



International Commission on  
Large Dams



International Commission on  
Irrigation and Drainage

Mr. Jim Yong Kim  
President World Bank Group  
1818 H Street  
Washington DC  
USA

May 14 2014

Dear Mr. Jim Yong Kim,

After the long ‘dam debate’ of the 1990s and the early 2000s, we have had the pleasure of noticing the re-engagement of the World Bank in their support for the development of good projects for Large Water storage and Hydropower infrastructure. This is in order to address the urgent needs for water, energy and food supply, especially in the developing countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America. This progressive re-engagement clearly represents a significant contribution to poverty alleviation and provides the basis for enhanced socio-economic development in these regions. Some of the major Bank-assisted hydro schemes will also play an important role in integrated regional development, and in climate change mitigation.

This re-engagement, which began with the “**Water Resources Sector Strategy**” of 2003, was most recently clearly confirmed by the adoption of the World Bank’s policy document of 2013 entitled “**Toward a sustainable energy future for all: Direction for the World Bank Group’s Energy sector**”. Policies have been put into practice, with increased funding for water infrastructure over the past ten years. An important example is the World Bank support for the Inga 3 project, which will play such a major role for multiple African nations. Since 2007, funds allocated to renewable energy have increased by a factor of 4. Our organizations have greatly appreciated the strong will and engagement of the World Bank.

We particularly appreciate your recent statement: “*We need affordable energy to help end poverty and to build shared prosperity. We will also scale up efforts to improve energy efficiency and increase renewable energy—according to countries’ needs and opportunities*”.

We would like, through this letter, to express our concerns about some recent criticisms of dams for water storage and hydropower, emanating from certain NGOs, sometimes from misinformed decision makers, or expressed in pseudo-scientific papers.

The existing 50 000 large dams, together with one million small dams, are regulating around 4000 km<sup>3</sup> of water, representing 31 per cent of the renewable world water resources. It is well known that regulated water resources are used:

- to produce around 15% of world electricity, representing 80% of renewable electricity, thus providing massive amounts of cheap and clean energy;
- to produce 40% of the world's food using irrigated agriculture for feeding feed around 2.4 billion people;
- to supply water to millions of people, sometimes in very large cities without any other sources of fresh water;
- to ensure better inland navigation and recreational facilities;
- to mitigate the effects of recurrent floods and droughts;
- to restore wetlands for animals, flora and ecological biodiversity, in arid and semi-arid areas;
- and so on.

These infrastructures have proven to contribute to the improvement of people life's conditions the foundation for socio-economic prosperity in many industrialized nations of Europe, Asia, the Americas and Australasia; and today they are closely associated with rapid economic development in the emerging countries.

We consider that the new criticisms and debate relating to dams for water storage and hydropower are counter-productive, as they do not propose any credible or viable alternative for meeting world needs on a realistic scale. If their proposed recommendations are followed, it will result in human disasters in regions such as Africa and Asia. The cost of no action will be very heavy for the populations in these countries, and for the environment.

Vast potential exists, and is largely untapped, on the African continent, which has large river systems and huge arable land resources, which need to be harnessed. Only 8% of African hydropower potential has been developed and 10% of the arable land is under irrigation, and yet, it is on this continent that we find recurrent famines and permanent malnutrition of people, mainly women and children, more than half of the population live in darkness, limited access to education and health, and no job opportunities.


In the first half of this century, as the world's population grows to around 9 billion, global demand for food, feed and fibre will nearly double. If we consider the effects of global change linked to this fast increase in world population and the effects of climate change resulting in recurrent floods and droughts, it is clear that lowering or stopping the construction of water infrastructure for multipurpose uses and hydropower, could result in a global disaster in the near future.

Our organizations would like to express to the World Bank our full support for the development and implementation of well-run projects, to manage world water for the benefit of people, the prosperity of nations and the world.

We encourage and support the World Bank to work with all multilateral and bilateral funds to contribute to speeding up this development. As international professional associations we will continue to provide guidance and state-of-the-art know-how to the profession and decision makers, to ensure that these projects will be safe, economically efficient, environmentally sound and socially equitable.

Yours sincerely,

Adama NOMBRE  
President of ICOLD



Zhanyi GAO  
President of ICID

