantity. Water flows from northern Iraq to Mosul dam and from thereon, water is distributed by a system of quotas to the different provinces. There are many dimensions to research. In the south, we can look into the social impact of dams; how people's income depends on river flows. Furthermore, the researcher can examine water samples, in order to understand the extent of the water contamination. There was a discussion regarding the target audience, whether it is directed at public opinion or at public policymaker. We are still discussing the components of the research, and in the process of assembling a team that will include civil society and academia.

Advocacy meetings: Ministry of Water Resources (MoWR), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), Directorate of Foreign Countries, Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture Committee in the Iraqi Parliament. They need to be re-scheduled for later this year because it was not possible during this visit to Iraq due to a religious holiday and closure of traffic in Baghdad.

International

Youth Camp in Amed (Diyarbakir): Activity planned by our colleagues in Turkey. Exchange of experiences between activists/youth in Turkey and Iraq. No further details yet.

UNESCO World Heritage Committee Meeting (June 28 – July 7, 2015). Plans for a small demonstration/action to raise awareness on the issue of cultural heritage in Iraq.

Shadow report to the Committee of ICESCR. The next revision for Iraq is September 21 – October 9, 2015. Iraq has failed their duty to protect its citizens right to water. Can one of the international NGO's do it? It won't be very powerful. Note: Iraqis expressed that should they do this, the Iraqi government and ministries will close all their doors. This is not recommended by the Iraqi's, especially since they recently established a new relationship with the government.

Water Forum in Amed (Diyarbakir) in March or April 2016. Needs further planning and preparations, the dates are still not final. This activity will be in collaboration with the Mesopotamia Social Forum that is being proposed for 2016.

4. Advocacy meetings

Two advocacy meetings took place on May 11, 2015 with members of the Steering Committee and our partner in the KRG, Al-Messala.

General Directorate of Dams and Water Reservoirs, Erbil, Kurdistan

Campaign representatives met the general director, Akram Rasul. We discussed our concerns that the Kurdish region will be very much affected by Ilisu and other Turkish dams, without any opposition from the Kurdish region. Mr. Rasul expressed his support and shared our concerns, but stressed that it is the job of the Iraqi central government and not the KRG to negotiate with Turkey and Iran. He said that the central government has not shown any willingness to discuss the matter of dams with Iran. However, Kurdish parties are part of the Iraqi parliament as well. Mr. Rasul expressed that the KRG cannot rely on Turkey or Iran for fair shares of river water. Moreover, he defended the construction of dams in the Kurdish region, in his opinion to protect agriculture and food security for its people. We discussed the legal dimension of our campaign and offered to send the legal paper released last year by the campaign. He offered to channel it to the higher levels in the Ministry of Water Resources. We sent the paper via email the next day. We recommend that Al-Messala, our partner in Kurdistan, will follow up on this in a meeting with Mr. Rasul.

Water and Agriculture Committee in the Kurdish Parliament, Erbil, Kurdistan

Campaign representatives met with various members of the committee. They emphasized their intention to build as much water storage as possible to protect and safeguard people's right to water. We discuss again the legal dimension and stressed that it does not take much to take the issue of Ilisu Dam to the UN Security Council. Iraq and the KRG could gain a lot by prompting Iran and Turkey to the negotiation table.

5. Press Conference

Our press conference took place in Chwar Chra Hotel, Erbil, on May 12, 2015. During the press conference, we released our statement addressed to the Kurdish and central government. It can be found on the website: <http://www.iraqicivilsociety.org/archives/4258>. Various news agencies published the press statement:

Xendan News:

<http://xendan.org/dreja.aspx?=hawal&jmara=37225&Jor=1>

Aga Press:

<http://agapress.net/nwe/item.php?id=2673#.VWDl3FyI4du>

Wishe:

<http://www.wishe.net/dreja.aspx?=hewal&jmare=17705&Jor=2>

Bas News

<http://www.basnews.com/news/2015/05/12/كورد-ههريمي-حكومتي-دهدرتي-ته-هوشداري/>

Kurdistan Parliament Website

<http://www.perlemanikurdistan.com/Default.aspx?page=article&id=22324&l=3>

Sileimany News Network

<http://snnc.co/News.aspx?id=20988&MapID=1>

Kurdiu

<http://www.kurdiu.org/details.php?section=hawal&lang=1&type=1&id=34291>

Esta News

<http://www.estanews.com/Read/8795/-ع-يراق-زۆن-گاوهكان-ي-ودي-ج-له-روي-اري-پ-اراس-تني-ههلمهت-ي-.html>

Nuche

<http://www.nuche.net/?p=36098>

6. Conclusion

This strategy meeting was an important event, since for the first time in the history of the campaign all activists, from in - and outside of Iraq, gathered together. For some of us it was the first time to meet face-to-face with other activists in the campaign. In that regard, the strategy meeting was a success since activists were able to discuss the campaign with each other in person. The intention was to set up a strategy for the next 1.5 years. To follow-up, it is highly recommended that active participants of the campaign become members of the Steering Committee, which is the decision making body, especially since each partner is working within separate spaces (Iraq, KRG and internationally). We need strong communication on horizontal

level between the international partners, KRG and Iraq (and within Iraq different regions: Baghdad/Basra). On a vertical level, we need to ensure communication from the Steering Committee to our official partners on the ground and in their turn to their collaborators (researcher, volunteers, activists, other organizations). Our partner in the KRG is the NGO Al-Messala, and perhaps other partners/activists might join. There is a timeline for our activities in the KRG. In the rest of Iraq we have several organizations who intend to work on the campaign, with the ISF being the main partner, although there is no final decision yet on who will execute which activities, or a final timeline. A long-term commitment is required of various partners in the south. The Steering Committee should meet on a frequent basis via Skype to discuss the direction of the campaign.

Regarding visibility: it is important for the campaign to establish a nation-wide presence with a strong presence in the political centers where our advocacy work is mostly needed. To this aim we have a large stack of banners, posters in the KRG, and the plan is for the rest of Iraq to have the same. Our media activities need to be strengthened, although we are on the right track. Together with our partners, we are increasing our presence on Facebook, having doubled our number of likes on Facebook past 1100 in the past weeks. We introduced a new hash tag (#Save_Tigris) on Twitter and we plan to publish more videos on our Youtube channel. Several activists from the campaign have voiced their opinion that it is important for the campaign to keep an activist approach, and for the next period to mostly focus on advocacy and not on awareness. We must not lose focus of our main goal, which is to advocate with the authorities against Ilisu and other dams. Plans should be made and activities should take place with this ultimate goal in mind: what does it contribute to our advocacy targeting authorities in the KRG and Iraq? This is especially relevant for the research on dams, which in the end should produce a document that is able to convey the message to authorities and local communities that Ilisu and other dams pose a great threat to Iraq and the KRG. A lot will have to be invested in our relationship with the authorities in the KRG and especially in Baghdad. It is very important since our advocacy is targeting the government institutions.