

MARCH 14

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF ACTION AGAINST DAMS AND FOR RIVERS, WATER, AND LIFE



Poland, 2001: The Ecological and Cultural Association Klub Gaja took a canoe journey to Nieszawa, the location of a planned dam on the Lower Vistula River (known as 'the Queen'), located in the spiritual heart of Poland. They also conducted a joint press conference with other groups.

The International Day of Action Against Dams and for Rivers, Water, and Life was inspired and mandated by the participants of the 1997 First International Meeting of People Affected by Dams in Curitiba, Brazil. Every year on March 14, people around the world celebrate victories such as dam removal and river restoration, teach others about issues threatening rivers and communities, and demand improvements in policies and practices of decision-makers.

The goals for the Day of Action include:

- building and strengthening networks within the international movement working to protect and restore rivers, and defending the rights of communities that depend on healthy watersheds,
- protesting destructive dam projects and the development model they advance, and
- promoting alternative ways of meeting people's needs for water and energy.

On this day each year, we raise our voices in unison to denounce destructive water development projects, reclaim our rivers and watersheds, and demand the equitable and sustainable management of our waterways. By acting together, we demonstrate that these issues are not merely local, but global in scope.

Every year since the International Day of Action was launched in 1998, groups around the world have mobilized thousands of people to take action and demand justice for their rivers and lives. Events range from children's river-art projects to massive demonstrations, from dam takeovers to workshops and seminars, from letters delivered to decision-makers to ceremonies celebrating healthy rivers. The ways in which people use this day to effect change are as varied as the issues faced by dam-affected people and river defenders on six continents. Here is a sampling of events from recent years:

Brazil **Brazilian Movement of** **Dam-Affected People (MAB)**

The birthplace of the Day of Action Against Dams sets the stage for nationwide mobilizations on and around March 14. Hundreds of farmers, *quilombolas* (descendants of former slaves), and other dam-affected or dam-threatened people march through Brazil's state capitals to seats of government and headquarters of dam promoters to highlight the destructiveness of large dams and demand social justice.

For example, in 2002, MAB led a march of people impacted by Castanhão Dam to the site of the annual meeting of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), which is a major funder of large dams in Latin America. In 2004, they mobilized thousands in partnership with the Landless Movement and progressives in the Catholic church to take over various dams in the region, including Manso Dam in Mato Grosso. One of the 1,200 participants said, "The situation in Manso is of hunger and misery. It has been two years with nowhere to go; affected families are living in a makeshift encampment next to the dam. At the time of the expulsions, the families were removed from their homes and their houses burned down to prevent them from returning." After nearly two decades of taking bold action on March 14, MAB has galvanized the Brazilian people to resist the social, economic and ecological threats posed by large dams.



Lesotho, 2005: The Transformation Resource Centre and community members affected by the multi-dam Lesotho Highlands Water Project and those who will be affected by the Metolong Dam, in an action at the site of the proposed Metolong Dam on the Phuthiatsana River, southeast of the capital city of Maseru. About 2,000 people gathered to sing, dance, and celebrate rivers, water and life – a huge turnout for the small country.



Brazil, 2002: A Brazilian Movement of Dam-Affected People demonstration of *quilombolas* (descendants of ex-slaves) at Votorantim headquarters in São Paulo, in which participants protested plans to build the Tijuco Alto Dam in the Ribeira do Iguape valley in São Paulo state.

Thailand **Assembly of the Poor, Southeast** **Asia Rivers Network (SEARIN)**

In Thailand, villagers and activists use the week of March 14 to worship their sacred rivers and demonstrate against the devastating impacts of large dams on fisheries and livelihoods. Dam-affected villagers hold boat rallies and religious ceremonies, while activists and students in urban areas put on seminars and workshops at universities.

In 2000, hundreds of villagers rallied at Rasi Salai and Pak Mun dams on the Mun River to demand decommissioning of dams that have wrought ecological and social havoc without providing promised benefits. In 2001, in a tremendous victory for citizen action, the gates of both dams were

opened, allowing recovery of local fisheries and restoration of economic viability and health. Local people and their allies are still fighting to make permanent the decision to open the dam gates.

Ao Khuan kuen bpai, ao Dhammachat kuen ma!
Take your dams back, give us nature!

India **Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA)**

In India's Narmada valley, tribals and activists hold festivals, rallies, marches and theatrical productions to resist pro-dam and anti-people policies. The people speak out against unjust, unwarranted and inhuman displacement.

In 1998 thousands of people from 30 villages gathered in the village of Domkhedi, on the banks of Narmada River, while celebrating Holi – the most important tribal festival of song, dance and colors – and burned an effigy of the Sardar Sarovar Dam. This ritual was preceded by a public meeting, and a number of organizations and supporters from various parts of India participated in the celebrations and the program.

Vikas Chaahiye – Vinaash Nahin
We want Development – Not Destruction
Narmada Bachao – Manav Bachao
Save Narmada – Save Human Beings

Nigeria Society for Water & Public Health Protection (SWAPHEP)

In Nigeria, as in many parts of Africa, the Day of Action provides an opportunity to educate the public about the impacts of large dams and the need for development alternatives that better meet the water and energy needs of the majority. Lectures on dams and development draw participants from academia, NGOs, civil society and the government. Questions are raised as to the rationale behind the continued construction of dams across Nigerian watersheds despite the obvious devastating effects dams and dam failures have had on the lives of Nigerians and their environment.

Participants in SWAPHEP's 2002 lecture series questioned government plans to resettle and compensate several thousand victims of flooding from dam failures, and expressed concern over why Nigeria's development partners such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank continue to sponsor dams in Nigeria. They wondered why financial institutions don't provide equivalent support and subsidies to alternative, clean and sustainable sources of energy and water supply.

Slovakia Wolf Forest Protection Association

Activists and friends of WOLF Forest Protection Movement in Slovakia, like other European groups, use humor, visual spectacles and creativity to engage the media and draw attention to serious issues surrounding the impacts of dams in the region. In a 1998 demonstration at the Starina Dam in eastern Slovakia, activists spread a banner with a joke by Slovak caricaturist Fedor Vico on a dike in the presence of journalists and reporters. The banner read, "It's better to have water up to our knees than dams up to our necks" and includes a drawing of a man with water up to his knees, saying "They preach of wine but suck our blood."



US, 2005: CASA - Salvemos Nuestros Pueblos (Comité de Ausentes de San Gaspar en Acción) held a press conference at the Mexican Consulate in San Francisco to voice their opposition to the proposed San Nicolas Dam in Jalisco, Mexico, a project that would have flooded the town of San Gaspar and 42 other communities and displaced over 10,000 people.

The action made the link between the destruction of Slovak forests and unhealthy watersheds. Instead of providing fundamental changes in forest management policy, the Ministry of Land Management in Slovakia intended to solve this situation by building additional expensive dams although their function could be substituted by healthy natural forests.

If there is a fool sitting in the bathtub with holes in it and there is not enough water, he will let more water run, but the wise man will repair the bathtub.

United States Friends of the River (FOR), International Rivers Network (IRN)

International Rivers Network (IRN)

In the US, the Day of Action is an opportunity to express solidarity with struggles around the world, to call for dam removal and river restoration and to celebrate victories over persistent proposals for new dam construction. In 2002 Friends of the River and International Rivers Network celebrated the demise of dams and rebirth of rivers, water and life with a New Orleans-style funeral procession through downtown Auburn, California – location of the long-proposed Auburn Dam. The event publicized a recent decision to close the dam diversion tunnel, another nail into the coffin of the Auburn Dam.



Japan, 2003: The Struggle Committee Against Tokuyama Dam held a rally and protest march in Ogaki City, Gifu Prefecture, Japan. They spoke out against the compulsory land purchases associated with this dam, as well as raising concerns about the Tomada and Kawabegawa dams, which have been strongly opposed for decades.

In 2005, IRN joined FOR and several California Indian tribes, including the Karuk, to call for removal of several dams and restoration of the Klamath River, which would lead to the recovery of salmon runs that are crucial to the tribe's economic, physical and spiritual health. Hundreds of participants in the Sacramento event to "Bring the Salmon

Home" marched to the steps of the state capital and held a rally featuring speakers from the tribes and commercial fishing interests. The Klamath River dams have come up for federal relicensing, which represents a significant opportunity to remove dams and restore the river.



Spain, 2004: Asociacion Rio Aragon (an affinity group of COAGRET-EBRO VIVO), climbed to the summit of Collarada Mountain in the Pyrenees with a banner reading "SOS Pyrenees, Stop Dams" to celebrate the International Day of Action. Overlooking the confluence of the Zaragoza and Ebro rivers, with many participants dressed as zebra mussels, they made a statement in defense of these threatened animals and in honor of rivers, water and life.



Pakistan/UK/US, 2005: Friends of the River Indus (FOTRI) demonstrated in Karachi to protest the Kalabagh Dam and Thal canal in Pakistan. Thousands of people offered prayers for the long life of the Indus River, observed hunger strikes and participated in protest rallies and sit-ins on three continents.

The first international meeting of dam-affected people, organized by a committee including International Rivers Network (IRN), India's Save the Narmada Movement (NBA), Chile's Biobío Action Group (GABB), and European Rivers Network (ERN), was a successful first step in building and strengthening a global network. Representatives from twenty countries including Taiwan, Brazil, Chile, Lesotho, Argentina, Thailand, Russia, France, Switzerland, and the United States decided that the Day of Action would fall on 14 March, Brazil's Day of Action Against Large Dams. At Rivers for Life, the Second International Meeting of Dam-Affected People and their Allies, held in Rasi Salai, Thailand in 2003, participants reaffirmed their commitment to the Day of Action.

Excerpt from the Curitiba Declaration, March 14, 1997:

Our common struggles convince us that it is both necessary and possible to bring an end to the era of destructive dams. It is also both necessary and possible to implement alternative ways of providing energy and managing our freshwaters which are equitable, sustainable and effective.

For this to happen, we demand genuine democracy, which includes public participation and transparency in the development and implementation of energy and water policies, along with the decentralization of political power and empowerment of local communities. We must reduce inequality through measures including equitable access to land. We also insist on the inalienable rights of communities to control and manage their water, land, forests and other resources and the right of every person to a healthy environment.

We are strong, diverse and united and our cause is just.

To reinforce our movement we will build and strengthen regional and international networks. To symbolize our growing unity, we declare that 14 March, the Brazilian Day of Struggles Against Dams, will from now on become the International Day of Action Against Dams and for Rivers, Water, and Life.

¡Agua para la vida, no para la muerte!

Águas para a vida, não para a morte!

Water for life, not for death!

To get involved, get connected or get more information, visit www.irn.org/dayofaction

Or contact:

Day of Action Coordinator
International Rivers Network
1847 Berkeley Way, Berkeley, CA 94703

+1 510-848-1155 (tel) +1 510-848-1008 (fax)

dayofaction@irn.org



International Rivers Network
Linking Human Rights and Environmental Protection

IRN supports local communities working to protect their rivers and watersheds. We work to halt destructive river development projects and to encourage equitable and sustainable methods of meeting needs for water, energy and flood management.