



This submission to the World Commission on Dams
was presented at the Commission's
East / South-East Asia Regional Consultation

Hanoi, Vietnam
26-27 February 2000

Disclaimer - This paper was prepared as a submission to the Fourth Regional Consultation of the World Commission on Dams in Hanoi. The views, conclusions and recommendations are those of the writer and are not intended to represent the views of the Commission or the Government of Vietnam.

The World Commission on Dams
5th floor, Hycastle House
58 Loop Street
PO Box 16002
Vlaeberg
Cape Town
SOUTH AFRICA

Telephone: +27 21 426 4000
Fax: +27 21 426 0036

Website: <http://www.dams.org>

Email: info@dams.org

Ms Reiko Amano

Society against Nagara River Estuary Dam Construction
Dams in Japan with a Special Focus on the Nagara River

Ladies and gentlemen, my name is Reiko Amano. I am the president of the Society Against the Nagara River Estuary Dam Construction. In spite of our desperate activities to save the river, the dam was completed and the operation has begun. However, we will never give up. We are determined to continue our movement to save not only one river but to save all Japanese rivers. Therefore, it is with great pleasure that I am able to report our movement for the World Commission on Dams in Vietnam. Also I would like to express my gratitude to the organizer of this conference.

1. Until 1988, in Japan, anti-dam movements were limited to isolated minor conflicts at local dam construction sites and those movements had never won the case. However, our organization has made our movement an integrated nation wide movement since 1988, starting from a challenge to save the last free-flow river, the " Nagara River ". It has grown to a movement not only to save one beautiful river but to save all Japanese rivers by questioning how Japan, a civil engineering giant has killed rivers, mountains, oceans and exported such technology to other Asian nations since World War Two.

We have learned from the International Rivers Network or NWF in 1994 that The United States has stopped dam construction and we have spread this information nationwide through International Symposiums held by us three times since 1995. One of the speakers for the symposiums was Mr. Daniel Beard who was an active Commissioner of the US Bureau of Reclamation.

In May 1996, we visited the U.S. with Diet members, researchers and the media to study international trends and after that, we tried to make the " Public Works Control Law " to reform public works in Japan. Due to our pressures, the Construction Ministry revised its Rivers Law for the first time in 100 years by adding some expressions like " environmentally important" and " dialogue " and as a result, 17 dam construction projects were canceled and 12 were suspended. Nowadays, the Construction Ministry may look like a newly reformed Ministry, but that is only the surface. We have two major problems going on in Japan concerning the Ministry.

1) The " National Land Transportation Ministry " will be born on January 1st, 2001.

The Construction Ministry which has been killing Japanese rivers by constructing numerous dams is also in charge of constructing roads nationwide. The Transportation Ministry is collaborating on roads planning with the Construction Ministry and National Land Agency, which are responsible for planning water related projects. The Transportation Ministry, the National Land Agency, Hokkaido Development Agency and the Construction Ministry will be integrated into a huge single Ministry named the " National Land Transportation Ministry " . It will be the biggest Ministry in the world with 70,000 officials.

2) The government is planning to start dam construction projects forcibly within fiscal 2000 such as the Yoshino River Estuary Dam, Kawabe River Dam and Tokuyama Dam. When the Ministries cited above are integrated into the " National Land Transportation Ministry ", and if the current Construction Ministry does not have a large budget, they will lose in the power game within the new Ministry. Therefore, they are taking quite strong action against protest movements, which include local people and fishermen unions, at the Yoshino River, Kawabe River and Tokuyama Dam site.

Secondly, I would like to report on the current conditions of the dams in Japan.

As you know, Japan is located in the monsoon climate zone. In the case of the Nagara river, an estuary dam was built on the brackish zone, which is the most important zone for many creatures. Very naturally, we found a lot of influences caused by the dam for the river. There is a great deal of damage to rivers throughout Japan.

* Deterioration of water quality

* Sedimentation in dammed lakes; for example ; the Ohi River

* Damage to rivers, oceans and fishery caused by flash out of sand from dams; for example, the

Kurobe River

Damaged lives of local people around dams

- * Ohi river (Frequent occurrence of flooding due to sedimentation; Decline of fishery due to the disappearing coast)
- * Yoshii river (Oppression to administration at Tomada dam
- * Saru river (Destruction of sacred land life of Ainu people)
- * Nagara river (Destruction of river fishermen's lives)
- * Shimanto river (Decline of river fishery)

3 Large-scale projects which the Construction Ministry is vigorously planning to start

* Yoshino River Estuary Dam

The first -ever people's referendum in Japan concerning dams was carried out on January 23, 2000. The turn out of the voting was 55 % and more than 90 % of the local people showed that they are against the project but the Construction Ministry did not change the plan.

* Kawabe River Dam

Opposition movement against the project has been continuing for as long as 32 years. In fall 2000, people will be forced to move out as the last move. However, fishermen' unions are still taking a position of absolute objection.

* Tokuyama Dam

25 years have passed since the dam issue was raised and people moved out of the region but they are still suffering from bad economic conditions as its aftereffects .

4. Report about Japanese Public Works in general and current power of citizen and opposition parties

- * Submission of the bill of " Public Works Control Law " to the Diet due to our cooperation in March 1997. This bill has not been passed yet.
- * Completion of " The Top 100 Public Works Projects That Should Be Urgently Stopped " in 1997. This list was made mainly by the " 21st Century Environmental Committee " with the cooperation of NGOs all over Japan.
- * Report of the " Preliminary Research " (an agreement of 40 Diet members can order the Diet to research) along with the resubmission of the bill of " Public Works Control Law " by the Democratic Party of Japan (this is planned for the next session of the Diet from January 2000). National Public Works will be investigated for the first time by the Diet. The first sites for the investigation includes 5 dam sites on December 8th, 1999. On January 25th, 2000, thanks to the cooperation of NGOs, the Democratic Party of Japan announced that it would submit the bill of " Public Works Control Law ".

5. Conclusion

Advanced dam countries such as those of Europe or the U.S. which Japan imitated, have reviewed their policies of the 20th century at the end of this century. They are trying to make the 21st century one of " Restoration ". In such a world trend, only Japan is moving in the reverse.

That is the dam builder's idea, which is exporting dam building to Asian countries, of course without stopping dam building in Japan. On the otherhand, European countries or America, who spread modern river engineering to the world have already reviewed their past ideas using concrete and huge dams, and are applying the water shed management policy.

I believe that this watershed management policy is the very traditional river policy which Japan had applied and established until the the end of the 19th century. That is, " We do not fight the rivers, we let the flood water go." This is the wisdom for us to be loved by the rivers.

I would like you to advise the Japanese government to revive our old people's wisdom and to be the leader of this watershed management policy in the world. Also I would like you to cooperate to save the Nagara River as the symbol of such an effort.

Thank you,