

# PM Orders Governors To Pursue Dam Demolitions

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Prime Minister Hun Sen has ordered governors of provinces surrounding the Tonle Sap lake to destroy or downsize made-made reservoirs around the lake, and to have a clear-cut master plan for any future development projects in the area, according to a letter the premier issued Friday.

Hundreds of the reservoirs have appeared around the lake in recent years as businessmen and wealthy farmers have moved into its floodplains to convert local wetlands and flooded forests into irrigation reservoirs for large-scale rice farms.

In his letter, Mr Hun Sen orders the governors of the six provinces that surround the lake—Banteay Meanchey, Battambang, Kompong Chhnang, Kompong Thom, Pursat and Siem Reap—to lead the push

against the reservoirs.

The order covers reservoirs in zones three and two, which cover the lake's floodplains and the land immediately adjacent, respectively. Reservoirs in the former zone, where farming has been entirely banned, will be destroyed. Those in the latter, where some farming is still permitted, will each be scaled back by 60 percent.

The premier's letter also orders the governors to make sure that any future development projects in zone one, furthest away from the lake, be preceded by a master plan and full approval from all relevant ministries.

"All governors of the six provinces around Tonle Sap have to take action to prevent clearing, burning and illegal claiming of flooded forestland around Tonle Sap and new construction in zones two and three," the letter states.

After demolishing an initial 15 reservoirs in Kompong Thom earlier this year, work crews resumed work there late last month.

Tonle Sap Authority secretary-general Chan Youttha said yesterday that teams had been dispatched to the other five provinces around the lake to locate reservoirs there and determine which zones they lie in.

Once the reservoirs have been identified and mapped, he said a team of five bulldozers would be sent to each province to begin work.

He said the government already knows of at least six reservoirs in Siem Reap, one reservoir in Pursat, and three abandoned dams in Banteay Meanchey.

Battambang provincial governor Prach Chan said two remaining reservoirs lie in the target area in his own jurisdiction and would be demolished soon.