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His Excellency Samdech Hun Sen
Prime Minister of the Royal Government of Cambodia
Government Peace Building, No. 38
Russia Confederation Blvd (110)
Phnom Penh
Cambodia

17 August 2017

Subject: Environmental impacts of the proposed Sambor and Stung Treng hydropower dams on the Mekong River

Your Excellency,

We are writing to you on behalf of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and on behalf of the IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC) to express concern about the potential environmental impacts of the proposed Sambor and Stung Treng hydropower dams on the Mekong River.

In this context, allow us to state that IUCN recognizes the imperative of Cambodia's energy development and further obviously supports that Cambodia makes energy-related investments to ensure that the Cambodian people and economy can prosper for the benefit of all. In the same breath, however, we emphasize that the Cambodian people also deserve a healthy and diverse environment with abundant wild species and healthy biodiversity.

Cambodia has a number of energy options, and we recognize that hydropower will remain an important energy source for the foreseeable future. However, we believe that Cambodia's energy needs can be met in ways that preserve Cambodia's unique heritage of precious species and natural ecosystems.

As you know, the Mekong maintains some of the world's richest biological diversity. This includes numerous species that are already close to extinction. Of particular concern are the "river giants," such as the Critically Endangered Mekong River population of dolphins and the Mekong giant catfish, as well as endangered giant carp, stingrays and turtles that live and reproduce in the river. The lower Mekong provides habitat for about 850 different fish species, 135 of which migrate up and down the overall river system. This biodiversity supports local fisheries that produce an estimated 4.5 million tons of fish worth US\$ 4-7 billion a year. Large dams have been shown to reduce fish diversity and block the migratory movements of many species, in some cases causing their extinction and the loss of valuable fisheries, thereby also jeopardizing food security.

Largely through the work of SSC's Cetacean Specialist Group, IUCN has been supporting the Fisheries Administration of the Royal Government of Cambodia to save the Mekong dolphins. The Mekong dolphin population has fallen drastically to around 80 individuals primarily as a result of accidental drowning in fishing nets. Fortunately, thanks to the efforts of the Cambodian Fisheries Administration, the dolphin population appears to have stabilized and may even be recovering slowly. Increasing numbers of tourists are visiting the dolphins, which are now an internationally recognized symbol of Cambodia. This has brought considerable economic benefits to local communities along the Mekong.

As mentioned, we appreciate the critical importance of alleviating poverty and improving the lives of people and we certainly agree that this must remain a high priority for your administration. We also realize that expanded energy production is vital for a country's development. However, we are concerned that

construction of the Sambor and Stung Treng dams, in such a biologically rich river system, would, according to experts in the Cetacean Specialist Group, completely reverse the globally significant conservation achievements mentioned above. These dams would destroy habitat and lead to extinction not only of Mekong dolphins but also of several of the world's largest freshwater and most valuable fish species. For great river basins such as the Mekong, dam site selection matters enormously for biodiversity, and careful planning is vital to minimize negative environmental, social and economic impacts.

As a Party to the Convention on Biological Diversity, Cambodia has agreed to the Strategic Plan on Biodiversity and its Aichi Biodiversity Targets. Specifically, Aichi Target 12 states: *"By 2020, the extinction of known threatened species has been prevented and their conservation status, particularly of those most in decline, has been improved and sustained"*. We respectfully ask that you consider this commitment as your Government seeks to increase Cambodia's electrical energy production, and particularly as decisions are made regarding the proposed Sambor and Stung Treng dams.

Allow us to highlight that there is a wealth of expertise in the SSC network. Numerous SSC members have specific knowledge on the conservation of riverine species and management of freshwater ecosystems. In particular, the Cetacean Specialist Group is eager to continue and strengthen its collaboration with your government and other groups in Cambodia as they work to ensure a future for Mekong dolphins and the natural environment that sustains them. If you wish to take up this offer or discuss the matter further, please do not hesitate to have your office contact us for deeper engagement.

Please accept, Your Excellency, the assurances of our highest consideration.



Inger Andersen
Director General



Jon Paul Rodríguez, PhD
Chair, IUCN Species Survival Commission

Cc: H. E. Bin Chhin, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Office of the Council of Ministers
H. E. Say Samal, Minister of the Ministry of Environment
H. E. Veng Sakhon, Minister of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
H. E. Lim Kean Hor, Minister of the Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology
H. E. Aun Pornmoniroth, Minister of the Ministry of Economic and Finance
H. E. Suy Sem, Minister of the Ministry of Mine and Energy
H.E. Mr. Ney Samol, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Permanent Representative,
Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of Cambodia to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva