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## Human Rights Council

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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

## **Written statement\* submitted by Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association, a non- governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[20 August 2020]

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\* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



## The right to clean drinking water and the impact of megaprojects on the right to water in Egypt

### Preamble

The right to clean and safe drinking water is a key principle of human rights. In light of the global race to use clean and renewable energy sources, all countries seek to achieve the goal of renewable energy self-sufficiency, topped by electrical energy, in addition to increasing their export capacity. But interests often conflict with one other, as is the case in the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), which construction has been announced in early 2011. The construction of the Dam caused sever tension between the two downstream countries (Egypt and the Sudan) and the upstream country (Ethiopia). Since 2011 and until now, the dispute between Egypt and Ethiopia over Egypt's historical share of the Nile water and its right to access clean drinking water, is still unresolved.

### Mega projects and its impact on the right to clean drinking water

The drinking water purification plants in Egypt, dominated by the Holding Company for Drinking Water and Wastewater, rely on three main sources. The first and main source is the surface water coming from the Nile water (about 86%). The second source is the groundwater wells (about 14%). The third source is the seawater desalination that make up a negligible percentage. After purifying the water coming from these sources, the holding company pumps it through networks for consumers who get clean drinking water.<sup>1</sup>

This only happens when Nile water flows naturally, without being blocked by any huge development projects, such as the Renaissance Dam that will affect the Egyptian's share of Nile water, in addition to exacerbating conflicts between upstream and downstream countries.

It is worth noting that Egypt has historical and natural rights to the water of the Nile River that dates back thousands of years, which sits at 55.5 billion cubic meters per year, flowing mainly from the Blue Nile originating from the Ethiopian lands, where the Blue Nile contributes about 80-85% of the water flowing to Egypt.<sup>2</sup> However, Egypt is afraid that filling the dam would cause a drought, as within three years, it will lose between 25 to 33 billion cubic meters annually, and the per capita share of water resources will likely drop to 610 cubic meters. This, in turn, negatively affects the development process in Egypt, especially the sixth goal of the Sustainable Development Goals, calling for "clean water and sanitation for all people." This puts the country below the threshold of water poverty, which according to the World Bank is 1,000 cubic meters of water per person. In the event that the filling period of the dam doubled to six years, this will decrease Egypt's water share by 12 to 17 billion cubic meters.<sup>3</sup>

After ten years of negotiations between the two downstream countries, Egypt and the Sudan, from one hand, and the upper stream country, Ethiopia, from the other hand, nothing has changed, and the construction of the Renaissance Dam continued nonstop. Egypt stood by indifferent to the problem, until late January 2020, when it tried to resolve the matter politically and technically, carrying out tripartite negotiations between the three countries, sponsored by the World Bank and the United States of America (United States). However, all diplomatic attempts at a peaceful solution to the crisis have been fruitless, and Ethiopia rejected draft agreement prepared by the United States and the World Bank on filling the Dam's reservoir.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://bit.ly/348usAL>. كيف يحصل المصريون على كوب مياه نقي؟، تضامن، نوفمبر 2013، على الرابط التالي:

<sup>2</sup> بي سي عربي، سد النهضة: بريطانيا تنبأت قبل 30 عاما بـ "ألا تقبل مصر أن تكون رهينة لسلح المياه الاستراتيجي"، 9 أغسطس 2020، <https://bbc.in/2XKRSbr>، الرابط:

<sup>3</sup> Ahram Online, Water Effects of The Dam, 24 March 2020, link: <https://bit.ly/3ktWpZu>.

<sup>4</sup> سد النهضة: إثيوبيا لن تشارك في الاجتماع القادم في واشنطن ومصر تؤكد حضورها، بي سي عربي، فبراير 2020، على الرابط <https://www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast-51645326>، التالي:

In late June 2020, the Renaissance Dam file witnessed signs of a breakthrough in the crisis. As it was agreed to form a governmental technical committee, consisting from the three countries Egypt, the Sudan and Ethiopia, legal and international parties and the African Union, and also agreed not to take any unilateral measures regarding filling the dam reservoir.<sup>5</sup> However, Ethiopia took a unilateral step to start filling the Renaissance Dam, indicating that Addis Ababa is unwilling to reach a fair agreement between the three countries in this regard.

To conclude, the construction of such water megaprojects must be decided upon the consent of all basin-countries, so that no harm would be caused to any of them, and that they must be built and run according to prior agreements not by imposing the de facto policies that Ethiopia follows, which is stipulated in all international agreements related to international river management.

## Recommendations

Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights recommends the following:

- The Ethiopian government should carefully consider the effects of the Renaissance Dam, which is a flagrant violation of one of the basic human rights principles, which is the right to water in addition to the right to development.
- The Ethiopian government must abide by the outcomes of the negotiations carried out between the relevant countries regarding the Renaissance Dam, to ensure that downstream countries' share of Nile water is not affected.
- The international community must take all necessary measures to guarantee the right of Egypt and the Sudan to access to clean and safe drinking water and ensure the continuation of all their development projects.

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<sup>5</sup> سد النهضة.. تأجيل الملء واتفاق نهائي خلال أسبوعين"، العربية نت، 27 يونيو 2020، على الرابط التالي: <https://ara.tv/pgnca>.