

11th January, 2016

Subject: Concerns over safety issues in the Foz Tua Dam (FTD) construction site.

To UNESCO

The World Heritage Committee and the World Heritage Centre

Dear Sirs/Madams,

The report of the WHC/ICOMOS/IUCN Reactive Monitoring Mission on the Alto Douro Wine Region (ADWR) (1046), July-August 2012, alerted the Portuguese authorities to the high number of accidents that occurred in the Foz Tua Dam (FTD) construction site since the construction began (cf. WHC/ICOMOS/IUCN 2012, p. 34).

The mission was informed by NGOs that three accidents occurred on the construction site since August 2011. These were as follows:

- Accident in August 2011: It was reported that a crane platform slid and 3 people were seriously injured;
- Accident of 26 January 2012¹²: a landslide occurred at the site and several machines were crushed leaving 3 people killed. It was reported on the national TV that the administrator of EDP said that he would open an investigation into causes of the accident;
- Accident of 8 February 2012: Publico¹³ reported that after a controlled explosion there was a yet another landslide which left 5 workers injured; 4 of whom had minor injuries and 1 who was seriously injured having broken several ribs.

In the same Report, WHC/ICOMOS/IUCN notes that:

It should be noted that a multiple fatality on any construction site is an element of very serious concern and it has a significant impact on how the project continues and is being managed. This also includes the impact on the local community who typically feeds a good portion of the construction workers on these projects. (...)

At last, UNESCO concludes and recommends on the revised dam project (cf. WHC/ICOMOS/IUCN 2012, p. 42).

11. Concerning health and safety issues, the mission expresses concern that over a period of six months, from August 2011 and February 2012 three accidents occurred on the site with one accident of three fatalities. The mission would expect that in the interest of full transparency, credibility of the project and to avoid any further incidents which could also impact on the World Heritage property, the following issues are addressed in the accident investigation and made publically available: Description of the accidents; Findings from accident investigations; Preventative measures taken immediately after the accidents (i.e. temporary works, revised emergency planning); Medium and long term improvement measures undertaken following the accident investigation (site supervision, health and safety training, more frequent health and safety inspections, etc); Update on the conditions of the workers involved in the other two non-fatal accidents;

Platform Save the Tua (PST) integrates local, development and environmental NGOs and wine producing companies. It was created in order to join forces to protect the Tua Valley, part of the ADWR classified World Heritage by UNESCO, by preventing the construction of the dam that will destroy this heritage.

Therefore, PST has always acted on behalf of those which represents and their concerns related with the FTD Project. Since 2012, PST has been continuously reporting all the infringements committed by EDP and the contempt of the Portuguese State over UNESCO guidelines.

The high number of occurrences concerning the lack of safety on the construction site demonstrates that, once again, UNESCO guidelines have been completely disregarded. After the last CENTRE/ICOMOS/IUCN Reactive Monitoring Mission, more accidents have occurred, with an alarming number of injuries and casualties. The *Autoridade para as Condições de Trabalho* (ACT), the National Authority responsible for evaluating and improving working conditions, has performed several inspections, with consequent temporary suspensions. The conclusions of these inspections were never made public, as counselled by UNESCO, but the public statements demonstrate no working conditions improvements.

Hereby PST submits an updated list of occurrences concerning safety issues in the working site:

- Alert on the 24th of July, 2013 (cf. JN 2013): ACT is cited on this piece of news, reporting that the working hours per employee were beyond the legal limit, lack of security conditions in specific works and poor organization of the machinery and equipment maintenance registers. Moreover, it stated the need to improve water distribution and redefinition of signed boundaries between traffic lanes of vehicles and workers.
- Accident in the 24th of May, 2014 (cf. PUBLICO 2014a): The news state that a worker has passed away, after falling from a height of 10 meters.
- Alert in the 1st of July, 2014 (cf. RTP 2014): ACT suspended part of the dam worksite in order to reach a conclusion on the causes of the accident causing one death. The news state a "lack of collective protective guardrails to prevent falls, use of ladders which are not anchored, lack or poor access to work platforms, unprotected irons, lack of water in work sites for the employees and 10 hours working schedules".
- Alert in the 1st November, 2014 (cf. PUBLICO 2014b): Several Engineers, members of the National Order of Engineers (OE), wrote a letter stating the conflict of interests between the owner of the subcontracted safety company in the FTD construction works and its statements as the OE North Region President.
- Accident in the 12th of May, 2015 (cf. JN 2015): The news report the death of another worker, when the transport system materials crashed into a container, making it drop from a height of 30 meters.
- Alert in the 25th of June, 2015 (adapted from PUBLICO 2015): The news report the results of the ACT inspection carried out after a total of five deaths and a subsequent temporary suspension of the works in the FTD. ACT identified "(...) several serious irregularities, from 12 working hours a day and six days a week per employee, stating that the entity found "situations of serious and imminent danger to the workers lives", noting that the most serious occurrences were related to concrete operations of some of the dam wall structures. The ACT general inspector, Pedro Pimenta Braz, attended the inspection and said he was shocked to come across these "unacceptable" occurrences.



In total, ACT issued 45 notifications made to take action, 6 notices of news and determined 3 suspensions jobs (cf. ACT 2015).

The extremely high frequency of these accidents and the repeated conclusions reached by ACT lead only to one conclusion: besides disregarding UNESCO guidelines and ACT mandatorial notices, EDP and the Portuguese State continuously disrespect basic XXI century health & safety measures. The proponent of this project wants forcibly to take back the time lost in 2011 upon the conclusions of the WHC/ICOMOS/IUCN Reactive Monitoring Mission Report: the construction works on the FTDD project should slow down until it is demonstrated that the specific recommendations were met.

As several times demonstrated by PST, the UNESCO guidelines and recommendations are not being met. The very opposite, actually. This is particularly obvious when taking into account topics such as Mobility, the High Voltage Power Line and now the Health and Safety measures. Concerning this last topic, all the evidences PST had access demonstrates there were no effective preventive measures nor an update on the working conditions.

Therefore, we invite the Committee to visit the FTD construction area on a new Monitoring Mission and to make a real democratic listening of all stakeholders involved. Please see for yourselves that EDP and the Portuguese State have consistently despised commitments. Key compensations measures are either ineffective or not implemented at all.

Best regards,

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President of Platform Save the Tua

References

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