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Some non-governmental organizations working on the Namakhvani HPP project issues made a joint statement in a response to the steps taken by the government and the investor regarding the project.

“The Social Justice Center (formerly EMC), Green Alternative, and Georgian Young Lawyer’s Association (GYLA), are deeply concerned over the fact that in response to our criticism, regarding fundamental violations committed during the implementation of the Namakhvani HPP project, gross human rights abuses, the concluded agreement essentially compromising state interests, non-transparency and institutional failures, the government refuses to engage in the dialogue and continues the infringement of human right to assemble, to protect the environment, to use public space, as well as the right to freedom of expression and free movement in the Rioni Valley.

Human rights infringements, in the recent period, are accompanied by disinformation campaigns and discrediting attacks on activists, civil society organizations, and experts who oppose the Namakhvani project implementation in this form.

Instead of taking constructive steps in response to the legitimate, completely fair, and objective protests and answering critical questions towards the government, we are facing a smear campaign by both the project implementing company Enka and the state-owned Georgian Energy Development Fund (GEDF)," the statement by NGOs reads.

NGOs claim that the government failed to act in defence of the public interest in this process. They say that the public communication by the government was openly complemented by the company's PR, which blurs the line between the state and a private entity.

"The role of the state is represented only through the police force and repression, which neglects democratic principles, infringes the rule of law, violates human rights, hinders the peaceful and democratic resolution of these processes, and increases security risks for Rioni Valley defenders as well as the organizations protecting their rights.

We have identified a new strategy that is being used by the state, and other local or individual international actors involved in the process, to create an unfair connection between the peaceful and legitimate opposition to the Namakhvani HPP project and the fight against energy security and national interests of Georgia, to declare this healthy process as managed, xenophobic, peripheral, marginal, and to frame the project related criticism in a geopolitical context," the statement reads.

NGOs say such rhetoric of the state and the other actors serves to delegitimize the protest.

"The public is well aware of the main concerns related to the Namakhvani HPP construction project, which serve as the basis for criticism of residents and civil society organizations. The preparation of the Namakhvani HPP project, including the selection process of the project implementing company, was completely non-transparent. Also, until recently, the public was not aware of the content of the agreement between the government and the company "Enka", which makes it clear that the state is giving up national and public interests in favour of a private company.

Also, key decisions made by the government, such as the transfer of land rights to the company, were made in advance – before the environmental impact assessment decision (permit) and the construction permit, were obtained," NGOs claim.

The signatories of the statement said that more than a year has passed since two lawsuits were filed in court seeking the annulment of the said environmental impact assessment decision, however, the court hearings have not been held to date.

At the same time, the government's attempts to create illusory discussion formats ("For Better Namakhvani") reduce criticism of Namakhvani HPP only to the issue of dam safety and remove from the agenda other fundamentally critical issues around the project," the joint statement concluded.

The non-governmental sector sees the agreement between the Georgian government and the Turkish company ENKA Renewables Ltd as favourable for the investor and believes construction poses several risks.

Georgian Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development, Natia Turnava, declared that experts would study the Namakhvani HPP project. If they find any shortcomings, their recommendations would be taken into account. The dam would not be built until major studies are verified.

The Georgian government and ENKA Renewables Ltd signed a perpetual build-own-operate agreement back in 2019. ENKA has been awarded the rights to develop, construct, own and operate the Namakhvani HPP Cascade Project in Georgia.

By - Svetlana Alimova

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