

# The Ilisu Dam Project:

*An Update*

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**KHRP Briefing Paper**

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## Summary

Few infrastructure development projects have caused as much international controversy in recent years as the proposed Ilisu hydroelectric dam project in the Kurdish region of south-east Turkey. If it were built, the dam would displace between 50,000-78,000 people, mainly Kurds; flood the ancient town of Hasankeyf and hundreds of other unexplored archaeological sites; severely impact the environment upstream and downstream of the dam; and significantly reduce the flow of water to the downstream states of Iraq and Syria, with the potential for exacerbating conflict in the region.

Scheduled for construction on the River Tigris, some 65 kilometres from the Syrian border, the dam forms part of the giant Southeastern Anatolia Project (known as GAP after its Turkish name, Guneydogu Anadolu Projesi), a network of 22 dams and 19 power plants.

The Ilisu project has been plagued by difficulties since its inception, most notably vocal international concern over its adverse environmental, social, security and human rights impacts, as well as a lack of secure financing.

Although the final design for the dam was approved in 1982,<sup>2</sup> the project remained on the drawing board until the late 1990s, when a European-US consortium – headed by UK construction company Balfour Beatty – sought finance for the dam from European and US Export Credit Agencies (ECAs).<sup>3</sup> However, in 2002, the lead companies in the consortium withdrew from the project after widespread public outcry, led by the Ilisu Dam Campaign, of which KHRP was a founding member.

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<sup>1</sup> This is an updated version of *'The Ilisu Dam Project: A Flawed Plan is Revived Unchanged'*, a KHRP Briefing Paper originally published in May 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Turkish Embassy, Altinbilek, D., *'The Ilisu Dam Project, in Water and Development in Southeastern Anatolia: Essay on the Ilisu Dam and GAP'*, London, 2000, p.31.

<sup>3</sup> Export Credit Agencies are government bodies that use public money to provide companies with insurance against the main commercial and political risks of operating abroad.

Two years later, a new European-led consortium was formed to build the project, led by Austria's [VA Tech Hydro](#) (since taken over by Andritz AG), together with [Alstom Switzerland](#) and the German construction company [Züblin](#).<sup>4</sup> Despite widespread opposition in their home countries, the three companies secured government-backed export credit guarantees in 2007 from Austria, Germany and Switzerland, subject to Turkey abiding by 150 social and environmental conditions. Funding was suspended in December 2008 however, after Turkey failed to implement the agreed conditions. The suspension was made permanent in July 2009, when the three ECAs together with a number of private commercial banks withdrew their funding following Turkey's clear failure to address resettlement concerns. This was a particularly damning act as this was the first time an ECA had withdrawn from a project after funding had been agreed.

Nonetheless, Turkey remains adamant that it will complete the project.<sup>5</sup> Construction work on the dam has continued intermittently and villagers in the immediate area of the dam site have had their land expropriated. Turkey has now announced that it is approaching China's export credit agency, Sinosur, for funding. According to the Chinese Embassy in Ankara, however, no Chinese company is (as of the beginning of December 2009) involved in the project.

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<sup>4</sup> VA Tech Hydro and Alstom would supply the electromechanical equipment. Construction would be undertaken by Zueblin with the Turkish construction companies Nurol, Cengiz and Celiker. Engineering works would be the responsibility of two other companies, Stucky (Switzerland) and Temelsu (Turkey). Swiss consultants Colenco and Maggia are also involved.

<sup>5</sup> *'Speculations On Return of Turkish Troops From Operation Do Not Reflect Facts, Erdogan'*

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[http://www.turkishpress.com/news.asp?id=218261&s=&i=&t=Speculations On Return Of Turkish Troops From Operation Do Not Reflect Facts, Erdogan.](http://www.turkishpress.com/news.asp?id=218261&s=&i=&t=Speculations_On_Return_Of_Turkish_Troops_From_Operation_Do_Not_Reflect_Facts,_Erdogan)

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## Contents

1. The Ilisu Dam: Facts and History	4
2. Motivation Behind Ilisu Dam	7
A. Economic Goals	8
B. Social/Political Goals	8
3. Impact of the Ilisu Dam	9
A. Environmental Issues	9
B. Social Issues	10
C. Archaeological/ Cultural Issues	14
D. Political Issues	15
E. Conclusion	17
4. Recommendations	18

## **Ilisu Dam: Facts and History**

The Ilisu Dam is intended to generate 3,600 gigawatt-hours of peak hour electricity a year and is Turkey's largest planned hydroelectric project. It will cost an estimated 2 billion euros.<sup>6</sup> A second associated dam downstream at Cizre, on the Turkey-Syria border, is intended to provide power and irrigation; it is dependent on the construction of Ilisu<sup>7</sup> and would be implemented once construction of Ilisu is started.<sup>8</sup> Because Cizre would be an irrigation dam, water fed to it by Ilisu would be largely lost to downstream flow.

Plans to build the Ilisu Dam were first mooted in 1954. Although pre-feasibility studies were completed in 1971 and the final design for the dam

was approved in 1982,<sup>9</sup> the plans were for a time shelved in response to recurring conflicts in the area, but were revived in the late 1990s. At this time the project was adopted by several European companies, including UK construction company, Balfour Beatty. These companies sought financial backing from Export Credit Agencies (ECAs). However, the project was highly criticised by archaeologists, environmentalists and human rights groups because of the detrimental effects it would have on villagers, the local environment, and international relations.

As a result of the conflict with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), the region was at the time under military rule and opposition to the dam was severely constrained. One Kurdish lawyer was even charged with 'insulting the moral personality of the Government and the military and security forces', for writing a critique of the environmental impact assessment for the project.<sup>10</sup> However, international protests in solidarity with local people, led to the companies involved withdrawing from the project in 2002, citing the State water agency's – the *Devlet Su İşleri's* (General Directorate of State

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<sup>6</sup> In 2006, the construction costs were estimated at 1.2 billion euros, with an additional 800 million euros for resettlement and 'cultural heritage protection'. See Hermes, [http://www.agaportal.de/en/portal/presse\\_Ilisu.html](http://www.agaportal.de/en/portal/presse_Ilisu.html), 5 December 2006.

<sup>7</sup> The Environmental Impact Assessment for Ilisu (p.4-29) states, 'Cizre could not be implemented without Ilisu'. See: [http://www.designconsult.com/Ilisu/themes/blue\\_style/images/force-download.php?file=./umwelt/pdf/07\\_section\\_04\\_impacts.pdf](http://www.designconsult.com/Ilisu/themes/blue_style/images/force-download.php?file=./umwelt/pdf/07_section_04_impacts.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> The Environmental Impact Assessment for Ilisu states that the feasibility study for Ilisu concluded that Cizre should be built downstream 'to better regulate the discharges from Ilisu' (p.2-10); that Cizre is planned 'for both power production and irrigation' (p.2-27); and that 'its implementation should start after the green light to build Ilisu is given' (p.2-27). The EIA denies, however, that Ilisu is dependent on Cizre being built (p.2-28). Section 4 of the EIA deals in details with the Cizre project: [http://www.designconsult.com/Ilisu/themes/blue\\_style/images/force-download.php?file=./umwelt/pdf/07\\_section\\_04\\_impacts.pdf](http://www.designconsult.com/Ilisu/themes/blue_style/images/force-download.php?file=./umwelt/pdf/07_section_04_impacts.pdf).

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<sup>9</sup> Five firms undertook the design for the dam. Of these one was Turkish and four were foreign, including three from the United Kingdom, among them James Williamson and Partners, and Kennedy and Donkin. See: Turkish Embassy, Altinbilek, D., 'The Ilisu Dam Project', in *Water and Development in Southeastern Anatolia: Essay on the Ilisu Dam and GAP*, London, 2000, p.31.

<sup>10</sup> KHRP and BHRC, 'Meaningful Consultation and the Ilisu Dam: the Trial of Human Rights Defenders: Trial Observation Report', 2003.

Hydraulic Works, DSİ) – failure to meet criteria established by the ECAs. The criteria required Turkey to develop a resettlement plan meeting international standards, a plan for preserving the archaeological heritage of Hasankeyf, and assessments of the cultural and environmental impacts of the dam.

Despite the serious problems associated with the Ilisu Dam project, the Turkish government decided to continue with construction plans. In 2004, a new consortium was formed to build the project, led by Austria's VA Tech Hydro (since taken over by Andritz AG) together with Alstom Switzerland and the German construction company Züblin.<sup>11</sup> In order to reduce the high financial and political risks of the project, the new consortium sought government-backed export credit guarantees from Austria's ECA Oesterreichische Kontrollbank - OeKB (200 million euros), Germany's EulerHermes (93.5 million euros in addition to some 100 million euro in re-insurance for OeKB), and Switzerland's SERV (formerly ERG)<sup>12</sup> (equivalent to 140

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<sup>11</sup>. VA Tech Hydro and Alstom would supply the electromechanical equipment. Construction would be undertaken by Zueblin with the Turkish construction companies Nurol, Cengiz and Celiker. Engineering works would be the responsibility of two other companies, Stucky (Switzerland) and Temelsu (Turkey). Swiss consultants Colenco and Maggia are also involved.

<sup>12</sup>. In January 2007 the Swiss Export Risk Insurance (SERV) replaced the Swiss Export Guarantee Agency (ERG) – see: <http://www.serv-ch.com/en/index.html>.

million euros).<sup>13</sup> The three ECAs acknowledged that the project still lacked both an environmental impact assessment and a resettlement plan that met international standards.<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, in March 2007, they approved finance for the project, subject to Turkey meeting 150 obligations and conditions within the repayment period of 15-plus years.<sup>15</sup> The conditions – which covered environmental impacts, resettlement, cultural heritage and downstream impacts – were intended to **'guarantee that the planned project... will conform to international standards.'**<sup>16</sup>

Pressure from European non-governmental organisations (NGOs),

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<sup>13</sup>. NZZ Online, 5. December 2006, 'Bundesrat hat noch Vorbehalte beim Ilisu-Kraftwerk' – <http://www.nzz.ch/2006/12/15/il/newzzEVQDZ7Q8-12.html>

<sup>14</sup>. The ECAs have acknowledged the lack of both key documents. Commenting on the Environmental Impact Assessment, for example, the ECAs stated in March 2007: 'In the field of biodiversity the [EIA] is often too superficial in the sense that it uses existing information, and that no actual field data from the project area are available. For this reason, the identified impacts, and especially their importance, are often questionable.' See: ECA Final Terms of Reference – Environmental Issues, E-13, available from <http://www.Ilisu-wasserkraftwerk.com/page.php?modul=HTMLPages&pid=69>.

<sup>15</sup>. Number given by the German government. The conditions are grouped differently in Switzerland, resulting in a total of 100. The content of the conditions is identical, however, as they were negotiated jointly by all three ECAs with the Turkish government.

<sup>16</sup>. Hermes, 'Additional information on an export credit guarantee for the hydroelectric power plant Ilisu', [http://www.agaportal.de/en/portal/presse\\_Ilisu.html](http://www.agaportal.de/en/portal/presse_Ilisu.html), 5 December 2006.

as well as local activists in the Initiative to Keep Hasankeyf Alive and the Turkish environmental organisation, Doğa Derneği, resulted in a Committee of Experts being established by the ECAs to monitor Turkey's compliance with the conditions that the ECAs had set. The groups also continued to highlight the project's continuing failure to meet international standards relating to environmental protection, resettlement, archaeological preservation, and negotiation with affected communities and other nations. Meanwhile, the European Parliament also passed a resolution calling on Turkey, as an accession country to the European Union (EU), to abide by EU standards in its dam building programmes.<sup>17</sup>

In March 2008, the ECAs' Committee of Experts warned that Turkey had only made progress on five of the 35 conditions relating to resettlement and compensation. Five months later, a further report by the committee found that there was still 'little or no follow up' regarding the measures which they had proposed to address the project's impacts. In particular, no new lands had been identified for resettling those who would be displaced – and the issue continued to be 'totally neglected' by Turkey.<sup>18</sup> A program to restore the income of the

<sup>17</sup> European Parliament resolution of 21 May 2008. Texts adopted – P6\_TA(2008)0224.

<sup>18</sup> *Committee of Experts – Resettlement, Ilisu Hydroelectric Dam and Power Plant Project*, Report of the Second Field Visit 10-19 March 2008, p.24. See also: Peter Bosshard, 'Ilisu – A Test Case for the Global Dam Industry', <http://www.internationalrivers.org/en/node/3272/>.

affected people still did not exist 'and its preparation had not started yet'. In conclusion, the experts found that:

**'the lack of preparation in the resettlement component (...) entails serious risk of impoverishment, destitution, and social disorganisation for the massive population inhabiting the reservoir.'**

The panel also said that measures to protect the environment and preserve the cultural heritage in the ancient town of Hasankeyf were inadequate.<sup>19</sup>

In October 2008, the ECAs gave Turkey 60 days to bring the project into compliance with the conditions set by the ECAs. When this deadline passed without Turkey taking adequate action, the ECAs suspended their funding for the project in December 2008.<sup>20</sup> The suspension was made permanent in July 2009, when the ECAs formally withdrew from the project.<sup>21</sup> Shortly thereafter, the commercial banks whose loans to the companies had been insured by the ECAs also withdrew.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Peter Bosshard, 'Ilisu – A Test Case for the Global Dam Industry', <http://www.internationalrivers.org/en/node/3272/>.

<sup>20</sup> Bryant, C., 'Germany drops support for Turkish dam', 22 December 2008, [http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/57096ba8-d031-11dd-ae00-000077b07658.html?nclick\\_check=1](http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/57096ba8-d031-11dd-ae00-000077b07658.html?nclick_check=1).

<sup>21</sup> 'European export credit agencies abandon Turkey's 1200 MW Ilisu Dam,' Hydroworld, [http://www.hydroworld.com/index/display/article-display/3380448176/s-articles/s-hrhw/s-News/s-european-export\\_credit.html](http://www.hydroworld.com/index/display/article-display/3380448176/s-articles/s-hrhw/s-News/s-european-export_credit.html).

<sup>22</sup> ECAwatch Austria et al, 'European banks withdraw from Ilisu Dam Project in Turkey: Non-

Despite the withdrawal of European financial backing, Turkey insists that it will persevere with the project.<sup>23</sup> It has been reported that Turkey is now seeking funding from China. According to Peter Bosshard of International Rivers, an NGO which monitors dam-building worldwide:

**'In June 2009, Turkey's President visited China and signed several cooperation agreements, including in the energy sector. Under a plan which is currently being discussed, Andritz Hydro, the main contractor for the Ilisu hydropower project, would manufacture the turbines for the project in China rather than in Austria. Sinosure, an insurance company set up and owned by the Chinese government, would insure the bank loans for the contract. In a new twist in its emerging role, China would thus not enable its own dam builders to go abroad, but would underwrite the exports of Western dam builders which have shifted part of their manufacturing base to China.'**<sup>24</sup>

In response to a letter from the Initiative to Keep Hasankeyf Alive,

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governmental organisations welcome pullout as the right decision', 10 July 2009.

<sup>23</sup> '400 milyon Euro bulunursa Ilisu Barajı yapılacak', *Hürriyet*, 2 August 2009.

<sup>24</sup> Bosshard, P., 'Will China Turn Its Back on International Standards in the Ilisu Dam?' *International Rivers*, 2 December 2009 [www.internationalrivers.org/en/node/4879/](http://www.internationalrivers.org/en/node/4879/).

however, the Chinese Embassy in Ankara, Turkey, stated that (as of the beginning of December 2009), no Chinese company was involved in the project.

In November 2008, the Initiative to Keep Hasankeyf Alive reported that work had restarted on the project,<sup>25</sup> despite the project lacking the appropriate permits.

### **Motivation Behind Ilisu Dam**

Ilisu forms part of the giant Southeastern Anatolia Project (known as GAP after its Turkish name, *Guneydogu Anadolu Projesi*) Covering nine provinces<sup>26</sup> with a total area of 74,000 square kilometres, the \$32 billion project<sup>27</sup> is the largest development project ever undertaken in Turkey, and one of the largest of its kind in the world.<sup>28</sup> Under the GAP, the Turkish government plans to develop a cluster of seven major water development projects on the

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<sup>25</sup> Initiative to Keep Hasankeyf Alive, 'Bauarbeiten in Ilisu ohne Genehmigung weitergeführt', 13 November 2009.

<sup>26</sup> The nine provinces are: Gaziantep, Diyarbakır, Sanliurfa, Mardin, Adiyaman, Batman, Kilis, Sirnak and Siirt.

<sup>27</sup> According to the GAP administration, just over 50 per cent of this figure will be spent on dams and irrigation infrastructure. As of February 2000 – 30 years after the project was first launched – the Turkish government had raised just 43.3 of the total projected expenditure. See: Olcay Unver, 'The Southeastern Anatolia Project (GAP): An Overview', in Turkish Embassy, *Water and Development in Southeastern Anatolia: Essays on the Ilisu Dam and GAP*, London, 2000, pp.14-15.

<sup>28</sup> Embassy of the Republic of Turkey, Washington DC, <http://www.turkey.org/> Cited in: Sahan, E., Mason, S., Gilli, A., Zogg, A., 'Southeastern Anatolia Project in Turkey – GAP', Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich, 2000, p.1.



Euphrates basin and six on the Tigris. When completed, a total of 22 dams and 19 power plants will have been built on the two river basins, regulating 28 per cent of Turkey's total water potential.

### **Economic Goals**

The two professed goals of the GAP project are harvesting energy and creating more irrigated farm land (and therefore higher employment rates and standards of living). In addition to generating 27 billion kilowatt hours of electricity,<sup>29</sup> the dams would be used to irrigate 1.7 million hectares of land in order to grow cash crops and encourage the growth of agro-industries, such as food processing for export.<sup>30</sup> The newly irrigated land would increase the area in Turkey under irrigation by 40 per cent.

However, studies of the future sites and experience from currently operating dams indicate that the project will be unable to achieve these economic goals if continued as planned. The present villagers will be unlikely to benefit from any economic growth, as they will be displaced

from their homes and forced into the shanty towns of nearby cities.

Turkey has also failed to properly consider other options, such as solar or wind power, which may be more beneficial economically, without harming the land and culture of the area. Further, a different location or a shorter dam could save the ancient town of Hasankeyf, while dramatically reducing building expenses.

### **Social/Political Goals**

Many view the GAP project as part of a larger program of cultural assimilation, aimed at erasing the Kurdish culture and assimilating Kurds into the mainstream Turkish society.

GAP has been celebrated by the Turkish government as a project intended 'to reinstate civilisation to the Upper Mesopotamia.' This statement is indicative of the Turkish government's refusal to recognise Kurdish heritage as valuable, or even worthy of being called civilisation.

KHRP believes that the main driving force behind the GAP is neither economic nor social development. On the contrary, it considers the project to be driven by the security establishment's misguided beliefs that this project will weaken Kurdish identity in Turkey and will potentially allow for a military victory in the ongoing armed conflict in the Kurdish region. Far from **'enhancing the level of welfare, peace and happiness of our citizens**

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<sup>29</sup> The figure of 27 billion kilowatt hours of electricity takes no account of abstraction of water for irrigation. Once this is taken into account, the figure would be reduced. See: Olcay Unver, 'The Southeastern Anatolia Project (GAP): An Overview', in Turkish Embassy, *Water and Development in Southeastern Anatolia: Essays on the Ilisu Dam and GAP*, London, 2000, pp.15-16.

<sup>30</sup> Southeastern Anatolia Regional Development Administration <http://www.gap.gov.tr>. Cited in: Sahan, E., Mason, S., Gilli, A., Zogg, A., 'Southeastern Anatolia Project in Turkey – GAP', Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich, 2000.



**living in the region'** as claimed in the action plan launched in May 2008, this project in its current state will in fact be detrimental and increase instability not only domestically, but in the region as a whole.<sup>31</sup>

### **Impact of the Ilisu Dam**

The Ilisu Dam project fails to meet international standards in several areas, which will be highlighted below. Severe problems are evident in the environmental, archaeological/cultural, social (resettlement and compensation), and political aspects of the plan. The project does not even meet the minimum requirements of the World Bank: mitigating environmental problems, assessing alternatives, consultation with riparian nations, and local participation in decision-making.

### **Environmental Issues**

The Tigris River, on which the Ilisu Dam will be built, is one of the most biologically diverse rivers on earth. If constructed, the Ilisu Dam will result in the loss of major riparian ecosystems both in the reservoir area and for a lengthy stretch downstream. Many rare species will no longer be able to maintain viable populations.

Unfortunately, no adequate Environmental Impact Assessment has been made in preparation for the project. According to internationally renowned universities like the Swiss

ETH Zürich, the Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR)<sup>32</sup> released by the Turkish authorities for the Ilisu Dam is vague, incomplete, and sometimes even contradictory. It does not comply with the EU Directive on Environmental Impact Assessment, though the European Commission has stressed that Turkey must comply with these standards in all projects. It also fails to meet World Bank standards for impact assessments.

The EIAR does not assess the degree of the impacts associated with the dam. Without this information it is impossible to find solutions for minimising effects.

In addition, the EIAR's assessments do not include impacts outside of Turkey, in Syria and Iraq. The farmers in these countries have not been informed of the project, and will not receive any assistance for negative side-effects. The Turkish DIA insists that they are helping these farmers by preventing floods. However, KHRP has learned that

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<sup>31</sup> See 'Southeastern Anatolia Project Action Plan (2008-2012)', Turkish Government, May 2008, [www.gap.gov.tr/English/Genel/eylem812.pdf](http://www.gap.gov.tr/English/Genel/eylem812.pdf).

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<sup>32</sup> The International Association for Impact Assessment (IAIA) defines an environmental impact assessment as '*the process of identifying, predicting, evaluating and mitigating the **biophysical**, social, and other relevant effects of development proposals prior to major decisions being taken and commitments made.*' See '*Principles of Environmental Impact Assessment Best Practice*', International Association for Impact Assessment in cooperation with Institute of Environmental Assessment, UK, 1999. [http://www.iaia.org/publicdocuments/special-publications/Principles%20of%20IAIA\\_web.pdf](http://www.iaia.org/publicdocuments/special-publications/Principles%20of%20IAIA_web.pdf).

these farmers actually rely on annual floods to irrigate their land. Moreover, although the dam will prevent yearly floods, it will create daily surges of water which are not beneficial to farmers.<sup>33</sup>

Another potential environmental problem is a decrease in water and soil quality. The soil downstream may become salinated or erode as a result of the dam. Sediment will be trapped, preventing it from fertilising farmland and causing a build-up in the reservoir, decreasing the dam's productivity. In addition, the water will be 10-15 degrees cooler downstream and will contain less oxygen. The water will also become dirtier as a result of sewage from upriver cities and agricultural run-off collecting in the basin. Sewage treatment plants are planned for upriver cities, but they will not be completed before the dam, nor do the plans take into account the population increase from displaced villagers. Finally, the eutrophication and anoxic conditions caused by the agricultural run-off will remain unmitigated.

Because this increasingly dirty water will remain stagnant, the river will not be able to purify itself, creating a risk for disease. This risk is increased by rotting plant life submerged under

the reservoir, which creates a breeding ground for insects that carry malaria, leishmaniasis, and other diseases. There have been severe malaria problems in the wake of recently completed dams, such as the Atatürk and Birecik.

Finally, local varieties of fish and plant life are endangered by the dam. About 400 kilometres of river ecosystems (the Tigris and its tributaries) would be destroyed, and a number of species specific to the area would lose their habitat.<sup>34</sup> A decrease in fish will also remove fishing as an additional source of income for villagers.

### **Social Issues**

The Ilisu dam, if completed, would displace up to 78,000 women, children and men, the majority of whom are Kurdish, destroying their homes, livelihoods, way of life and cultural roots. According to the Initiative to Keep Hasankeyf Alive, the figure could be as high as 100,000 if pastoral groups who use the reservoir area are taken into account.<sup>35</sup>

The decades of conflict in this area of Turkey have already led to millions of people being displaced. The campaign of village destruction in the 1980s and 1990s drove many to cities

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<sup>33</sup> *The Cultural and Environmental Impact of Large Dams in Southeast Turkey: Fact-Finding Mission Report*, National University of Ireland, Galway and the Kurdish Human Rights Project, London, February 2005, [http://www.nuigalway.ie/archaeology/documents/ronayne\\_turkey\\_dams.pdf](http://www.nuigalway.ie/archaeology/documents/ronayne_turkey_dams.pdf).

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<sup>34</sup> See *Early Warning and Technical Assessment Report: The Mesopotamian Marshlands: Demise of an Ecosystem*, Partow, H, UNEP, Geneva, 2001, <http://www.grid.unep.ch/product/publication/download/mesopotamia.pdf>.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with İpek Taşlı of the Initiative to Keep Hasankeyf Alive, October 2009.

such as Diyarbakır and Hakkari, which were ill-equipped to receive such numbers. Slums began to spread and the population exploded. For an idea of the scale of growth, between 1991 and 1996, the city of Diyarbakır nearly quadrupled, from 350,000 to 1.5 million.<sup>36</sup> The cities are now swamped, the infrastructure, such as it was, has collapsed and the displaced families, already suffering from the deep trauma of forced evacuation, further face increased poverty, unemployment and intolerable pressure on already under-resourced public facilities. And yet it is to these cities that most of those displaced by the Ilisu dam would have to move.

In particular the situation of IDP women is of concern. Women undertake most of the unpaid work involved in holding a community together, such as bearing and raising children, caring for the sick and elderly, fetching water, growing and preparing food and caring for livestock. All of these are adversely affected by displacement, as women become isolated and are vulnerable to violence. The relative safety of the western cities to which many IDP women were displaced was not sufficient to overcome the difficulties facing them. Rather, migration to these cities represents another stage of displacement during which additional problems arise from the urban environment. In the urban

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<sup>36</sup> See *'The Internally Displaced Kurds of Turkey'*, Mark Muller and Sharon Linzey, KHRP, London, 2007, p. 97.

context the situation of IDPs is complicated as a result of changes in family and community structures, domestic and state violence, and bias against women, which is compounded for IDP women as a result of their ethnicity and their educational and economic standing in Turkish society.<sup>37</sup>

IDPs suffer disproportionately high levels of psychological problems as a result of the reality and threat of violence, combined with the severe social dislocation associated with displacement.<sup>38</sup> They are at an economic disadvantage and lack the social support networks necessary to survive in times of crisis. These problems create a complex situation in which many cumulative difficulties have an impact at an individual, family and community level. As one lawyer from *İnsan Hakları Derneği* (Human Rights Association of Turkey, İHD) in Batman said:

**'The pressures on all of us are unbearable... but our women and girls suffer in specific ways and we need to hear their voices and respond to their cries for help.'**<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *'The Internally Displaced Kurds of Turkey,'* Mark Muller and Sharon Linzey, KHRP London 2007, pg. 97.

<sup>38</sup> *'The Internally Displaced Kurds of Turkey,'* Mark Muller and Sharon Linzey, KHRP London 2007, pg. 97.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with *İnsan Hakları Derneği* (Human Rights Association of Turkey, İHD), Batman Branch during KHRP and Corner House Fact-finding Mission to the Ilisu Dam Region; October 2009.

The poverty and despair that people find themselves in has led many to formally request to return home to their original villages; the majority of these requests have been refused due to 'security reasons'.<sup>40</sup> There has been a project of Village Return and Rehabilitation and of Centralised Villages, but these all demonstrate a further desire to control the area and link disparate settlements through a program of major road-building for easy military access. By flooding vast areas of land and making further tracts uninhabitable, the building of dams constitutes the most permanent and irrefutable denial of people's applications to return.<sup>41</sup>

The Turkish government has developed a Resettlement Action Plan (RAP) to handle the displacement of villagers. However, the organisational plans for resettlement and compensation are weak. In addition, officials have not consulted with local communities, particularly women, or even made information available to them (the RAP is not publicly available). This violates the World Bank standards for international financing, to which the ECAs have expressed a commitment.

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<sup>40</sup> Initiative to Keep Hasankeyf Alive, 'Bauarbeiten in Iltisu ohne Genehmigung weitergeführt', 13 November 2009.

<sup>41</sup> 'The Cultural and Environmental Impact of Large Dams in Southeast Turkey: Fact-Finding Mission Report', National University of Ireland, Galway and the Kurdish Human Rights Project, London, February 2005, [http://www.nuigalway.ie/archaeology/documents/ronayne\\_turkey\\_dams.pdf](http://www.nuigalway.ie/archaeology/documents/ronayne_turkey_dams.pdf).

One problem in the organisational structure is the RAP's uncertainty about population. Earlier reports suggesting the displacement of more than 80,000 were later changed to 55,000. The RAP also fails to account for the population growth rate, which will be high on account of large families.

Another unaddressed problem is the local landowning system. Most of the property is owned by landlords, while many farmers own no property. The RAP does not ensure that those who use the land will receive compensation for their losses. Additionally, the RAP does not account for villagers who have already been displaced because of conflicts. They will have nowhere to return to after their villages are flooded, and the compensation will be received by the village guards living in their homes.<sup>42</sup>

Neither the villagers, nor the cities hosting those displaced have been consulted about the dam. Although the DSI professes local support, numerous fact-finding missions undertaken over the years by KHRP and its partners, have found that

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<sup>42</sup> The village guard system was established by the Turkish government in the mid-1980's to act as a local militia in towns and villages, and has been widely condemned in and outside of Turkey for systematic human rights violations. Throughout the period since major hostilities officially ended, the government has repeatedly stated that it plans to end the system, yet there are between 50,000 to 90,000 village guards currently employed by the State. See 'Human Rights in the Kurdish Region of Turkey: Three Pressing Concerns', KHRP, London, August 2009.

many villagers have not even been informed, while others are adamantly against the project.<sup>43</sup> The town of Hasankeyf even has a local initiative to save the town from flooding. City officials from nearby Batman are also unsupportive of the project, as they are unable to cope with thousands of displaced farmers.

Women in particular have been left out of the decision-making, although the DSI claims to be focused on women's and children's issues. Those women interviewed by KHRP's fact-finding missions universally declare that they do not want the dam because it will make caring for a family even more difficult. As most women do not own property, the small compensation will go only to the men.<sup>44</sup>

Although villagers ought to have been involved in the consultation process, within the ongoing context of state oppression, torture, and other human rights violations, many villagers are left too afraid to speak out. As KHRP's recent mission to the dam region was told, farmers for instance have been given no safeguards in pursuing any legal remedy and are frightened and limited in what they can do because

of the village guards.<sup>45</sup> Hence as the mission heard in October 2009, when in 2007 villagers received a notice inviting them to negotiate the compensation awards that have been assessed for their land and house, very few villagers were reported to have responded. On the contrary for those who did attempt to take up the invite, the method of 'consultation' was them being ordered into a police station only to be told that there were no rights of negotiation and the dam was going to be built. Under the present conditions a fair and open discussion of the project is impossible.

Finally, it is uncertain whether the RAP is legally binding, and so it may ultimately amount to nothing more than promises. Either way, legally binding or not, the RAP remains inadequate. For example, the compensation awards should have taken into account the cost of resettlement and not the value of land and property alone, particularly given that the cost of relocation to a town would far outweigh any monetary value attached to their properties.

As relayed to KHRP by villagers during its most recent field visit in October 2009, despite the withdrawal of European funding, Turkey is still pushing ahead with expropriating the land for the project. Those living in Ilisu village, nearest to the dam site, have already received expropriation

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<sup>43</sup> *The Cultural and Environmental Impact of Large Dams in Southeast Turkey: Fact-Finding Mission Report*, National University of Ireland, Galway and the Kurdish Human Rights Project, London, February 2005, [http://www.nuigalway.ie/archaeology/documents/ronayne\\_turkey\\_dams.pdf](http://www.nuigalway.ie/archaeology/documents/ronayne_turkey_dams.pdf).

<sup>44</sup> *The Internally Displaced Kurds of Turkey*, Mark Muller and Sharon Linzey, KHRP London 2007, pg. 97.

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<sup>45</sup> Interview with lawyer, Mehmet Emin Basar, Batman, during KHRP and Corner House Fact-finding Mission to the Ilisu Dam Region; October 2009.

notices. Over 500 are challenging the terms of their compensation through the courts.<sup>46</sup> Although the state has offered to provide new houses, those evicted will have to pay for them, which they are unable to do with the compensation on offer. Many will be forced to abandon their livelihoods in the countryside and move to the slums of the major regional cities.<sup>47</sup>

### **Archaeological/ Cultural Issues**

The most widely decried result of the Ilisu Dam is the destruction of the ancient town of Hasankeyf. It is a first degree Archaeological Conservation Site, and any intervention must be approved by the appropriate authorities. In 2008, a Turkish court ruled that decision-making in cases where dam construction threatens heritage sites was a matter for a '**regional conservation council for cultural and natural assets**'. The ruling overturned an earlier move to hand these powers to the Department of Energy and Natural Resources.<sup>48</sup>

The Turkish government has ratified the 1992 European Convention on the Protection of Architectural Heritage as part of the EU accession process. According to the Convention, archaeological assets are non-renewable resources that should be preserved, preferably *in situ*. Turkey's plan to quickly remove parts

of Hasankeyf before destroying it, without considering alternatives, is in direct violation of the Convention. There are also concerns that the fragile sandstone of Hasankeyf does not allow monuments to be moved.<sup>49</sup> Archaeologists have grave doubts about the plan to move parts of the city to safety. Experts believe it will be impossible to transport the antique monuments without destroying them. Furthermore, Turkey has not set enough time or money aside for this endeavour. Archaeologists claim it will take at least 25 years, but the dam is expected to be finished in less than ten.

Even if the plan is successful, part of the town will still be lost, violating the EU Convention's focus on *in situ* preservation. The city of Hasankeyf is a monument, as an important stop on the Silk Road and as a flourishing medieval city between two empires in the East and West.

Hasankeyf is not the only site of archaeological interest to be lost in the flood. Archaeologists believe discoveries from the area could lead to connections between Neanderthals and modern man. As of today, the area has not been thoroughly surveyed by archaeologists. In addition, the flooding caused by the dam will wipe out more recent history, including the culture,

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Initiative to Keep Hasankeyf Alive, 'Bauarbeiten in Ilisu ohne Genehmigung weitergeführt', 13 November 2009.

<sup>48</sup> 'Ilisu on hold after collapse of European support', Newline 45, KHRP, London, 2009.

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<sup>49</sup> Eberlein, C. et al, 'Lesson to learn from the Ilisu Dam project in light of the Common Approaches', Presentation to OECD Export Credit Group Consultation with Civil Society Organisation', Paris, 16 November 2009.



heritage and traditions of the people living in the area today.

This is part of a broader plan to repress cultural diversity in the region, particularly with regard to the Kurdish people. The floods will cover up the religious and cultural centres of the region's residents and the graves of their ancestors. As interviews with villagers during KHRP's latest fact-finding visit verified, it will also separate communities who will not be resettled together – all part of an attempt to assimilate locals of the region into mainstream Turkish culture.<sup>50</sup> Finally, the floods will cover up evidence of recent conflicts and human rights violations occurring in the area, including evacuated villages and possibly graves of the disappeared. According to the World Archaeological Congress, this amounts 'to a form of ethnic cleansing' in which supporting governments and companies will be complicit.<sup>51</sup> Yet as KHRP's recent fact-finding mission identified, there was a commonality of spirit among the villagers it spoke with, whom were emphatic that while the Turkish government can buy their land, they cannot buy their culture, which will be lost as a result of the dam.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> KHRP and Corner House Fact-finding Mission to the Ilisu Dam Region; October 2009.

<sup>51</sup> 'Withdrawal of Support from Ilisu Dam Project', Press Statement from the President's Office, World Archaeological Congress, 14 November 2001,

[http://www.nuigalway.ie/archaeology/documents/ilisu\\_dam\\_wac\\_press\\_release.pdf](http://www.nuigalway.ie/archaeology/documents/ilisu_dam_wac_press_release.pdf).

<sup>52</sup> KHRP and Corner House Fact-finding Mission to the Ilisu Dam Region; October 2009.

## Political Issues

**International:** Turkey shares the waters of the Tigris River with Syria and Iraq. International law requires that Turkey consult with these countries, negotiate, and address any problems raised before interfering with the water supply.

There have been a series of meetings on this issue and although Turkey claimed in 2007 that an agreement was reached, this is refuted by both Iraq and Syria. Iraq insists that the only agreement reached was over a framework for future talks, denying that it has given approval to Turkey's plans.<sup>53</sup> Although the European ECAs said that they would require Turkey to inform Iraq, the project was approved in March despite Iraq's objections.

In March 2008, Turkey, Syria and Iraq announced the decision to establish a water institute that will consist of 18 water experts from each country to work toward the solution of water-related problems among the three. On March 8, 2008, Iraqi Minister of Water Resources Abdul-Latif Jamal Rasheed was in the Iraqi delegation and met with Eroğlu to tell him that Baghdad had accepted Turkey's offer to establish a water institute at Atatürk Dam. As a gesture from Iraq, Rasheed also declared that Iraq would like the Ilisu Dam to be built as soon as possible, despite previous

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<sup>53</sup> See 'Ilisu Dam Downstream Water Impacts and Iraq: Report of Fact Finding Mission to Iraq', The Corner House and Kurdish Human Rights Project, London, 29 March 2007.



objections to the construction of this dam on the grounds that Iraq would receive less water.<sup>54</sup>

Although the Final Terms of Reference for the Ilisu project require a flow of 60 cubic metres per second, this is only at Ilisu, not the border. The flow could end up being much lower, especially in the summer, if the planned irrigation dam at Cizre is built, since much of the water would be withdrawn from the river for agriculture. The Ilisu Dam could allow Turkey to completely halt the flow of the Tigris into Iraq and Syria.

In addition, Iraq and Syria face the same environmental problems (flooding, decreased water quality, etc.) as downstream Turkish farmers. In line with international law, World Bank standards demand that Turkey solicit opinions from riparian nations (as well as local communities) before beginning the project.

**Local:** The dam may increase tensions in the already conflict-ridden region of south-east Turkey, as more locals become refugees. Turkey has essentially acknowledged this, sending 5,000 soldiers to the region for security.

The Kurdish region has suffered a long and drawn out conflict, decades of deliberate isolation and neglect, massive displacement of the

population and some parts today remain under State of Emergency-like conditions having been declared 'high security zones'. The UK Defence Forum has noted that **'from the outset, the Southeast Anatolia project has had profound security implications'** and that **'it is no coincidence that the project is situated in the Kurdish region of Turkey'**.<sup>55</sup> One key so-called 'security benefit' from GAP will be that it will displace Kurds from their traditional mountain environment and into urban areas, where they can be culturally assimilated and where the government believes it can more easily keep an eye on them. As recently as 2007, Sabhattin Cevheri AK Party Deputy for Şanlıurfa, stated in a report on the region, **'As long as GAP remains unfinished, terrorism cannot be vanquished.'**<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> 'The Impact of Large-scale Dam Construction on Regional Security in the Kurdish Regions of Turkey' Speech Delivered by the Kurdish Human Rights Project at the Alternative Water Forum, İstanbul, 21 March 2009. Also see: 'The Ilisu Dam, the World Commission on Dams and Export Credit Reform: The Final Report of a Fact-Finding Mission to the Ilisu Dam Region', by Ilisu Dam Campaign; the Kurdish Human Rights Project; The Corner House; World Economy, Ecology and Development; Eye on SACE Campaign and Pacific Environment Research Center, 9-16 October 2000, <http://www.thecornerhouse.org.uk/item.shtml?x=52195>.

<sup>56</sup> See: 'The Ilisu Dam, the World Commission on Dams and Export Credit Reform: The Final Report of a Fact-Finding Mission to the Ilisu Dam Region', by Ilisu Dam Campaign; the Kurdish Human Rights Project; The Corner House; World Economy, Ecology and Development; Eye on SACE Campaign and Pacific Environment Research Center, 9-16 October 2000, <http://www.thecornerhouse.org.uk/item.shtml?x=52195>.

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<sup>54</sup> See 'Turkey, Iraq, Syria to Initiate Water Talks', Today's Zaman, 12 March 2008, <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/detaylar.do?load=detay&link=136183&bolu m=102>.

From 2002, in order to keep this project afloat, Turkey has worn whichever hat is likely to fit at any given time, but the end goal has remained the same. When the economy was failing, the project was used to attract international investment. When it was in vogue, Turkey began to use the 'anti-terror defence' to gain the support of the West. National and political security became equated with cultural homogeneity and economic development. In the view of the Turkish state, this has meant that any opposition the Ilisu dam is a threat to the integrity of the State. More recently, the Government is adapting to international trends once more, sensing the growing disquiet with the blanket 'anti-terror defence' given by many governments around the world and the recent moves in the US to once again strengthen the dialogue on the compatibility of freedom of expression, including freedom of dissent, and has recast the GAP as an essentially humanitarian project, using such phrases as 'broadening freedom'. However, those who raise questions about the value or even legality of the Ilisu dam continue to be seen as criminals, and as a threat to the State. As recently as December 2008, İpek Taşlı from the Keep Hasankeyf Alive Initiative, was arrested, detained without access to a lawyer and then accused, along with her driver, of disseminating propaganda on behalf of a terrorist organisation. All this was for attempting to investigate whether or not official efforts were being made to inform residents in the Ilisu area

about the construction of the dam. In March 2009, people who only implicitly questioned the State by simply unfurling a banner that read, 'No risky dams' at the World Water Forum, were deported.

### **Conclusion**

The Turkish government's insistence on the continued viability of the Ilisu Dam, and fresh reports of China stepping into fill the funding gap where European support has collapsed, continues to negate the devastating impact posed by the project, which remains in violation of International law. Decades on, the project continues to threaten environmental, societal, and cultural integrity, as well as political stability, not only in the Kurdish region of Turkey but also in the neighbouring countries of Iraq and Syria. Therefore the consequence of any fallout which emerges from this project is not likely to be confined to this region alone, but risks reverberating across the Middle East and globally. This underlines why KHRP and its partners must persevere in its campaign against the Ilisu dam, and why the parties behind the project – governmental or otherwise – too must act to comply with international law.

### **Recommendations**

#### **Requirements: Government of Turkey**

- Release all information and plans
- Consider alternative projects
- Complete a thorough and accurate environmental impact report

- Have interventions with archaeological sites approved by relevant authorities
- Develop a comprehensive resettlement plan addressing land ownership issues and impact on women and children
- Community involvement in decision-making within an environment free from fear and oppression
- Consult/negotiate with Iraq and Syria.

### **Suggestions: Governments of Iraq and Syria**

Write as a matter of urgency to the government of Turkey:

- Specifying the information that has not been received from Turkey
- Indicating that required consultations have not taken place
- Reiterating rights set out under international law and bilateral agreements with Turkey.
- Create an inter-agency commission for strategising in regards to state interests.



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The Kurdish Human Rights Project (KHRP) is an independent, non-political, non-governmental human rights organisation founded and based in London, England. KHRP is a registered charity and is committed to the promotion and protection of the human rights of all persons living with the Kurdish regions of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Syria and elsewhere, irrespective of race, religion, sex, political persuasion or other belief or opinion. Its supporters include both Kurdish and non-Kurdish people.