

DIOCESE OF ANTIPOLO
MINISTRY OF SOCIAL AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT
SOCIAL ACTION CENTER

Social Action Center (SAC) of the Diocese of Antipolo
STATEMENT AGAINST THE LAIBAN DAM
(July 13, 2009)

We are greatly disturbed by the haste and secrecy of the negotiations between the Philippine government and a private corporation on the proposed Laiban Dam. The discussion on this huge project has been shielded from public scrutiny. How could a \$2 billion project which is long term and a largely irreversible environmental structure that will affect millions of residents and will alter the river and forest ecosystem be kept secret? Whatever remains of the constitutional right to information and access to public documents?

Together with the indigenous brothers and sisters, we voice our fears on the proposed construction of the Laiban Dam. The climate change is bringing about more extreme storms and increasingly severe floods that will have major implications for dam safety. Even the world's most modern technology can not assure our safety and peace of mind over the soundness of building a dam near a geological fault. Experts around the world concur that the higher the water column in a reservoir, the higher is the risk of Reservoir Induced Seismicity (RIS).

The Laiban Dam Project is anti-poor. The Dam will create unsustainable debt obligations and it will always be the poor who will again bear the burden of shouldering the high cost of water just to pay the huge loans incurred in the building and maintenance of the dam. Water in this water-abundant country is turned into a costly commodity. By submerging thousands of hectares of peasant and ancestral lands, how could the people who are deprived of their means of livelihood pay for such? According to Dr. Michael Cernea of the World Bank and Dr. Thayer Scudder, Professor of California Institutes of Technology: "Dam related relocation affects society in three ways: an economic disaster, human trauma, and social catastrophe."

The Laiban Dam will drastically change the ecosystem. Remote areas previously inaccessible will now be easily reached by new roads thereby serving as magnets to loggers and developers, and thus accelerate deforestation. In fact, one can find golf courses and resorts along the edges of reservoirs in every large dam in Thailand.

In sum, the cost of the project outweighs the promised benefits.

Alternative Solutions. Whether water shortage in Metro Manila is a present reality or a future problem, we propose the following for the Philippine Government to consider:

- Develop a truly integrated and holistic approach in addressing the water issue by:

- Protecting and conserving the ecosystem of Sierra Madre mountain ranges
- intensifying the anti-logging campaign and prosecute the perpetrators.

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- promoting tree planting in the Marikina watershed and declaring it a Protected Area.
 - stopping land use conversion for industrial and housing, and
 - cleaning up rivers and address the siltation problem.
- Fix the theft and leaks from the Angat-Ipo Dams in Bulacan and La Mesa reservoir in Quezon City to minimize wastage. Patch the leaks of these structures, not build a new dam.
 - At the same time revive Wawa Dam. The water output though insufficient, may complement the water output from the rehabilitation of the existing dams.
 - Focus on designing an effective water servicing and technology like modern pumping stations, rainwater harvesting, water distribution facilities or wastewater treatment and recycling facilities.

The problem is not the insufficient water supply. The problem can be traced to the insufficient participatory processes, lack of commitment or political will, and poor implementation of laws that protect the watersheds and water sources.

The World Commission on Dam which was established by the World Bank and World Conservation Union stated that: while "dams have made an important and significant contribution to human development, and benefits derived from them have been considerable... in too many cases an unacceptable and often unnecessary price has been paid to secure those benefits, especially in social and environmental terms, by people displaced, by communities downstream, by taxpayers and by the natural environment."

As Christians, our duty to protect the environment is firmly rooted in a profound theological understanding of the world and our place within it. The human person must be at the center of environmental concerns. But as John Paul II explained, *the human person vis a vis the environment is "not the mission of an absolute and unquestionable master, but of a steward of God's kingdom."*

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