



Lake Sarez in the Pamir Mountains of Tajikistan was created in 1911 when an enormous landslide (approx. 2km³) blocked the Murgab River valley. The landslide was triggered by one of the strong earthquakes typical of this region of active tectonism. The natural dam, which was named Usoi after a village buried by the landslide, impounded Lake Sarez. With a height of about 600 m, the Usoi landslide dam is the highest dam in the world. Because the Usoi dam is not an engineered structure and because of the large volume of water it retains, questions have been raised both nationally and internationally regarding the stability of this natural dam.

This report presents the results of the reconnaissance mission to Lake Sarez, organised by the UN Secretariat for the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR) in June 1999. This mission, fielded with assistance from OFDA/USAID, the World Bank, UNDP, consisted of a combined group of Tajik and expatriate scientists who studied the dam and lake, as well as the inhabitants and environment of the Bartang valley. The members of this reconnaissance team concluded that the probability of a massive outburst flood from Lake Sarez was low in the near- to mid-term, but, should such a flood occur, the impact on the downstream valleys would be devastating.

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