

Report on a trip to Iraq
about the impacts of the Ilisu Dam on Iraq

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On 27th of July 2009 I went to Iraq with Anne Holmes (a freelance photo journalist) to get information about the impacts on the down stream countries due to the Ilisu Dam Project. During our visits to Arbil and Duhok cities, we met the Minister of water resources Tahsin K. Ali, the General Directors of water resources Muhammed Amin Faris and Akram A. Rasul, the Minister of Environment Dara M. Amin Saeed of the Kurdistan Regional Government, Prof Dr. Nazar M. S. Numan of Dahuk University, the Mosul dam Manager Abdulkhaliq Thmoon Ayoub and the representatives of several NGOs. We also gave an interview to a newspaper called Rubarş telling the effects the building of the Ilisu Dam would have within the Turkish Republic.

On the 28th of July 2009, we met the Minister of Water Resources Tahsin K. Ali of the KRG to talk about the impacts of Ilisu dam. As we were informed, according to the 1815 Treaties from Vienna, international law Institute conference in 1911, the Helsinki rules of 1966, the conference of international law on the 21st of May 1997, International Water Laws confirm the necessity of discussion and mutual agreements before construction of dams on international rivers. The minister told us that Turkey did not discuss the subject with the Iraqi government or the KRG. Tahsin Ali said that "According to the constitution of Iraq, the federal government is responsible for protecting our share of the water. The responsibility of the negotiations and the authority of the water belong to Iraqi federal government" However there has been no agreement since the Turkish Government has refused to give an official promise about protecting the share of Iraq on international rivers. After this, the parliament of Iraq pressed the central government to stop dealing with Turkey. Tahsin Ali said that they hope that the Turkish and Iraqi governments will find a democratic solution to this problem and he

stated that if the international laws were implemented a fair solution could easily be found.

To discuss the same issue we met the General Directors of water resources Muhammed Amin Faris and Akram A. Rasul.

Muhammed Amin Faris said "This project will affect all of Iraq and Kurdistan also, but mostly the Middle and South of Iraq, more than 565 thousand hectares will be dry. We already have a drought in all of Iraq, because of the dams built on Euphrates. We have 200 metric cubic per second on Euphrates but Iraq needs more than 500 per second".

In February 2009 there was a meeting between Turkey, Iraq and Syria but the Ilisu Dam was not discussed. The next meeting will be in Baghdad, Ilisu will be included in the agenda of the meeting and will be one of the main points. The Ministry of water resources in Baghdad sent an invitation to Turkey for the meeting in Baghdad at end of July but there is no reply yet.

According to Amin Faris, after the withdrawal of European countries on the 7th July 2009, Turkey will try to get the funds from somewhere else, regardless of the political relations Turkey can have a support from any country because of economical advantages. Amin Faris said "I don't think getting funds will be a problem for Turkey, because Turkey can get the funds from another source. They can get it from the investors, from China, from Israel or America. But because of the environmental aspects of the dam, European countries have to put a pressure on Turkey because Turkey wants to enter the EU."

Turkey has a lot of water due to the dams built on the two main rivers: Tigris and Euphrates. So there is not a lack of water for electricity and for irrigation or for any purpose. But Turkey has security problems and Ilisu dam project also is a security issue. Turkey has to understand that dams cannot be a solution for political questions. In Iraq most of the dam projects were built in Kurdistan for security, to destroy the area and keep distance between the Peshmerga and the surrounding areas, not for the benefit of the area. But it did not work, because Kurdistan region has a federal government.

According to Akram Resul: Ilisu dam will be a disaster not only for Iraq but also for Southeast of Turkey. Due to the resulting shortage of water desertification would take place in more and more places of Iraq. In Iraq the marsh becomes dry already these days. Furthermore agriculture, which is one of the most important economic branches in Iraq, would

also be affected and threatened by this development. From Akram Rasul's point of view there are already many dams of the GAP built, so they don't have a water problem. He states that Turkey doesn't need to build any more dams, that they are building this dam to impound the Kurdish areas and that they think a big amount of Kurdish inhabitants will immigrate to separate areas. In his opinion that's their main goal, and Turkey wants to build Ilisu to always have a card to use on Iraq, maybe also for the PKK issue.

Globally, water supply is, and will be even more so in the following years, one of the most important issues we face. For sure, the Middle East will be a part of it and especially this area will be the affected. Therefore, I agree to the assumption of some of the interviewed persons that Turkey wants to have this tool to put pressure on Iraq when it is useful for other political interests.

The Associations and NGOs we met were also worried about the future of Iraq and told us that they sent a letter to European countries to step out of the project and they will continue to struggle by means of diplomacy with the UN or other organizations, to negotiate with Turkey.

In the meeting with the NGOs such as Green Kurdistan Association, Kurdistan Green Peace, Together to protect Human & Environment association and Water Reservation Association it was decided to organize a conference and invite concerned NGOs from all over Iraq, Syria, Turkey and Europe. The conference is planned to be held at the end of October 2009 in the KRG region.

Another meeting was held with the Minister of Environment, Dara M. Amin Saeed. As far as he informed us, the Kurdish region will be effected less than the rest of Iraq. The Central Government of Iraq is more responsible for this issue, but as KRG they are also against the Ilisu Dam project because Tigris river is the most important water source for Iraq. Mr Saeed said: "Many other Dams have been built on Euphrates River by Turkey till now and there is a shortage of water in this river in Iraq, but because there is not much land available for agriculture along the Euphrates it is not as important as Tigris River. If the water of Tigris is cut, Iraq will be just a desert."

After we finished our meetings in Arbil (Hewlêr) we moved to Duhok to meet managing Director of Irrigation Directorate of Duhok city, Mr Ziyad Saeed. He underlined the importance of the Mosul dam and told us that Mosul dam will be badly effected by the Ilisu Dam. He explained that

Mosul Dam was constructed for multi purposes. First the control of increased water flow during winter and spring. Secondly, it irrigates about 2 million dönüms (about 500,000 hectares of agricultural landscape). And the dam produces about 1 thousand megawatts (MW) of electricity annually. In Duhok and other cities more than 4 million people depend on this water.

We also visited Mosul Dam and made an interview with the manager of the Dam, Abdulkhalik Thamoon Ayoub. Mr Ayoub said that “they respect Turkey’s rights to invest in (their) own country but not on the account of Iraq’s share of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. The capacity of the Ilisu Dam will be huge and for sure this dam will affect the quantity of water (through the planned downstream Cizre dam on the Tigris river) flow which will be a part of Iraq’s share.” Ayoub added that they have “no problem with the Turkish side and Turkey has the right to do what they like but any new project should be negotiated with Iraq’s government.”

Ayoub noted that Tigris within Iraq starts close to the city Zaxo and ends at the Arabian Gulf near Basra. According to him, the whole country needs this water for agriculture and drinking water. **Furthermore he explained that all hydro-power by-products of the Mosul dam are distributed on a national grid to the different regions of Iraq. Therefore, directly or indirectly, people from all over Iraq are profiting from it.**

Ayoub also explained that the water for irrigation downstream of the Mosul dam is coming from the Tigris. Furthermore, all irrigation systems that were planned in Iraq were calculated based on the present inflow of the Tigris. The Ilisu dam project of course would reduce the usual estimated inflow severely, thereby causing problems in the Iraqi irrigation and electricity systems. The Iraqi government will not be able to guarantee any amount of water if they are asked by farmers who want to make their crop plan, because of the inability to predict how much water they will receive if the Turkish government is controlling the flow.

Ayoub also said that Turkey will not use the dam for the production of electricity alone, and added “Anyone at the beginning will say like that, but for sure they will use it for different purposes.” But even if the dam would just be used for the electricity, Turkey will not inform the Iraqi government about using the water for electricity. It will cause chaos in Iraq because they will not have the possibility to make plans for agriculture and irrigation. Also if there is a flood there is no way to plan ahead for the discharged water coming through Iraq.

At the meeting held with Professor Nazar Numan from the University of Duhok, we talked generally about Ilisu dam and its effects. Nazar Numan thinks the effects of Ilisu Dam, are unforeseeable, however, it is certain that it would have quite negative effects on peoples' lives and the environment in general.

"The annual budget of water that comes into Iraq through the Tigris river will be cut into half at least" said Mr Numan. The results would certainly be droughts, increased desertification, economic hardship and the destruction of ecosystems, like the Iraqi Marshes, which are important for migratory birds. "Here is a unique area in the world where the biodiversity is so immense inside the marsh," he said.

According to the professor, the GAP project dams have been the main factor in the end of agriculture along the Euphrates. He reported that in the 1970's there was a flourishing agriculture in middle and south Iraq. However, today the Euphrates in Iraq is almost dry due to the shortage of water caused by several dams in Turkey. "The irrigation projects which were constructed on this river for agriculture can no longer supply water, because of water shortage and definitely a desertification happens in that area. As a result of that, economic hardship started for the farmers and also a very fast migration raised from the rural to urban areas. Sudden expansion of the cities happens because of the difficulties the farmers are facing." The rapid urbanization of Iraq contributes to the development of slums, poor infrastructure and bad sanitary services.

Professor Numan criticizes the Iraqi Central government because, from his point of view, they raise the issue in the media but don't take any measures in their negotiations with Turkey. He mentioned that 70 % of the foreign investment is Turkish, and that this could be an area where Iraq could do pressure Turkey. However, he also mentions that the **Central Iraqi government is so concerned with its own problems, security and terrorism, for example, that they don't focus on the important issue of water**, which, in Prof. Numan's opinion, should be one of the major issues to deal with.

"Constructing a dam can have some positive aspects (for Turkey) because you have a lot of water for irrigation, but you (Turkey) have plenty of water and plenty of energy." Nazar Numan points out that a huge dam like the Ilisu dam also causes a great loss of water due to the evaporation that takes place. He explains that especially in a semi-arid climate such as Turkey's, where the Ilisu basin will be formed, about

300 square kilometers of water-surface will be formed, and billions of cubic meters of water will disappear into the air, and cause increased salinity in the remaining water. "These lakes have very negative environmental aspects. We have to be very careful when we construct a dam because a dam politically is a very big achievement but environmentally it is not always like that. Environmentally it is very bad in some cases. You lose a lot of water by evaporation, you lose a lot of agricultural land, a lot of people leave their areas, and you destroy the ecosystem."

We learned that in the case of Mosul dam, an increase in algae and ferns growing in the water was triggered by and negatively influenced by the production of a large lake behind the dam, impacting the living conditions for several organisms. Additionally, the development of swamps leads to the increased mosquito breeding, which leads to a higher occurrence of tropical diseases.

When we talked about the NGOs in Iraq and their important role in such issues, Professor Numan said: "There are NGOs but their role is very limited really, and we have not come to the level of awareness to realize that NGOs are the fifth authority in a society. We talk about the government branches, which are the legislative, the executive, and the judicial, and then comes journalism. But in my view, now the NGOs are number five in leading society. We need a lot of encouragement and also we need a lot of expertise from outside to help people know how to go about running NGOs."