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NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

930 East 50th Street
Chicago, Illinois 60615
Phone: (773) 373-3366 * Fax: (773) 373-3571

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The Honorable Karen Bass
Chair: US Congressional Black Caucus
2059 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

National Headquarters
930 East 50th Street
Chicago, IL 60615
(773) 373-3366 Office
(773) 373-3571 Fax

LaSalle Street Project
Located within the
National Office in
Chicago, IL 60615

Peachtree Street Project
100 Auburn Avenue
Suite 101
Atlanta, GA 30303
(404) 525-5663 Office
(404) 525-5233 Fax

Automotive Project
4335 W. Fort Street
Detroit, MI 49202
(313) 842-3883 Office
(313) 842-2625 Fax

Silicon Valley Project
1400 65th Street
Emeryville, CA 94608
(510) 854-6258 Office
(510) 336-6883 Fax

Public Policy Institute
727 15th Street, NW3
Suite 1200
Washington, DC 20005
(202) 393-7874 Office
(202) 393-1495 Fax

Wall Street Project
1441 Broadway
Suite 5051
New York, NY 10018
646-569-5885

Dear Honorable Bass:

*Re: Request to Issue a CBC Resolution Against Egypt's Letter
To the UN Security Council About the Nile River*

I hope this letter finds you well and you are keeping safe. I see this as a historic document and find it important to bring to light that our government, the World Bank and the United Nations Security Council are being used as vehicles by the government of Egypt to impose a colonial era treaty against 11 black African nations.

I am writing about a deeply disturbing case, regarding a letter that the government of Egypt has submitted to the UN Security Council to pressure Ethiopia into signing a neo-colonial agreement that will make Egypt a hegemon over the Nile River. This is inexplicable because 85% of the waters of the Nile river originate from Ethiopia. The remaining 15% is contributed by 10 Sub Saharan Africa Nile basin nations. Egypt contributes 0% to the river flow.

At the heart of the Ethio-Egypt problem is a colonial legacy that Egypt is trying to hang on to. Here is how the [Brookings Institution](#) presented Egypt's intentions on April 28, 2015.

A 1929 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty "granted Egypt veto power over construction projects on the Nile River or any of its tributaries in an effort to minimize any interference with the flow of water into the Nile."

In 1959, Egypt and an independent Sudan signed a bilateral agreement, which effectively reinforced the provisions of the 1929 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty... The 1959 agreement, like the 1929 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty, did not make any allowance for the water needs of the other riparian states, including even Ethiopia, whose highlands supply more than 80 percent of the water that flows into the Nile River.

This is consistent with how the [German Institute for Institutional and Security Affairs](#), explained the conflict.

Successive governments in Cairo have always insisted on the status quo of water distribution. In doing so, they relied primarily on colonial treaties: firstly, an agreement of 1929 with the colonial power Great Britain, which granted Egypt a veto right against water projects on the upper reaches; and secondly, an agreement with Sudan of 1959, which divided the Nile water resources between the two countries, and guaranteed Egypt 55.5 billion cubic meters annually and Sudan 18.5 billion cubic meters. Cairo ignores the fact that these contracts were negotiated without Ethiopia.

[The Conversation](#), a network of not-for-profit media outlets that publishes news stories written by academics and researchers, did not mince words presenting the fact.

Egypt has historically adopted an aggressive approach to the flow of the River Nile, including threats of military action against Ethiopia should it interfere with the flow as set out in agreements signed in 1929 and another in 1959. To this day Egypt argues that the 1929 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty and its modified version, the 1959 Agreement, are still valid. The 1959 agreement, signed by Egypt and an independent Sudan, increased Egypt's share to 55.5 billion cubic meters and Sudan's to 18.5 billion. These bilateral agreements totally ignored the needs of other riparian countries including Ethiopia.

Annually, the Nile River flows 84 billion cubic meters of water, of which Egypt gets a lion's share of 66%, Sudan gets 22% and the remaining 12% is lost to seepage and evaporation. The 10 Black African nations from whose land 100% of the Nile gushes out get 0% water allocation. Nearly every Egyptian administration has threatened the use of war to protect its colonialist share of the Nile waters.

President Anwar (1970-1981) publicly stated: "Any action that would endanger the waters of the Blue Nile will be faced with a firm reaction on the part of Egypt, [even if that action should lead to war.](#)"

President Hosni Mubarak (1981-2011) As reported in [Business Insider](#) (2012), a high-level Egyptian security/intelligence official stated: "The only country that is not cooperating is Ethiopia. We are continuing to talk to them, using the diplomatic approach. Yes, we are discussing military cooperation with Sudan. ... If it comes to a crisis, we will send a jet to bomb the dam and come back in one day, simple as that. Or we can send our special forces in to block/sabotage the dam... Look back to an operation Egypt did in the mid-late 1970s, I think 1976, when Ethiopia was trying to build a large dam. We blew up the equipment while it was traveling by sea to Ethiopia."

President Mohamed Morsi (2012-2013) is on the record in a televised speech stating, "If our share of Nile water decreases, our blood will be the alternative."

Current President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi (2013-Present) publicly proclaimed in a televised program "No one can touch Egypt's share of water... We are capable of protecting our national security and water to us is a question of national security. Full stop."

Despite a mountain of evidence to the contrary, in an enclosure to its letter to the UN Security Council, Egypt falsely claims "At no point in its history has Egypt sought to obstruct the implementation of water projects by its co-riparian nations."

Let me share with you two letters the government of Egypt sent to the Queen of UK (1929) and to international agencies (2011). There are many in between.

On May 7, 1929, Mr. Mahmoud Pacha, Chairman of the Egyptian Council of Ministers wrote a letter to the Queen through Lord Lloyd, Britain's High Commissioner in Residence in Cairo. The letter sought the Queen to affirm the "natural and historical" rights to the waters of Nile. The purpose of the letter was to deny Sudan's request for reasonable share of the Nile waters. In the Same day, Lord Lloyd responded:

“I would like to remind your Excellency that Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom has already recognized the natural and historical right of Egypt to the waters of the Nile. I am entrusted with the responsibility of declaring that Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom considers the observance of these rights as a fundamental principle of the policy of Great Britain.”

In 2011, Egypt's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ahmed About Gheit, wrote to the World Bank and to bilateral donor countries to deny Ethiopia financing for the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. His letter warned: Countries and international agencies who fund the project will strain their diplomatic relationship with the Arab League.

In essence, the objective of Egypt's letter to the UN has the same purpose as the 1929 letter to the Queen of colonialist Britain, namely, to reaffirm Egypt's hegemonic power over the Nile River.

One of the requests Egypt included in its letter to the UN is to stop Ethiopia from filling the reservoir for the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. This is a brazen reflection of Egypt's hegemonic attitude. When Egypt built the mega Aswan Dam and filled its reservoir, it did not seek nor receive concurrence from Ethiopia. Even worse, though Ethiopia contributes 85% of the Nile waters, Egypt did not consult Ethiopia when it diverted the Nile water outside of the basin boundary. This a flagrant violation of international transboundary river laws.

What disturbed me most and obliged me to pen this letter is Egypt's attempt to ride on the shoulders of our government and the World Bank. In its letter to the UN, Egypt accuses Ethiopia of failing to honor “an agreement on the filling of the GERD that was formulated by two international mediators, namely the United States and the World Bank Group.”

There are two fundamental problems with this. First, in principle unless our government and the World Bank believe Egypt and Ethiopia are governed by different international standards, they cannot require Ethiopia to do what Egypt was not required to do. I like to establish for the record that Ethiopia has done everything in accordance with international water laws.

Second, from November 7, 2019 to February 12, 2020, the US has issued six press releases, regarding the Nile mediation. Every one of them refers to our government's and the World Bank's role as “observers.” International mediation rules are unequivocal that observers cannot formulate legal opinions or offer recommendations, unless all mediating parties officially authorize them to do so. Ethiopia has neither authorized nor consented to the US or the World Bank to formulate or prepare legal text. If our government and the World Bank have formulated the claimed “agreement” then it was done in flagrant violation of their duty as observers.

Our government and the World Bank have moral and legal obligations to notify the UN Security Council that Egypt's (1) characterization of the US Treasury Department and the World Bank as “mediators” is false; and (2) accusation that Ethiopia has “refused to accept a compromise text that was formulated by our American partners...” is misleading because as an observer the US had no authority or consent from Ethiopia to formulate “a compromise text” on behalf of Ethiopia.

This is critical to set the record straight and free our country from the Arab League's and Egypt's attempt to enforce a colonialist water rights regime against Black African nations.

It is also necessary to diffuse Egypt's escalation of political posturing and threat of war. It should be noted that Egypt's statements in the letter to the UN that Ethiopia's position is “wholly intolerable to Egypt” and that it

“potentially poses a serious threat to peace and security” is a continuation of the Egyptian government’s earlier televised threat to “send special forces to destroy the dam, fly jets over it to scare Ethiopians, or support rebels fighting the Ethiopian government.”

I would like to draw your attention to the fact that Egypt withdrew from two Africa-based mediation initiatives after it failed to keep the 1929 and 1959 treaties alive. Unfortunate to the Sub Saharan African nations, Egypt’s colonialist agenda gained momentum after it successfully moved the mediation between Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt to the US.

No matter how much I tried, I found it harder to rule out race as a factor in the international play. As African Americans, we have moral responsibility to ensure that our government and the World Bank (that receives our tax dollars to the tunes of billions) stand on the side of justice. It is one thing for the Queen of Great Britain to strip black African nations of their sovereign rights in 1929. It is completely another for the United States and the World Bank to avail themselves as alibi to help Egypt hang on to a colonial treaty from a century past.

It should be noted that Ethiopia has no voice in the World Bank to challenge its illegitimate action to surpass its role as observer and issue a legal text, if indeed Egypt’s claims are true. As you are well aware, Sub Saharan African countries are denied voice in the World Bank Board. Nigeria with a population of 195.9 million people has 0.65 percent voting rights in the World Bank Board. Kuwait with less than 4.1 million population wields more voting power than Nigeria. Ethiopia, one of the 23 founding members of the World Bank, with 109.2 million people is allotted 0.08 percent voting rights, equal to that of the Bahamas islands with 385,640 population.

The Congressional Black Caucus is the only Black August body in the world that can speak up for Black Africa without facing grave consequences from international forces. In this regard, it is of the utmost importance for it to pass a strong resolution as soon as possible to counter the Arab League’s resolution that supports Egypt’s “water rights on the Nile” that stems from the 1929 colonial treaty. Time is of the extreme essence to issue an official resolution from your good office before the UN Security Council acts on Egypt’s request.

I hope you will give this request the utmost priority and attention it deserves. I look forward to hearing from you soon. Stay safe and God Bless.

Sincerely,



Rev. Jesse L. Jackson, Sr.
Founder & President

cc: His Excellency António Guterres (UN Secretary-General); His Excellency Steven Jurgenson (President of the UN Security Council); His Excellency Mr. David Malpass (World Bank President); The Hon. Steven Mnuchin (US Secretary of the Treasury); and His Excellency Ambassador Taye Atske-Selassie, Permanent Representative of Ethiopia to the UN.