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September 21, 2021

To:

- Alok Sharma, the 2021 President of the UNFCCC Conference of the Parties
- Parties to the UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (COP-26)

A Declaration: Climate mitigation efforts must reject so-called “sustainable hydropower” as a solution to combat climate change

On behalf of 300 organizations from 69 countries, representing civil society, peoples movements, Indigenous Peoples organizations, scientists, conservationists, we call upon Alok Sharma, the 2021 President of the UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (COP-26), and all parties to COP-26, to reject attempts by the hydropower industry to secure scarce climate funds to finance a new wave of hydropower projects. Funding hydroelectric power construction would not only fail to prevent catastrophic climate change, it would also worsen the climate crisis by exploding methane emissions and diverting scarce climate funds away from meaningful energy and water solutions in a world that is already grappling with severe impacts of climate change.

We call instead for just and sustainable solutions to the climate and biodiversity crises that recognize and support the role of natural systems and free-flowing rivers in promoting climate resiliency and mitigation and center the invaluable role of Indigenous Peoples and traditional communities on the frontlines of these crises.

We are facing an unprecedented threat posed by the global climate crisis. In August 2021, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warned that we are already experiencing severe climate impacts in every region of the globe and we are

likely too late to hold maximum global temperature increase to 1.5°C, as called for in the 2015 Paris Accords. The report detailed, however, the imperative of reducing greenhouse gas emissions to bring down global temperatures in order to stave off worsening and irreversible impacts. The report further called for curbing methane emission as among the most immediate, effective and practical steps to quickly reduce temperatures in the coming decades.

Meanwhile, at the upcoming Convention on Biological Diversity COP in Kunming, China, the parties will discuss how to respond to the dramatic and precipitous biodiversity loss and the acute threat of ecosystem collapse that could dwarf the loss of biological diversity experienced to date.

At the same time, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic speaks to the need to protect ecosystems and river-based food systems while challenging us to avoid the same mistakes in the economic recovery that led us to these simultaneous crises. We must heed this moment and use it as an overdue opportunity to build resilience in our communities and in the natural world.

Unfortunately, this is happening against a backdrop where the hydropower industry is gearing up for a massive greenwashing effort to present its destructive product – which has been shown time and again to destroy ecosystems and communities – as the pathway out of our predicaments. The industry is enlisting national governments and global organizations in its efforts to resuscitate the waning hydropower sector plagued by unfavorable economics, declining opportunities, community opposition, aging infrastructure, and climate vulnerability. This industry has already shown its deadly impact, creating decades of impoverishment in riparian communities, particularly for Indigenous Peoples whom we know to be the best guardians of natural resources, and precipitating the rapid decline in freshwater biodiversity.

We expect this industry to make polished appeals under the guise of sustainability – a goal upon which they have consistently failed to deliver – but this time with an apparent acknowledgment of the harms they have caused in the past. We ask that you view these overtures with healthy skepticism. It is of grave concern that this industry, which has caused so much harm, including extinctions, endangerment, violence, forced displacement, and impoverishment, is now positioning itself as a climate savior, in order to lobby for climate funds to bankroll a new wave of hydropower expansion. This is the definition of business as usual, and is the very thing we must escape to make true progress on addressing the climate crisis.

We base our call on the following:

Free-flowing rivers and natural lakes have immense value for the welfare of the ecosystems they sustain, humankind, and survival on the planet. Rivers can also play a central, often spiritual and cultural role for many Indigenous riparian communities. These life-giving systems are being destroyed by growing pressure from a variety of sources, chief among them hydropower dams. Urgent removal of these pressures is necessary to protect the immense benefits these waterways provide.

Rivers play a vital role in sequestering carbon and building climate resiliency, yet hydropower dams prevent rivers from serving these critical functions. Rivers help regulate an increasingly volatile global carbon cycle by drawing an estimated [200 million tons of carbon](#) out of the air each year. Dams, however, block the natural carbon sequestrations cycle of watersheds. Healthy rivers and their catchments are also critical to building climate resilience by reducing the impacts of floods and droughts, recharging groundwater supplies, sustaining fisheries, maintaining local ecosystems, and transporting sediment and nutrients downstream. Dams interrupt these processes, prompting erosion and coastal flooding, further reducing ecosystem resiliency, undermining food security for people, causing population displacement, and risking conflict with downstream neighbors.

Hydropower dams are vulnerable to climate change and will be further impacted by changing hydrology. Our climate and hydrological cycles are changing, but hydropower dams are particularly ill-suited to adapt to these changes. Unprecedented floods exacerbated by climate change are already threatening the safety of dams around the world, with more extreme weather events elevating the risk of catastrophic dam collapse. Meanwhile, increasing and prolonged droughts are causing dam reservoirs to run dry, with hydropower-dependent energy systems facing extended power disruptions that have entailed significant knock-on economic impacts. These trends are predicted to only worsen in coming decades.

Adding more dams will exacerbate methane emissions at precisely the time IPCC warns they must be dramatically reduced. Hydropower reservoirs are a significant contributor to the climate crisis, primarily through emitting vast quantities of methane, a greenhouse gas 86 times more potent in the near term than carbon dioxide. Despite efforts by the hydropower industry to obscure the GHG footprint of dams, dam reservoirs are estimated to [emit 1 billion tons](#) of greenhouse gases per year, and scientists have found in some cases that dam reservoirs can emit [more greenhouse gases than coal-fired power plants](#). Methane emissions from dams are typically much higher in the first years of operation, and thus new dams would contribute to a spike in

emissions at the precise moment the IPCC urgently warns that we must drastically cut methane emissions to prevent the worst impacts of climate change.

Expanding hydropower is incompatible with efforts to address the looming biodiversity crisis. While they account for less than 1% of the Earth's surface, freshwater ecosystems are [home to more than 10% of all species](#). There is growing recognition of the immense benefits that freshwater ecosystems provide, as well as growing urgency to address the considerable threats that they face. Hydropower dams are a key culprit in the rapid [84% decline](#) in the populations of freshwater species experienced since 1970. Meanwhile, a recent study found that over [500 dams are currently under construction or planned](#) within protected areas such as national parks, UNESCO World Heritage sites, and wildlife reserves that include nearly half of the world's Key Biodiversity Areas. An expansion of hydropower would further jeopardize efforts to address the biodiversity crisis, including through the Convention on Biological Diversity.

The construction of hydropower dams routinely violates the human rights of impacted communities, particularly Indigenous Peoples. The hydropower industry has a long history of human rights violations, with many companies and financiers never held to account. Over 20 years ago, the [World Commission on Dams](#) (WCD) estimated that dams had displaced up to 80 million people, and that number is likely significantly higher today. Dams have also negatively [affected an estimated 472 million people](#) living downstream. Dams have particularly impacted Indigenous Peoples, violating their rights to lands, territories, resources, governance, cultural integrity and free, prior and informed consent. These impacts persist today despite the efforts of the hydropower industry to promote its own brand of "sustainability tools" to divert attention from its poor track record.

Climate finance has the potential to play a critical role in ensuring positive outcomes for rivers and for energy access. It should prioritize projects that restore and promote the health of riverine ecosystems and communities. This could include: protecting threatened freshwater resources; restoring flows that facilitate reconnection of fragmented ecosystems; ensuring cultural and environmental flows determined in consultation with affected peoples; and promoting river restoration efforts such as the decommissioning of obsolete dams. Meanwhile, better energy options exist that obviate the need for new hydropower. In most instances, these options cost less, are more equitable, can be developed more sustainably, come to market faster, and be deployed more quickly to displace fossil fuels.

In recognition of the foregoing, we the undersigned call for:

- A prohibition of funds committed under the Paris Agreement for the construction of new hydropower dams.
- Countries to remove new hydropower dams from their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).
- A just and sustainable energy transition and economic recovery that centers people and ecosystems.
- Investment to rapidly upscale truly renewable energy sources capable of delivering needed energy access while transitioning away from destructive fossil fuels and hydroelectric dams.
- Removal of destructive and obsolete dams that inhibit ecosystem processes (including carbon sequestration), providing additional benefits of spurring resilience and food security.
- Upgrading or refurbishing existing dams where economically feasible, not disruptive to ecosystems and river communities, and free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous Peoples has been granted.
- Enhanced energy conservation and efficiency measures, along with upgrades to electrical grids to lessen the demand for energy.
- Permanent protections that prohibit dam construction on free-flowing rivers and most vital freshwater ecosystems.

Signed,

1. Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP)
2. Burma River Network
3. Coalition des OSC pour le Suivi des Reformes et de l'Action Publique (CORAP), Democratic Republic of Congo
4. Comunidades SETAA/Movimiento Ríos Vivos, Colombia
5. Ecosistemas, Chile
6. Earth Thrive
7. Fundacion Yumana, Colombia
8. Indigenous Peoples Rights International (IPRI)
9. Indigenous Peoples Major Group (IPMG)
10. Interamerican Association for Environmental Defense (AIDA)
11. International Rivers
12. Justiça Ambiental, Mozambique
13. Karen Environmental Social Action Network (KESAN), Myanmar
14. Karen Rivers Watch, Myanmar
15. Ríos to Rivers, USA

16. Rivers without Boundaries International Coalition
17. Save the Mekong Coalition
18. Save the Salween Network, Myanmar
19. Save the Tigris
20. South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People (SANDRP)
21. Waterkeeper Alliance, USA
22. Grupo Ecologista Cuña Pirú, Argentina
23. Río Santa Cruz Sin Represas, Argentina
24. Tierra Nativa / Amigos de la Tierra Argentina
25. "EcoLur" Informational NGO, Armenia
26. ALERT, Australia
27. Colong Foundation for Wilderness, Australia
28. Port Phillip EcoCentre / Port Phillip Baykeeper, Australia
29. Scientists4Mekong, Australia
30. Free Rivers Fund, Austria
31. WET - Wildwasser Erhalten Tirol, Austria
32. Riverwatch, Austria
33. Waterkeepers Bahamas, Bahamas
34. Bangladesh Working Group on External Debt (BWGED), Bangladesh
35. CLEAN (Coastal Livelihood and Environmental Action Network), Bangladesh
36. Reach to Unreached (RUN), Bangladesh
37. Tista River Save Committee, Bangladesh
38. Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon (BAPA)
39. Waterkeepers Bangladesh
40. Mogilev environmental public association "ENDO", Belarus
41. Nerush, Belarus
42. Public Association 'Ecohome', Belarus
43. ONG PADJENA, Benin
44. Centar za životnu sredinu, Bosnia and Herzegovina
45. Amigos da Terra Brasil
46. APREC Ecosistemas Costeiros (Guanabara Baykeeper), Brazil
47. Associação Adianto de Promoção Social, Brazil
48. Associação de Favelas de São José dos Campos, Brazil
49. Coalizão pela Proteção Permanente dos Rios, Brazil
50. Coordenação Nacional de Articulação das Comunidades Negras Rurais Quilombolas - CONAQ, Brazil
51. Ecoa, Brazil
52. Fórum Nacional da Sociedade Civil nos Comitês de Bacias Hidrográficas - FONASC-CBH, Brazil
53. Instituto de Estudos Socioeconômicos - INESC, Brazil

54. Instituto Gaia, Brazil
55. Instituto Madeira Vivo - IMV, Brazil
56. Instituto OCA-SOL, Brazil
57. Movimento de Defesa de Porto Seguro, Brazil
58. Movimento Tapajós Vivo - MTV, Brazil
59. Observatório de Gestão das Águas - OGA, Brazil
60. Observatório Nacional de Justiça Socioambiental Luciano Mendes de Almeida - OLMA, Brazil
61. Operação Amazônia Nativa (OPAN), Brazil
62. Pastoral da Ecologia Integral, Brazil
63. Rede Pantanal, Brazil
64. SOS Restinga do Barreto, Brazil
65. SOS Rio Macaé, Brazil
66. Vicariato Litoral/Diocese de Nova Friburgo, Brazil
67. Balkani Wildlife Society, Bulgaria
68. Balkanka Association Sofia, Bulgaria
69. 3S Rivers Protection Network (3SPN), Cambodia
70. Action for Development, Cambodia
71. Cambodia Indigenous Peoples Organization
72. Cambodian Volunteers for Society (CVS)
73. Culture and Environment Preservation Association (CEPA), Cambodia
74. Equitable Cambodia
75. FACT Cambodia
76. Forests and Livelihood Organization, Cambodia
77. NGO Forum on Cambodia
78. Tekdeysovanphum (TDSP), Cambodia
79. Réseau Camerounais des Organisations des Droits de l'Homme (RECODH), Cameroon
80. Comité pour les droits humains en Amérique latine (CDHAL), Canada
81. Commons BC, Canada
82. Dam Watch International, Canada
83. Fundy Baykeeper, Conservation Council of New Brunswick, Canada
84. Grand Riverkeeper Labrador, Canada
85. Interchurch Council on Hydropower, Canada
86. International Observatory on Nature Rights, Canada
87. Peace Valley Environment Association, Canada
88. Peace Valley Landowner Association, Canada
89. RAVEN (Respecting Aboriginal Values and Environmental Needs), Canada
90. Responsible Hydro Campaign - Manitoba Energy Justice Coalition, Canada
91. Rolling Justice Bus, Canada

92. Wa Ni Ska Tan Alliance of Hydro-Impacted Communities, Canada
93. Chile Sustentable
94. Ecosistemas, Chile
95. Futaleufú Riverkeeper, Patagonia Chilena, Chile
96. Malen Leubü, Chile
97. No Más Represas, Chile
98. Red por la defensa del río queuco, Chile
99. Ríos To Rivers Chile
100. Bocas de Ceniza Waterkeeper, Colombia
101. Asociación PROAL-PACUARE, Costa Rica
102. Bloque Verde, Costa Rica
103. COECOceiba Amigos de la Tierra Costa Rica
104. Federación Ecologista, Costa Rica
105. Organización Montaña Verde, Costa Rica
106. NGO 350 Cote d'Ivoire
107. Zelena akcija / Friends of the Earth Croatia
108. CEE Bankwatch Network, Czech Republic
109. 100%Jeune asbl, Democratic Republic of Congo
110. A Nous l'Avenir, Democratic Republic of Congo
111. ACEDH, Democratic Republic of Congo
112. CENADEP, Democratic Republic of Congo
113. Initiative pour le Developpement Local, Democratic Republic of Congo
114. Justice Pour Tous, Democratic Republic of Congo
115. Just Finance International, Denmark
116. Centro de Documentación en Derechos Humanos “Segundo Montes Mozo S.J.” (CSMM), Ecuador
117. Igapo Project, France
118. Planète Amazon, France
119. Rivieres Sauvages, France
120. SOS Durance Vivante, France
121. Maiouri Nature Guyane, French Guyana / France
122. Green Alternative, Georgia
123. GegenStroemung – CounterCurrent / INFOE e. V., Germany
124. Informationsstelle Peru e.V., Germany
125. Urgewald, Germany
126. World Heritage Watch, Germany
127. Alliance for Empowering Rural Communities, Ghana
128. Mediterranean Institute for Nature and Anthropos, Greece
129. Association For Promotion Sustainable Development, India
130. Bangalore Environment Trust, India

131. Bargi Bandh Visthapit Evam Parbhavit Sangh, India
132. Chalakudypuzha Samrakshana Samithi, India
133. Earthcare Books, India
134. East Kali River Waterkeeper, India
135. Environment Support Group, India
136. Forum for Policy Dialogue on Water Conflicts in India
137. Gene Campaign, India
138. Gomti River Waterkeeper, The Society of Earth Scientists, India
139. Growthwatch, India
140. Himdhara Collective, India
141. Human Rights Forum, India
142. Let India Breathe
143. Movement for Advancing Understanding on Sustainability And Mutuality (MAUSAM), India
144. People for Environment and Nature, India
145. Punarbharan Foundation, India
146. River Research Centre, India
147. Scientists for People, India
148. South Asia Peace Alliance (SAPA), India
149. Veditum India Foundation
150. Yamuna Jiye Abhiyaan, India
151. Centre for Research and Advocacy, Manipur, India
152. Hindon River Waterkeeper, India
153. Save the Narmada Movement, India
154. South Asia Citizens Web, India / South Asia
155. debtWATCH Indonesia
156. KRuHA (Koalisi Rakyat untuk Hak atas Air/people's coalition for the right to water), Indonesia
157. TREND ASIA, Indonesia
158. WALHI West Java / Friends of The Earth Indonesia
159. Yayasan HAKA, Indonesia
160. Iraqi Social Forum
161. Shakoufyan Organization for Development and Culture, Iraq
162. Water Democracy Movement Ireland
163. Comitato AVB, Italy
164. Comitato di difesa del Sesia e dei suoi affluenti, Italy
165. Comitato NoTube Piacenza, Italy
166. Comitato Rispetto per l'Artogna e i prati di Campertogno, Italy
167. Free Rivers Italia - Coordinamento Nazionale Tutela Fiumi, Italy
168. Legambiente Piacenza circolo Emilio Politi, Italy

169. Friends of the Earth Japan
170. BCSD Kazakhstan
171. Green Central Asia, Kazakhstan
172. PA ECOM, Kazakhstan
173. 350Africa.org, Kenya
174. Friends of Lake Turkana, Kenya
175. Jamaa Resource Initiatives, Kenya
176. TINADA Youth Organization (TiYO), Kenya
177. Ecofinder Kenya
178. Conservación Humana AC, Mexico
179. Fundacion Arcoiris por el respeto a la diversidad sexual, Mexico
180. PFEA/Tijuana Waterkeeper, Mexico
181. NGO "Terra-1530", Moldova
182. NGO FAaN, Moldova
183. Oyu Tolgoi Watch, Mongolia
184. Rivers without Boundaries Mongolia
185. Community Empowerment and Social Justice Network (CEMSOJ), Nepal
186. Both ENDS, Netherlands
187. Milieudefensie, Netherlands
188. Recourse, Netherlands
189. Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth Nigeria
190. Greenleaf Advocacy and Empowerment Center, Nigeria
191. Rainbow Watch and Development Centre, Nigeria
192. Environmental Citizens' Association "Front 21/42", North Macedonia
193. Arctic Consult, Norway
194. Conservamos por Naturaleza, Peru
195. CooperAcción, Peru
196. Derecho, Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (DAR), Peru
197. Forum Solidaridad Perú
198. Marañón Waterkeeper, Peru
199. Alyansa Tigil Mina, Philippines
200. Community Organizers Multiversity, Philippines
201. Legal Rights and Natural Resources Center (LRC) - Friends of the Earth Philippines
202. Observatório Ibérico Energia, Portugal & Spain
203. Ecological Association Rzav, Republic of Serbia
204. Amur ecological club "Ulukitkan", Russia
205. Biodiversity Conservation Center, Russia
206. Bureau for Regional Outreach Campaigns, Russia
207. Center for Support of Indigenous Peoples of the North, Russia

208. Ecological center DRONT, Russia
209. Friends of the Baltic, Russia
210. Fund Obvinskaya Roza, Russia
211. NGO "Kola Biodiversity Conservation Center", Russia
212. Organizing Committee of the Russian Party for the Protection of Animals, Russia
213. Plotina.Net, Russia
214. Russian Social Ecological Union
215. Socio-Ecological Union International, Russia
216. Steppe Wetland Patrol, Russia
217. АНО "Западный Кавказ", Russia
218. Возрождение Казаса и шорского народа, Russia
219. Зеленый Дон, Russia
220. Региональная общественная организация "Ассоциация коренных малочисленных народов Севера Хабаровского края", Russia
221. Фонд саамского наследия и развития, Russia
222. Хакасский общественный экологический фонд "Ирис", Russia
223. Bargny Coast Waterkeeper, Senegal
224. Network Movement for Justice and Development, Sierra Leone
225. groundWork, South Africa
226. SAFCEI, South Africa
227. WoMin African Alliance, South Africa
228. Extinction Rebellion (XR) Nelson Mandela Bay (NMB), South Africa
229. South Durban Community Environmental Alliance, South Africa
230. Coagret, Spain
231. Centre for Environmental Justice (CEJ), Sri Lanka
232. Älvräddarnas Samorganisation/Älvräddarnas Waterkeepers, Sweden
233. Pro Natura / Friends of the Earth Switzerland
234. Tajik Social and Ecological Union, Tajikistan
235. Nipe Fagio, Tanzania
236. ChiangKhong Conservation Group, Thailand
237. Community Resource Center, Thailand
238. ENLAWTHAI Foundation-Enlaw, Thailand
239. Healthy Public Policy Foundation, Thailand
240. Human Rights and Environment Association, Thailand
241. Mekong Community Institute Association, Thailand
242. Northeast Community Network in 7 Provinces of Mekong River Basin (ComNetMekong), Thailand
243. Thai Mekong People Network in 8 Province, Thailand
244. Thai Water Partnership Foundation, Thailand

245. The Mekong Butterfly, Thailand
246. Yoto River Waterkeeper, Togo
247. Centre for Citizens Conserving Environment And Management (CECIC),
Uganda
248. Friends with Environment in Development, Uganda
249. London Waterkeeper, United Kingdom
250. Save Our Rivers, United Kingdom
251. The Corner House, United Kingdom
252. 2018 Baikal Headwaters Expedition, USA
253. Bank Information Center, USA
254. Choctawhatchee Riverkeeper, USA
255. Congaree Riverkeeper, USA
256. Crude Accountability, USA
257. Earth Law Center, USA
258. Friends of the Earth U.S.
259. Friends of the Santa Cruz River, USA
260. Gender Action, USA
261. Good Stewards of Rockingham, USA
262. Grand Riverkeeper, Oklahoma, USA
263. Green Riverkeeper, USA
264. Hudson Riverkeeper, USA
265. Hurricane Creekkeeper, USA
266. Living Rivers & Colorado Riverkeeper, USA
267. Lower Susquehanna Riverkeeper Association, USA
268. Milwaukee Riverkeeper, USA
269. Missouri Confluence Waterkeeper, USA
270. North Sound Baykeeper, USA
271. Peconic Baykeeper, USA
272. Poudre Waterkeeper, USA
273. Raritan Riverkeeper, USA
274. Rio Grande Waterkeeper, USA
275. Satilla Riverkeeper, USA
276. Save the Bay, USA
277. Save The Colorado, USA
278. Save The World's Rivers, USA
279. Suncoast Waterkeeper, USA
280. The Oakland Institute, USA
281. Three Rivers Waterkeeper, USA
282. Tree of Light, USA
283. Twin Harbors Waterkeeper, USA

284. Water Climate Trust, USA
285. Water-Unite, USA
286. Waterkeepers Chesapeake, USA
287. Watershed Poetry Mendocino, USA
288. North American Megadam Resistance Alliance, USA & Canada
289. Batani Foundation, USA & Russia
290. Centre for Social Research and Development, Vietnam
291. People and Nature Reconciliation (PanNature), Vietnam
292. Vietnam River Network
293. Action for Nature, Zambia
294. Centre for Alternative Development, Zimbabwe
295. EuroNatur Foundation
296. Global Alliance for a World Water Law
297. Green Silk Road Initiative
298. International Accountability Project
299. International Rafting Federation
300. NGO Forum on ADB