

Save the Tigris



www.savethetigris.org

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Revision 12 April 2022

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I. Mission

We are a civil society advocacy platform aiming to promote water justice in the Mesopotamian basin. Save the Tigris seeks to link groups and movements from Iraq, Turkey, Syria and Iran concerned with the protection of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. Our platform provides international solidarity and supports the exchange of knowledge. We advocate for policies that secure ecological justice including the equitable and democratic use of water for all who live in the Mesopotamian region, promoting water as a tool for peace.

II. Origins

Save the Tigris started as a civil society initiative in March 2012 by a coalition of Mesopotamian and international social and environmental activists to save the natural and cultural heritage on the Tigris River from the impacts of dams and other destructive megaprojects.

In recent times, the water resources of Mesopotamia have been weaponised and the rivers of Mesopotamia have become strategic assets over which states and other actors assert hegemony. Megaprojects have continued to receive strong support in the region without any assessment on their impact. The Turkish government is constructing a number of large dams on the Tigris River without any consultation with the Iraqi government and local communities. Iran is building number of dams and implementing water-transfer projects on rivers that are tributaries of the Tigris River. The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and central government of Iraq continue to build dams with no effective studies on their impacts.

Water infrastructure has been used for political and military purposes in conflicts. The use of water resources needs to respect the well-established international norms on uses of international watercourses, specifically the principles of equitable and reasonable utilization; participation; and the obligation not to cause significant harm to those who depends upon the water. Additionally the water resources of the Mesopotamia have been degraded by pollution, drought and climate change. For decades, water politics in the region has been based on over-exploitation, extraction and competition over resources without acknowledgment of access to water as a human right.

Save the Tigris believes a paradigm shift is necessary: instead of being a source of rivalry, water should be a force for peace and cooperation between all the countries and peoples of the Tigris-Euphrates basin. We advocate for safe access to water for all the people of the Mesopotamian region, and policies that secure the sustainable and equitable use of water for all those who live in Mesopotamia and for the coming generations. Our advocacy and awareness activities involve all relevant actors: local communities, civil society organizations, media, authorities, academics, research centres and others.

III. Challenges and our position

1. Denial of right to water (Privatisation of water)/Undemocratic decision-making / Consultation / Participation

1.1 The privatisation of water resources is being promoted all over the world by governments and policy makers, with the private sector becoming responsible for managing water resources, water provision, and water infrastructure. As a result of privatisation, the cost of water is increasing and the quality of water is declining, entrenching social injustices and breeding resentment among water users.

1.2 Access to water as a human right is under threat. The Mesopotamian region, traversed by the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers, is one example of an area where people face problems accessing clean and sufficient water. One of its main causes is the lack of transparency and the exclusion of key stakeholders from decision-making processes. Often communities are not taken into account by policy-makers.

Our position: Save the Tigris believes that rivers and watercourses are a shared resource and both government and citizens need to respect access to affordable drinking water for all. We believe sustainable and equitable use of water should be possible for all people living in the Tigris-Euphrates basin. All relevant actors, which include activists, civil society organizations, social movements, local communities, academics/researchers, municipalities and regional administrations should come together to decide on a better sustainable approach to water sharing.

2. The use of watercourses and water-related infrastructure as a weapon and a tool for political hegemony

2.1 Mega projects are a threat as rivers of Mesopotamia are being increasingly weaponised. Meanwhile, the political and security crisis in Syria and instability in the Mesopotamian region has caused issues related to access to water, pollution and water quality to be pushed to the margins of political discourse, without any clear water policies. Water infrastructure is exposed to armed threats and water is deliberately used by military forces as a tool for political control. Water security is increasingly a problem for the communities living along the rivers; internal and regional conflicts related to water are becoming a reality. The right of free access to water is under threat.

Our position: Save the Tigris is committed to obtaining the commitment of all, governments and non-state actors, *not* to use water infrastructure for political or military purpose in any conflict; and instead to adopt the principle of “water as a tool for building sustainable peace in the region”.

3. False solutions to the water crisis (Dams) / Human rights abuses associated with water

3.1 Mega dams continue to be constructed across the Mesopotamian region and impact the waters flowing downstream. These impacts are exacerbated by the accumulative effects of both large and small dams, as well as water transfer project across the countries of the basin. Examples are the GAP project in Southeastern Turkey, which includes the Ilisu Dam for hydropower purposes and the Cizre dam for irrigation. In Iraq, the government is constructing the Mahkoul Dam on the Tigris, while in Iran the massive Tropical Water Project is under way. Such constructions proceeded without a dialogue with the local communities along these rivers or with downstream states including Iraq, and without taking in consideration the impacts of such water infrastructure will have on the rights of people to have access to water, or of environmental, cultural and economic consequences.

Our position: Save the Tigris opposes all megaprojects on the rivers of Mesopotamia and seeks to link all groups concerned with their adverse impacts. Our initiative calls on the states of Turkey, Iran, Syria and Iraq to respect international law and the 1997 international convention on the law of the non- navigational uses of international watercourses, specifically the principals of equitable and reasonable utilization, participation and the obligation not to cause significant harm to those who depend on the water, as explained in the articles, 5, 6 and 7 of the convention.

4. Climate change

4.1 Despite the Mesopotamian region being far from one of the main contributors to global warming, it is disproportionately impacted by the consequences of climate change as is evident from the increase in droughts, desertification, dust storms and displacement (climate refugees) in the past decade across the region. Some efforts to reduce vulnerability to climate change inadvertently exacerbate conflicts, such as the construction of dams or overexploitation of groundwater resources. This is exacerbated by the lack of a basin-wide approach and coordination across borders.

Our position: Save the Tigris advocates for the implementation of ecological and just climate adaptation measures which can include small ponds, water recycling, plantation campaigns and others. Climate adaptation must take into account a do no harm-approach and must be linked to long-term peacebuilding efforts in the region. Intelligent climate adaptation policies need to measure their success against multiple objectives, not just the one target of increased water storage or agricultural output.

5. Threats to Cultural and Natural Heritage

5.1 Mega projects endanger the cultural heritage of the Tigris and Euphrates River basin. Ilisu Dam submerged the ancient city town of Hasankeyf in Turkey, while other upstream dams threaten World Heritage sites such as Ashur and the Marshes in Iraq. The latter was included in the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2016 but requires further sustainability

measures in the face of water scarcity. These are only examples of a basin rich of cultural heritage.

Our position: Save the Tigris monitors how megaprojects such as dams are affecting the cultural and natural heritage in the Mesopotamian region and advocates internationally against the threats that megaprojects pose to the region's heritage. Save the Tigris monitors the implementation of UNESCO recommendations for the Marshes and continues to spread information about the Marshes' value in Iraqi society and worldwide.

6. Pollution

6.1 Untreated water discharge from the industrial, agricultural and housing sectors is a great threat to clean water resources. Mesopotamian region faces further strains on its water resources due to waste disposal in its rivers including plastic and chemical and toxic materials, as well as rising salinity levels, particularly in Southern Iraq where saltwater has seeped into the soil and the Tigris-Euphrates waterway.

Our position: Save the Tigris calls on governments of the region to invest in updated sustainable methods for water management; and to promote and implement new methods for treating industrial, agricultural and housing waste. We need a new approach that prioritises biodiversity and keeps rivers fishable, swimmable and their water drinkable.

IV. Objectives

1. Protecting the right to water and practice democratic participatory decision-making over water management

1.1 Foster joint decision-making and solidarity between movements across the region through the Mesopotamian Water Forum

1.2 Sharing best practices, experiences and transfer knowledge on bottom-up approaches to water management between communities, civil society and activists of the region.

1.3. Promote and advocate for local control of water resources decision-making

2. Shared water resources become a tool for lasting peace between the different communities of the region

2.1 To advocate on national and international level for the protection of water infrastructure in times of conflict and for sustainable policies that protect the rivers of Mesopotamia, taking into account water scarcity and guaranteeing safe access to water for all Iraqis.

2.2 To promote cooperation between people in the Mesopotamian region over the shared water resources in order to create a lasting peace through dialogue and activities that involve environmental activists, civil society and communities across the region. This includes the Mesopotamian Water Forum.

2.3 To promote transboundary water cooperation and management including rivers, wetlands, lakes.

3. Water management policies and projects are socially and ecologically just and build resilient and equitable societies in Mesopotamia.

3.1 To advocate at the national and international level to halt the construction and mitigate the impacts of large dams in Iraq, Turkey, Iran and Syria.

3.2 To continue dialogue with the Iraqi government about the destructive socioeconomic, cultural and environmental impact of megaprojects. We advocate that the Iraqi government develops policies that address transboundary water issues and negotiates with riparian states in accordance with international law and to apply the articles 5, 6 and 7 of the 1997 International Convention to the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

3.3 To encourage Iraq, Turkey, Syria and Iran to sign agreements that establish a fair share of water between riparian states, and emphasize the integrity of the river ecosystem.

3.4 To raise awareness among communities in the region and internationally about the socioeconomic, environmental and cultural impacts of large megaprojects and the need to protect the Tigris-Euphrates Rivers.

4. The region has adapted to the reality of climate change and contributes to address the root causes of climate change.

4.1 To advocate for sound climate adaptation policies with policymakers across the Mesopotamian region.

4.2. Foster awareness among communities, policymakers on the structural causes and impacts of climate change.

4.3 Document the impacts of climate change on water resources and local communities in the region.

4.4. Work in solidarity with social movements advocating for a just transition away from fossil fuels.

5. The cultural and natural heritage of the Tigris-Euphrates basin is preserved on the basis of a common Mesopotamian identity

5.1 To demand that the Iraqi government, UNESCO and its supporting organizations work actively, transparently and in a timely manner to protect cultural heritage sites in Iraq, particularly the Iraqi Marshes.

5.2 To spread awareness internationally on the cultural and natural heritage of Mesopotamia.

5.3 To provide solidarity and support to movements across Mesopotamia protecting heritage sites along the Tigris-Euphrates Rivers endangered by megaprojects, water scarcity, pollution and other threats.

6. All Mesopotamian water resources are drinkable, fishable and swimmable

6.1 To demand that the Iraqi, Turkish, Syrian and Iranian governments adhere to international law which guarantees access to water for all Iraqis, and manages its water resources sustainably.

6.2 To document and draw attention to the pollution of the Tigris River and its tributaries.

V. Current situation

Save the Tigris was founded in 2012 as an informal international campaign, consisting of several members (NGOs, CSOs, individuals, ...) from various countries. Support was provided by its chair member, the Italian NGO Un Ponte Per (UPP), which funded activities of Save the Tigris. Donors across the years have included the European Commission, Medico, Fondation Assistance Internationale and CCFD-Terre Solidaire. Within Iraq, activities were carried out by a solid group of volunteers, which founded their own organisation Humat Dijlah in 2018, acting as the official partner of Save the Tigris in Iraq. In 2019, the first Mesopotamian Water Forum took place, a key element of our work. In 2020, Save the Tigris was registered as a Dutch foundation based in Amsterdam.

VI. Upcoming activities

Save the Tigris aims to create a solid and sustainable base in the Netherlands, which can provide support to environmental activists in Iraq and Mesopotamia working on protection of water resources. We continue to promote water justice in the region through concrete actions in the region and on the international stage.

VII. Organisation

Save the Tigris is registered organisation in the Netherlands.

Location: Keizersgracht 241 1016EA Amsterdam, Netherlands

Chamber of Commerce Number: 80906664

Fiscal Number: 861846382

Website: <https://www.savethetigris.org>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/save.the.tigris.stc>

Email: coordinator@savethetigris.org

1. Board

The board consists of 3 people:

Chairman: Toon Bijns (in function since 13 November 2020)

Secretary: Ismaeel Dawood (in function since 13 November 2020)

Treasurer: Ercan Ayboga (in function since 13 November 2020)

None of them receive any compensation for their activities

2. Employees

Save the Tigris employs 1 paid staff member: the international coordinator, based in the Netherlands.

Additionally, interns and volunteers are irregularly employed.

3. Steering Committee

The Steering Committee is the advisory body of Save the Tigris:

3.1 Roles and Responsibilities:

3.1.1 To develop and update the strategy of the organisation.

3.1.2 To determine and create an organizational structure that will sustain the initiative and review the goals and objectives, work program, activity schedule, etc.

3.1.3 To identify, recruit, screen, and select qualified individuals and encourage involvement of new members in Save the Tigris

3.1.4 To accept or reject new members based on background, expertise, previous experience of members, and commitment (individuals and organizations)

3.1.5 Organize entry and exit-interviews with SC members

3.1.6 Meetings of the steering committee are conducted via Internet and can be open to other members if needed

- 3.1.7 SC members should attend all its meetings unless in special cases a member may not attend by informing the others before the meeting.
- 3.1.8 To set up any working groups on specific topics
- 3.1.9 To determine the self-assessment process that the committee will utilize to develop the action plans.
- 3.1.10 To appoint representatives of Save the Tigris to attend formal meetings
- 3.1.11 To establish a regular meeting schedule once a month and extend invitations to appropriate meeting participants
- 3.1.12 To organize meetings of members of Save the Tigris
- 3.1.13 To follow up on actions, meetings and any other developments
- 3.1.14 To approve organisational documents

3.2 Structure of the steering committee (SC)

- 3.2.1 The steering committee is formed from the members Save the Tigris
- 3.2.2 In addition to at-large members, the steering committee will include a focal point from each riparian nation (Turkey, Syria, Iran, & Iraq), who will; be nominated by their national initiative members; be certified by the full steering committee as being members in good standing (active and engaged in initiatives), and represent the interests of their respective national initiative members.

3.3 Decision making process in the steering committee (SC):

- 3.3.1 Voting mechanism- every member of the SC has one vote including the chair.
- 3.3.2 Decisions are taken by SC in consensus to all members. If a consensus is not reached after two meetings, the SC members have to vote and the majority is 50%+1.
- 3.3.3 The chair of the steering committee (SC)
- 3.3.4 The chair is the international coordinator of Save the Tigris

3.4 The chair has the following responsibilities:

- 3.4.1 Facilitate communications between other members of the steering committee
- 3.4.2 Lead meetings to discuss strategy and propose changes
- 3.4.3 Ensure the steering committee implements the strategy
- 3.4.4 Ensure that decisions are communicated to the members

3.5 Other regulations

- 3.5.1 Members of Save the Tigris are working on a voluntary basis because of their interest and commitment to the organisation. Every time there is an activity, members of the Save the Tigris discuss resources and how to share costs of activities. The initiative is a combined effort of all members and volunteers.
- 3.5.2 Steering committee members cannot be paid to be part of the steering committee; their work is voluntary.

4. Supporters of Save the Tigris

1. Iraqi Civil Society Solidarity Initiative	ICSSI	Iraq-International	http://www.iraqicivilsociety.org/
2. Humat Dijlah		Iraq	http://www.humatdijlah.org
3. Iraqi Social Forum	ISF	Iraq	http://www.iraqsf.org
4. Waterkeepers Iraq-Kurdistan		Iraq-KRI	http://www.waterkeepersiraq.org
5. Initiative to Keep Hasankeyf Alive		Turkey	http://www.hasankeyfgirisimi.com/en/index.htm
6. Un Ponte Per	UPP	Italy	http://www.unponteper.it/
7. Corner House		UK	http://www.thecornerhouse.org.uk/
8. Tammuz Organization for Social Development		Iraq	http://www.tammuz.net
9. Ma'aluma Information Center		Iraq	http://infocenteriq.com
10. Al Mesalla		Iraq	http://www.almesalla.org
11. Mountainwatch		Iran	http://mountainwatch.persianblog.ir
12. Civil Development Organization	CDO	Iraq-KRI	http://www.cdo-iraq.org/English.aspx
13. Rivers Without Boundaries	RWB	Eurasia	http://www.transrivers.org
14. Mesopotamian Ecology Movement	MEM	Turkey	
15. Hasankeyf Matters		Turkey	http://www.hasankeyfmatters.com/
16. DOZ		Syria	https://www.doz.international/

4.1 Rights and responsibilities of the supporters

- 4.1.1 To participate in the general assembly and to propose ideas or activities
- 4.1.2 To participate in discussions about strategy
- 4.1.3 To be informed about the decisions of the steering committee
- 4.1.4 To be committed to the goals and objectives of the platform

- 4.1.5 To implement the campaign strategy
- 4.1.6 To comply with the strategy of the platform
- 4.1.7 To participate in activities. Supporters may represent the platform in meetings with officials, during public events or with media and other stakeholders only if they coordinate in advance with the steering committee and the chair and adhere to the objectives of the platform and the principles of this TOR.

We are open to new supporters that agree on the objectives of Save the Tigris and the principles set out in this TOR. Supporters may include NGOs, networks, social movements and individuals. In addition to individuals such as activists, professionals and academics, that are committed to achieve the goals. Supporters of Save the Tigris will be informed of events, and will be updated about campaign achievements and progress.

VIII. Ethics and Principles

1. Members and supporters are committed to the 1997 international convention on the law of the non- navigational uses of international watercourses and its general principles.
2. Members and supporters oppose large dams and other megaprojects that have a negative impact on the environment and on local communities
3. Members and supporters oppose construction of all megaprojects that are not implemented based upon participatory decision-making that involves local communities and are built without a comprehensive evaluation of the impacts to the environment.
4. Members and supporters oppose using water, and water-related infrastructure, as a weapon of war in times of conflict. Instead, they commit to the use of water as a tool for peacebuilding.
5. Members and supporters must be committed to responsible use of water, supporting water as a shared, public resource, and therefore opposing privatization of water.
6. Members and supporters oppose pollution of the Tigris-Euphrates Rivers. They have to be committed to the principles of respect of nature, water resources, and a healthy environment for all.
7. Members and supporters support protection of heritage, particularly the restoration and preservation of the Marshes, respect for its indigenous peoples, maintenance of its natural ecosystem and cultural integrity.
8. Members and supporters are committed to reduce the impact of human activities on the environment.
9. Members and supporters reject Malthusian views that simplistically blame water scarcity on overpopulation and are committed to exposing and campaigning against the remorseless generation of water scarcity through patterns of production and consumption that put profit before people and that benefit the few not the many.

IX. Information management and official documents of Save the Tigris

1. The main information platform of Save the Tigris is the independent website www.savethetigris.org.
2. Created documents that represent the opinion of the initiative are to be found on the 'Resources' page of the website. These include:
 - 2.1 Media
 - 2.2 Reports and papers
 - 2.3 Press releases
3. New documents should be agreed according to this TOR.
4. Save the Tigris is featured on social media:
 - 4.1 The facebook page of Save the Tigris: <https://web.facebook.com/save.the.tigris.stc>
 - 4.2 The twitter hashtag is #Save_Tigris
5. The official email address of Save the Tigris is: coordinator@savethetigris.org

X. Finances

Save the Tigris has been supported annually with a grant by CCFD-Terre Solidaire.
We accept donations via paypal.
For further info we refer to our annual reports.

XII. Modification of this Terms of Reference

It is possible to modify this TOR, Any modification should be agreed to in the steering committee and should clearly contribute to objectives and principles set in this TOR

Adopted and approved in December 2012

Revision 1.0 October 2013 - To delete members of the campaign and add new members. Minor typo error corrections.

Revision 2.0 February 2015 – To edit the Campaign definition, campaign goals, general objectives and specific objectives. To edit the information management of the campaign. To delete and add members of the campaign.

Revision 3.0 April 2017 – To renew the campaign definition, goals, objectives, add new members and information management. Approved in Sulaymaniyah, KRI.

Revision 3.1 January 2022 – Inserted the new organisational structure of Save the Tigris.

Revision 4.0 January 2022 – Updated mission, origins, challenges, objectives, organisation

Revision 5.0 April 2022 – Updated the complete document in the Save the Tigris strategic meeting, Sulaymaniyah, KRI.