

New Chinese Dam Project Fuels Ethnic Conflict in Sudan

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The Sudanese government has contracted Sinohydro to build the Kajbar Dam on the third cataract of the Nile. The project would flood lands of ancient Nubia and displace an estimated 10,000 people. With support from International Rivers, the affected communities are calling on the Chinese company to withdraw from the contract. They warn that if built, the dam could unleash a second Darfur conflict.

Proposed to be built near Kajbar village in Northern Sudan, the new dam would generate electricity at a capacity of 360 megawatts. It would also create a reservoir of 110 square kilometers, submerge some 90 villages, and destroy an estimated 500 archeological sites. Much of Nubia's territory had already been lost to the reservoir of the Aswan Dam. Yet another project, the Dal Dam, has been proposed to be built on the Nile's second cataract. The construction of the Kajbar and Dal dams would bring the Nubian culture, which dates back over more than 5,000 years, closer to extinction.

The affected people are strongly opposed to the construction of the Kajbar and Dal dams. A statement of the committee of affected villages declares: "We will never allow any force on the earth to destroy our heritage and nation. Nubians will not sacrifice for the second time to repeat the tragedy of the Aswan Dam."

The government never officially informed or consulted the affected people about the project. In April and June 2007, security forces brutally cracked down on peaceful protests against the planned project, killing four and wounding more than 20 people. The UN Special Rapporteur on Sudan deplored the "excessive force" and "arbitrary arrests and prosecutions to stifle community protest against the Kajbar dam" in a report in 2008. The villagers just learned that the Sudanese government in October 2010 awarded a \$705 million, five-year contract to build the Kajbar Dam to the Chinese company Sinohydro. Sinohydro, the world's largest hydropower contractor, was also involved in the construction of the Merowe Dam, upstream of the proposed Kajbar site. The Merowe Dam was built in 2003-2009 under massive human rights violations.

Chinese government institutions and Sinohydro have in recent years made repeated commitments to friendly relations with host communities in their overseas projects. China has also voted in favor of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which gives indigenous peoples, including the Nubians, the right to consent to projects in their territories.

In support of the affected people of the Kajbar region, International Rivers calls on Sinohydro to withdraw from the Kajbar project. "Building the Kajbar Dam would make Sinohydro complicit in the government's human rights violations, and would fly in the face of China's commitments to improved community relations," says Peter Bosshard, policy director of International Rivers.

International Rivers