

'Operatic Opposition' to Disastrous Ethiopia Dam

24th May 2010

#

Debt and Development Coalition Ireland led justice campaigners in a musical approach criticising the Ethiopian, Italian and Irish governments, and potential international lenders to an environmentally disastrous dam project in Ethiopia. The 'Gibe 3 Dam' is currently under construction alongside a hydroelectric power plant on the Omo River in Ethiopia. Once completed it will be the largest hydroelectric plant in Africa. The Ethiopian government neglected to properly assess almost every aspect of the hydropower project, violating domestic laws and international standards.

After awarding a closed-door contract in 2006 to Italian construction giant, Salini, the Ethiopia government paid out \$900 million so construction could start. International lenders and governments including the African Development Bank, the European Investment Bank and the Italian Government are now considering supporting the project. This support would undermine existing safeguard policies, foster corrupt business practices, and set a precedent that allows financiers to jump aboard fast-tracked projects which have knowingly side-stepped existing safeguards.

Ikal Angelei, the chair of Friends of Lake Turkana in Kenya, said: *"The Gibe 3 Project will destroy the lifeline of the Lower Omo Valley in Ethiopia and the Lake Turkana region in Kenya. It will condemn half a million of the region's most vulnerable people to hunger and conflict. We ask international banks and companies to stay away from this disaster."*

Speaking from the opera performance in Dublin's 'Italian quarter' Debt and Development Coalition Ireland Co-ordinator Nessa Ní Chasaide said

"The Italian government and international lending institutions, of which Ireland is a member, are considering supporting an environmental disaster in Southern Ethiopia and Northern Kenya. We urge the Minister for Finance Brian Lenihan to object to any support from international lenders to this devastating project, especially through Ireland's membership of the European Investment Bank and the World Bank."

As of July 2010, according to the project company the project was 38% completed. The completion of the dam requires further international lending and support and has been scheduled for July 2013. It is only on its completion that the true impact on hundreds of thousands of vulnerable people will be seen. Debt and Development Coalition Ireland is calling on the Irish government to play no part in this emerging disaster.