

An Appeal to Stop the Destruction of Nubia

By Bruce Williams, presented at the recent meeting of the American Research Center in Egypt

The Nubian people, their land, habitat, and heritage are once again under threat of exile and destruction by the construction of great dams.

As widely documented on the internet, and especially on the site <http://www.internationalrivers.org/en/node/6121>, three dams are now under contract in Sudan and a fourth (Dal) is moving forward. As with the hydroelectric project at Hamdab (Merowe), they are being built by Chinese companies with European advice.

While the original High Dam at Aswan has been touted for its positive economic effects, it created a large diaspora, damaged the environment, not least of Egypt, and had a devastating effect on heritage, both past and present, both in Nubia and Egypt. The Hamdab dam displaced an entire people forcibly (Manasir), with deeply incomplete compensation, and others (Rubatab, Shaikiya of Amri) partly. Now dams at Dal and Kajbar will further drastically reduce the land of the Nubian people to a fraction of what it was half a century ago. Apart from further large-scale damage to the environment, the heritage of the past in these areas will be lost.

Dal threatens Sai Island and Soleb among other sites, Kajbar the immense rock art site of Sabu and the inscriptions of Nauri, for example. To reduce the Middle Nile to a series of lakes is unconscionable, and it is being done without the consent of those the dams would affect most. Some already have died in defense of their homes.

I therefore presented the following resolution to the Board of Governors of the American Research Center in Egypt:

"In view of recent actions by the government of Sudan granting contracts to construct dams at the Fifth Cataract (Shereik), and the Third Cataract (Kajbar) as well as advancing plans to construct a dam at Dal (Second Cataract) the Board of Governors resolves to contact the government of Sudan to ask that it abandon a course of action that will displace many tens of thousands of people, destroy human and wildlife habitat and devastate a significant human heritage."

"The Board of Governors further resolves to contact the European Union to ask that it discourage or restrain European participation in destructive enterprises of this sort."

"The Board of Governors further resolves to offer moral and informational support to responsible organizations actively seeking to avert these disastrous events."

I can understand reluctance by academics to intervene in this matter.

After all, they have little enough influence on events here, in the United States, much less in a country far away. They rightly believe that ethnography and archaeology alone will not halt or delay an ugly project hell-bent on completion. Raising the issues of human rights may indeed carry some influence, and the government of Sudan has backed away from Kajbar before in the face of opposition. Encouraging the people of Nubia may help their resolve in the face of this threat, so it's not all futile. Working together with the Nubian people we may still not win, but if we don't speak out, we will surely lose.

Appeals to organizations are important, as is their action. But citizens alone can also influence events. We can speak out individually by writing our legislators, our president, human rights organizations, and politically active environmental movements.

I close with a statement from the Aswan UNESCO conference.

"Whatever the gains in knowledge made in the great Nubian rescue, the losses were enduring, and largely permanent, and these consequences should surely affect future projects of this kind. In carrying them out you destroy not just the past, but any future a drowned land might have offered. No matter how gently and generously you accomplish a resettlement, you inevitably uproot a people and create a diaspora. You take a living country and make it a desert, with water."

http://www.banktrack.org/show/dodgydeals/kajbar_dam

<http://www.waterpolitics.com/2011/02/05/new-chinese-dam-project-fuels-ethnic-conflict-in-sudan/>

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