

Bianca Jagger

BIANCA JAGGER'S APPEALS TO (ICOM) THE INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF MUSEUM

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I write as a human rights advocate to urge you, as directors of major museums throughout the world and curators of humanity's cultural heritage, to express your collective opposition to the involvement of Germany, Switzerland and Austria in the funding of the proposed Ilisu Dam project on the River Tigris in Southeast Turkey. If built, the dam will be a crime against the fundamental human rights of tens of thousands of Kurds who will be forcefully evicted from their homes; it will be a crime against our common cultural heritage". The Ilisu Dam will bury under the dam's reservoir the magnificent ancient city of Hasankeyf and hundreds of other unexplored archaeological sites -- and it will be an environmental disaster. Furthermore, by disrupting the flow of the Tigris, this controversial and ill conceived project will exacerbate the threat of a future "water war" in the region.

The dam is being built by the Turkish Government's Ministry of Energy and Resources, and its Sub-Division, State Hydraulic Works. DSI's Construction is to be carried out by a consortium of companies lead by Austria's VA Tech Hydro and including Alstom, Stucky and Maggia from Switzerland, Züblin from Germany, and Nuro, Cengiz, Celikler and Temelsu from Turkey. The Austrian, German and Swiss Export Credit Agencies (ECAs) have agreed to underwrite the risks of the project by guaranteeing export credit support to the consortium.

I recently visited the city of Hasankeyf, which is one of the world's most significant cultural heritage sites and a symbol of Kurdish culture, and during

my time there I met with the Mayor and many of the people whose lives and interests will be destroyed by the dam. The dam will affect approximately 78,000 people, tens of thousands of whom through forcible resettlement. Although the dam has been planned for over 50 years, the project still has no environmental impact assessment or resettlement plan that meets international standards. Plans to “rescue” Hasankeyf are impracticable and a mockery of its importance for world heritage. The city’s rich heritage of Assyrian, Christian, Abassidian-Islamic and Osmanian remains will be lost forever under the dam’s reservoir.

In conjunction with a planned downstream dam at Cizre, the Ilisu dam will severely reduce the downstream flow of the Tigris to Iraq and Syria, fuelling potential conflict in the Middle East. Turkey has yet to fulfil its obligations under international law to consult and negotiate with its downstream neighbours. Iraq’s Minister of Water has publicly expressed his concerns over the dam’s downstream impact.

The Governments of Germany, Austria and Switzerland have given the export credit guaranties to the controversial Ilisu dam project notwithstanding massive opposition to the project in Turkey and worldwide. Many will be surprised and dismayed at their decision to lend their support to a project that has already been turned down by the World Bank, and numerous private banks, including Germany’s Hypovereinsbank, Switzerland’s zürcher Kantonalbank (ZKB) and UBS have refused to provide finance. This project would have never have been sanctioned in the European Union; so one may legitimately ask why is it been allowed in Turkey.

Last week, five commercial banks - Germany’s DekaBank, Austria’s Bank of Austria Creditanstalt, France’s Société Générale and Turkey’s Garanti bank and Akbank - agreed to provide loans.

The companies, banks and Export Credit Agencies (ECAs) of Germany, Austria and Switzerland acknowledge the problems but argue that the concerns have been met by 150 conditions which the ECAs have attached to their involvement in the project. These conditions cover environment, resettlement, cultural assets and consultation with neighbouring states. The companies and financiers, along with Turkey, have also appointed a committee of “independent and internationally renowned experts on environmental, social and cultural issues who are responsible for the project’s compliance with the World Bank Standards”.

Whilst this sounds reassuring, the reality on the ground is that Turkey has *already* broken many of the conditions which it is already supposed to have met. Furthermore, many of the conditions are insufficient to bring the project into line with international standards. For example:

- Conditions relating to cultural heritage are wholly inadequate to save Hasankeyf and its surroundings.

- The project still lacks a Resettlement Plan that conforms with international standards In violation of World Bank policy. Nonetheless Turkey has already started expropriating land in the five villages nearest to the dam site. Villagers have not been informed of their rights and levels of compensation on offer are very low.
- Although the conditions imposed by the ECAs require that World Bank standards are applied for resettlement, Turkey has been carrying out the expropriation under existing Turkish law, which does not recognise many of the rights that the World Bank insists upon to protect affected communities.
- Despite an undertaking that an specific budget would be set aside within the Turkish national budget for resettlement, no such budget is yet in place.
- Many of the conditions have already been broken by Turkey – the authorities have started to expropriate the land of villagers nearest to the proposed dam site, but without following the terms that have been laid down. Villagers report that they have been offered minimal compensation.
- No Environmental Impact Assessment that can be regarded in line with international standards exists for the Ilisu Dam project. The ECAs themselves acknowledge that even the fundamental baseline data needed to draw up an EIA is still missing.
- Although Turkey was required to provide Iraq with the information it requested on Ilisu *prior* to approval of financing by the ECAs, until today it has failed to do so.

Perhaps significantly, the ECAs have yet to sign the final contracts for the project. A leaked letter suggests that the reason is that Turkey is baulking at agreeing to legally-binding commitments to comply with the ECA's conditions. The ECAs are now reported to be trying to find a form of wording that will satisfy Turkey.

Fudged wording is the worst form of "safeguard". The truth is that the ECAs should have insisted on their conditions being met *before* they agreed to appraise, let alone finance, the project. This is what the World Bank requires – and with good reason: tacking conditions on after the event is a recipe for them being broken, watered down or ignored.

If the governments of Germany, Switzerland and Austria go ahead and sign the final contracts for export credit contracts for the dam, more than just a unique historical city will be lost. Within the ruins of Hasankeyf will be buried what the ECAs have been prepared to set

aside – the fundamental human rights of the people that will be affected by the Ilisu Dam project. Our common cultural heritage, environmental standards, In effect, the cornerstones of our free society, due process civil liberties, human rights, and the rule of law.

Turkey's assurances over the dam have consistently proved to be paper-thin - as have those of the banks and the ECAs. I urge you to support the Resolution condemning the project.

Bianca Jagger

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and Chair of the World Future Council