
Thailand: letter to the Prime Minister on Rasi Salai dam

Inhabitants of Mae Mun Man Yuen Village #2 affected by Rasi Salai Dam are demanding that the government reexamines the impacts of the project and compensate 1800 families that are in danger of losing their farmlands. The protesters, who belong to the Assembly of the Poor, are prepared to stay in their village until their demands are met. Dam megaprojects have provoked severe concern and led to direct actions in different regions of Thailand (see WRM Bulletins 22 and 27).

Those interested in supporting this struggle can send their endorsement of the following letter to Aviva Imhof, including your name and that of your organization:

October 1999
The Hon. Mr. Chuan Leekpai
Prime Minister of Thailand

Dear Mr. Chuan,

We write to express our support for the 1850 people currently facing submergence at the Rasi Salai dam on the Mun River in North-Eastern Thailand. These people intend to stay in their village, Mae Mun Man Yuen Village #2, and face the rising waters, until their demands are met.

The Department of Energy Development and Promotion (DEDP) is currently filling the reservoir and the water level is at 116.8 metres above sea level. Already four houses and 80 per cent of the village's rice fields and vegetable gardens have been flooded. If the level reaches 117.5 metres, the village will be entirely submerged and people will drown.

We are writing to urge you to direct the DEDP to immediately stop filling the reservoir, and to give due consideration to the people's demands. The villagers are demanding that the government reexamine the impacts of the project, drain the reservoir, determine the exact number of people affected by the dam, pay compensation to all affected peoples, and correct the environmental problems caused by the dam. If the government refuses to pay compensation, the villagers demand that the dam be removed.

These people have been demonstrating for over six years, yet the government has refused to listen. On April 20 of this year, more than 1000 villagers affected by Rasi Salai dam occupied the dam site. Still the government did not listen. Now 1850 people are prepared to die in order to get the attention of the government. They have lost everything and they feel they have nothing more to lose.

Rasi Salai has been plagued by problems and deceit ever since it was first conceived. DEDP failed to release any information to the public prior to construction, and stated that they would only build a small rubber weir 4.5 meters high, not a concrete dam 9 meters high. More than 100 square kilometers were inundated, yet no Environmental Impact Assessment was conducted, contrary to the Environment Act. Even though the dam was completed in 1994, and DEDP is currently filling the

reservoir, the irrigation system is not operational, so the dam is effectively useless.

The dam destroyed the fresh water swamp forest along the banks of the Mun River and blocked the migration of fish. The reservoir has been plagued by salination problems because it is located on top of a big salt dome. More than 3000 families have lost their farmland to the reservoir, and compensation was paid for private property only, not for lost customary land rights. After a long struggle General Chawalit's government paid compensation to 1154 families, yet more than 1800 families remain uncompensated.

Please act now to protect the lives of these people and respect their demands. Thank you for your consideration of these important matters.

Yours sincerely