

Petition to UNESCO: Save World Heritage on the Tigris River in Mesopotamia

Distinguished Members of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee,

We address you gravely concerned about the threat posed to potential World Heritage Sites in Mesopotamia, a region of great cultural and natural importance which is endangered by the Ilisu Dam Project on the Tigris River.

This area is unique in many ways. It hosts great geographical, climatic and biological diversity. The step of transition from nomadic pastoralism to sedentary agriculture took place here. Thousands of archaeological sites bear testimony of dozens of cultures which intermingled here and provide the exceptional chance to gain further knowledge of humanity's history. Nowadays the inhabitants of Mesopotamia, particularly Kurds, Arabs, Aramaeans and Turkmen, are the carriers of this worldwide unique cultural heritage.

However, the tremendous cultural and natural heritage is in great danger due to the construction of the Ilisu Dam on the Turkish stretch of the Tigris River. Designed to impound an area of more than 310 km², it would impact the right to food and water of thousands of people in and around the planned reservoir as well as downstream. It also threatens precious riverine ecosystems hosting numerous endangered species, hundreds of archaeological sites including the ancient town of Hasankeyf in Turkey, as well as the Mesopotamian Marshes in Iraq.

Hasankeyf, with a history of at least 10,000 years, is unique in being continuously populated from Neolithic times through Classical Antiquity and the Middle Ages until today. It is a world class example of a site that combines both outstanding cultural heritage and natural landscape features. A recent study shows that together with the surrounding Tigris valley, Hasankeyf fulfils nine out of the ten UNESCO criteria for World Heritage Sites – a level reached by hardly any existing site. Should the Ilisu Dam be built, this heritage will be lost forever.

Owing to their outstanding value as the largest wetland in the Middle East and their function as a home to the 'Marsh Arabs' with their distinct 5,000-year-old culture, the Marshlands of Mesopotamia are on the Tentative List submitted by Iraq to the World Heritage Committee in 2003. After severe deterioration in the past decades, a major restoration program was started after 2003. The progress achieved is under threat now due to the construction of the Ilisu Dam.

Dear Committee Members,

We, the undersigned, urge you to assess the impacts of the Ilisu Dam construction on the World Heritage of the Mesopotamia region and to insist on the State Party to refrain from any action infringing upon any sites bearing the potential to become a World Heritage Site.

Surname	First Name	Street Address	Place, ZIP, Country	E-mail	Signature

Initiators: Initiative to Keep Hasankeyf Alive, Batman/Turkey; ICSSI – Iraq Civil Society Solidarity Initiative; CDO – Civil Development Organisation, Sulaimaniah/Iraq-KRG; CENESTA – Centre for Sustainable Development

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