

Cradle of Civilization at Risk of Desertification - Tigris Declaration sent to UN

Hasankeyf, Turkey, May 22, 2012 "We have come from Iraq to speak, because no one came from Iraq to speak to us. We live in one of the most significant regions in the world - the Mesopotamian marshlands - which is in danger because of Ilisu." With these words, Sheik Sayed Abbas began today's unique protest in the Turkish cliff side city of Hasankeyf. He has come to the region with eight other tribal leaders to speak out against Ilisu.

Together with the people of Hasankeyf, ECA Watch Austria, Nature Iraq, and the Turkish environmental group Doga Dernegi, these community leaders will sign the "Declaration Tigris," which urges the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to assist in the fight against Ilisu. "The impact of Ilisu will be far greater than previously thought. We hope that the UN will bring Turkey and Iraq to the negotiating table. Otherwise, the cradle of civilizations will become a desert," says Ulrich Eichelmann of ECA Watch Austria.

If the construction of Ilisu is completed as planned, there will be devastating consequences upwards of 1,000 kilometers downstream of the dam. The dam will hold back the water that the marshes and their inhabitants need desperately, especially the spring floods that feed the flood plains near Basra. Whatever water makes it to the marshes will be reduced to a dirty trickle. Over the years of debate about Ilisu, the consequences for this area were ignored. This changes now.

The Marsh Arabs are the inhabitants of the most important cultural landscape in the world, the Mesopotamian marshes in southern Iraq. At the confluence of the Euphrates and Tigris, the Sumerians developed the first writing, the first laws and the principles of agriculture over 6,000 years ago. This area must have been the Garden of Eden. Abraham, the father of Judaism, Christianity and Islam may have been born in the nearby city of Ur. Despite numerous interventions, an irreplaceable landscape in which people live as they have for time out of memory: sleeping in reed houses, fishing, hunting, and raising water buffalo.

"We are people of Mesopotamia, we are connected across the Tigris. This river is our common roots, our lifeblood and our future. We will fight together," said Sheik Sayed Abbas. He concluded with a simple suggestion: "If we reduced the height of the dam from 130 meters to 65 meters, this would not flood Hasankeyf, and our marshes would not dry out." - 65 meters for the cradle of humanity. Is this too much to ask?

Further Information:

Ulrich Eichelmann (ECA Watch Austria):

ulrich.eichelmann@eca-watch.at 0043 676 6621512 Pictures from today's meeting in Hasankeyf and from the Mesopotamian Marshes:

http://m-h-s.org/ilisu/front_content.php?idart=772

The Mesopotamian Tigris Declaration:

http://m-h-s.org/ilisu/upload/PDF/2012/The_Mesopotamian_Tigris_Declaration.pdf

Take Action to Stop the Ilisu Dam! Sign this petition:

<http://www.change.org/petitions/unesco-world-heritage-committee-save-world-heritage-on-the-tigris-river-in-mesopotamia>