

On the sidelines of Maat's Participation in the High-Level Political Forum 2021 and the 47th sessions in the Human Rights Council

# The Effects of the Unilateral Filling of the Renaissance Dam on the Nile Basin Countries

July 2021



# **Study on**

## **The Effects of the Unilateral Filling of the Renaissance Dam on the Nile**

### **Basin Countries**

**The Executive Summary of the Study**

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## **Introduction:**

The human right to safe drinking water is derived from the right to an adequate standard of living, and is closely linked to the right to life and human dignity. Water is a double-edged weapon; it is the lifeline and the primary source of prosperity; however, it can become a source of fears and disputes. International rivers from the one hand, can bring countries together, bridge the gap between them and promote mutual benefits. However, on the other hand, they can trigger conflicts and disputes that may amount to war.

Over the last years, a major crisis has emerged between Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia, after the latter declared the construction of a mega project on the Blue Nile known as the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). The GERD raises numerous fears and concerns among the downstream countries and the operation thereof will have direct repercussions on the interests of Egypt and Sudan. Ethiopia decided to act out of self-interest, without taking into account the rights of the two downstream countries. Over than one decade has passed since the three countries sat at the negotiating table trying to reach a legally binding agreement that recognizes Ethiopia's rights to development and guarantees the protection of the two downstream countries from the dangers of building the dam; however, the absence of Ethiopia's political will and the non-compliance with international laws prevented reaching an agreement till now.

Recognizing the gravity of the crisis, which represents an existential threat to about 150 million Egyptian and Sudanese, the two downstream countries were forced to seek the immediate intervention of the UN Security Council to protect the international security and

peace, oblige Ethiopia to adhere to the agreed-upon principles and bring it back to the negotiating table so that they can reach a legally binding agreement and stop the unilateral policies and actions that jeopardize the safety and rights of Egypt and Sudan.

The GERD will undoubtedly offer great benefits to Ethiopia. However, the technical specifications of the dam and its storage capacity are likely to cause drastic changes in the current climatic, environmental, and biological systems, such as the high evaporation rates, the lack of oxygen, the change in the chemical composition of water, the loss of fisheries and livestock wealth, and the increased water pollution and its low quality. The dam will also take a devastating toll on the economy of Sudan and Egypt, especially the agricultural sector and thus increase the unemployment rates, in violation of international human rights charters and in a way that obstructs the achievement of the SDGs.

The studies have shown that the failure to reach a satisfactory agreement between the three countries will entail various risks on social, political, economic, environmental and security aspects. Moreover, the severe repercussions of these risks will be felt not only by the people of the two downstream countries, but the whole African continent, posing serious threats to the international security and stability.

In this context, the study at hand highlights the several risks that may arise from the filling and operation of the GERD, in the absence of a legally binding agreement. These risks are summarized into five points: 1) the impact on agriculture; 2) forced displacement of population; 3) environmental impact; 4) economic and social risks; 5)



fears of dam collapse. This study is based on the legal foundations and international charters that protects human rights, as well as the legal agreements signed between the three Nile Basin countries and the expected impact on the SDGs.

The study suggested several future scenarios for the crisis, which, at best, Ethiopia's peaceful return to the negotiating table and reaching a legally binding and satisfactory agreement on the GERD crisis that allows Ethiopia to pursue its developmental goals as long as it doesn't jeopardize the interests of the two downstream countries, and, at worst, Ethiopia continue the unilateral filling and operation heedless of the serious damages caused to the interests of the two downstream countries which response will threaten the international security and peace.

**In light of the above, Maat calls for the following:**

- The Ethiopian government should stop the unilateral second filling of the GERD, until reaching a just and legally binding agreement that preserves the rights of the three countries in a manner that does not obstruct their development goals.
- The international community should acknowledge the gravity of the current crisis and its existential threat to about 150 million Egyptian and Sudanese, and try by all possible means to pressure the three countries to return to negotiations and reach a binding agreement that considers the interests of the three countries.
- The international community should support the development efforts in Africa that seek to find alternative clean sources of energy such as solar and wind energy, instead of using rivers which con outweighs the pros.

- The countries and companies responsible for building the Ethiopian dam must assume their responsibility for the potential damages to Egypt and Sudan, and recognize their involvement in the repercussions of the crisis.
- Civil society organizations worldwide should play a greater role and pressure by all possible means to bring the three countries back to the negotiating table and urge them to reach a legally binding agreement that recognizes the interests of the three countries and protects them from the scourge of wars.
- The UN Security Council should fulfill its obligation in protecting international peace and security, force Ethiopia to stop taking unilateral actions, and pressure it to return to the negotiating table according to legal bases that guarantee Ethiopia's right to development and protect Egypt and Sudan's water shares.