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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 Elizka Relief Foundation, 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.

[30 May 2021]

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



# **The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam & International Solidarity**

## **Preamble**

Elizka Relief Foundation presents its intervention to the attention of the Independent Expert on human rights and international solidarity, to highlight the key general principles of international solidarity and its role in protecting basic human rights, especially the right to development.

The intervention also addresses international solidarity in the Nile Basin region with regard to the current issue of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), and discusses how the concerned countries can benefit from the GERD in realizing the provisions of international solidarity in a way that guarantees equality, development and decent life for all. The intervention concluded with a set of recommendations to be submitted to stakeholders, especially Egypt, Ethiopia and the Sudan, to achieve the desired goals.

## **First: International solidarity and human rights ... two sides of the same coin**

In light of globalization and the interdependence of all parties, international cooperation based on human rights is renewed, that is, those practices jointly carried out by states, institutions and peoples in order to achieve prosperity and equality for all, which requires full concerted efforts for the sake of regional and international interest without regard to solitary gains so that the international system in general is not adversely affected. International cooperation and solidarity reinforce the idea of collective human rights, which includes all individuals and peoples, and ensures the fulfillment of all basic principles of human rights within the framework of adherence to the agreed upon international treaties and covenants. Hence, breaching its basic conditions will negatively affect individuals and peoples.

The African continent, particularly the Nile Basin region, is experiencing a real crisis since 2011 in terms of achieving international solidarity and regional cooperation. This crisis has been brought forth with Ethiopia's announcement of plans to construct the GERD. Yet, achieving solidarity and cooperation became a real challenge, given the different visions and perspectives adopted by each of the three countries, Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia. Presented hereinafter a general background to the crisis and how disregarding the principles of international solidarity may impact human rights in the three countries.

### **A. Background on the crisis**

The dispute over the GERD is part of a long-standing feud between Egypt and Sudan -the downstream states – on the one hand, and Ethiopia and the upstream riparian, on the other. It dates back to the British colonial period in Egypt, during which two agreements were signed to regulate the use of water. These agreements have guaranteed Egypt's water rights estimated at 48 BCM annually, and stipulated a number of provisions for water regulation during the drought period, as well as the right of Egypt and Sudan to object the establishment of any projects or dams on the river.

In 2011, the crisis was renewed again between the three countries, after the federal government of Ethiopia announced its plan to construct the GERD, in disregard of all agreements or the historical water shares for the two downstream countries. Since Ethiopia announced the initiation of building the GERD, the three countries have entered into continuous rounds of negotiations to reach a middle ground to ensure the achievement of Ethiopia's developmental renaissance in a way that does not harm the lives of the Egyptian and Sudanese peoples.

In conclusion, there is no dispute over the right of the Nile Basin countries to the economic and social development that comes from building giant dams within their territories, as long as it doesn't harm the interests of other countries and doesn't threaten the strong relations between countries in order to promote peace, security, development and human rights.

## **Second: The great Ethiopian project and international solidarity in the Nile Valley**

### **A. The Right to Ethiopian Development**

Undoubtedly, the GERD will promote the right to economic development. The hydroelectric dam can provide a reliable source of energy, not only to Ethiopia, but also to neighboring countries. The majority of the Ethiopian population hope that the Dam will generate the energy needed by developmental projects and create job opportunities for millions of poor citizens.

### **B. How can the Ethiopian project affect international solidarity and human rights?**

None can deny the importance of the GERD, but the real disagreement lies in the study of its negative repercussions, especially those related to basic human rights principles and the complementary relations between the three countries. If Ethiopia completed its development project without reaching a legally-binding agreement, it will definitely increase the economic and social disparities between the three countries, exacerbates poverty, hunger and health services, and weaken strong partnerships and institutions in the whole region. Provided hereinafter a set of the challenges posed by the GERD:

#### **1. Food security**

Any decrease to the historical water share of the downstream countries will directly threaten food security for those countries due to the shrinking cultivated areas. In Egypt, large areas of agricultural land, estimated at two million feddans, will be lost, agricultural lands in Upper Egypt will decrease by 29.47%, and the Delta will decrease by 23.03%. Not only the quantity but also the quality of agricultural lands will be affected, as the groundwater level will increase, thus affecting cultivated land and its products.

#### **2. Good health and well-being**

Studies have confirmed that the Ethiopian project will clearly affect public health levels in the two downstream countries. For example, the deposition of silt in Ethiopia behind the dam and the transfer of water to Egypt and Sudan without silt will decrease the fertility and productivity of the soil and convert agriculture into inorganic, depending on harmful pesticides and fertilizers. The GERD will also affect the quality of water in canals and drains due to the lack of washing of the river course resulting from the decrease in the amount of water flowing to it. This will lead to a rampant increase in waterborne diseases such as cholera.

#### **3. The right to clean water**

Despite the importance of the GERD to the Ethiopian economic development, serious human rights concerns are voiced by the two downstream countries, such as the "right to water", meaning the human right to have access to safe drinking water and sanitation, but in theory, the sudden drastic drop in the Nile water supply will be catastrophic. In Sudan, the risks of the second filling of the GERD will affect the amount of water in the Roseires Dam, and thus the volume of water accessed by people.

#### **4. Achieving peace and strong partnerships**

Coinciding with the escalation of the crisis between Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan over the GERD, the term "Blue Peace" appeared to refer to the possibility of utilizing water in promoting peace rather than conflicts, and caution against the risk of slipping into a vicious cycle of wars over basins and waterways. Besides, fueling conflicts between the three countries will deprive them of achieving integration within the framework of strong partnerships based on economic cooperation.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the importance of solidarity and international cooperation based on human rights, especially in light of the development of the situation in the Nile Valley, Elizka Relief

Foundation provides a set of recommendations for stakeholders to achieve the desired goals, which we present as follows:

a. Recommendations to the three African governments

1. The necessity of moving from a situation of potential conflict to cooperation, strengthening the principles of regional integration between the three countries in order to achieve prosperity and development in the region.
  2. Continue the tripartite negotiation process with an emphasis on the necessity of neutralizing all political matters aside, and the need to integrate the strategic, technical and political axes specialized in the talks to ensure the availability of all the required competencies and not to rely on one defective element.
  3. A number of strategic plans can be activated between the three countries to establish economic and investment projects as an alternative to the shortage of historical water shares or hydroelectric power generation. For example, the possibility of connecting the Ethiopian electricity network to the Egyptian and Sudanese electricity grid, as the surplus electricity generated by the GERD can be exported to neighboring countries, especially Egypt and Sudan.
  4. The Nile Basin countries should reinforce the principles of the Nile Basin Initiative, strive to implement its desired goals, and work to resolve the region's disputes in a peaceful, participatory, not divisive, partisan manner. We also recommend the need to amend national and local laws to be in line with international treaties and covenants.
  5. The importance of raising awareness of the principles of cooperation for development and economic integration and using these principles to pressure the governments to change their political agendas regarding dealing with the current crisis.
  6. Supporting mega investment projects to link the economies of the three countries, especially the water and development axes, in order not to prejudice the rights of any of the basic countries and to find alternative solutions in the event that one of them is harmed.
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