

Press release by the Shan State Farmers' Network

December 8, 2015

Hundreds attend ceremony to honor farmer killed by Burmese government troops at gold mine in eastern Shan State

Over 300 farmers from different areas of Shan State attended a ceremony yesterday to honor Loong Sarm, a farmer who was shot and killed two months ago by Burmese government troops guarding a gold mine in Mong Len, eastern Shan State.

The ceremony was organized by the Shan State Farmers' Network at Loong Sarm's village, Na Hai Long, which has been devastated over the past few years by the impacts of gold mining in the nearby Loi Kham hills. Water sources have been clogged and poisoned, and fields flooded with toxic residue, destroying the livelihoods and health of local villagers.

After strong local pressure, the Shan State Mining Minister last year ordered the mining in Loi Kham to stop, but companies ignored the order and continued operations, citing permission from Napyidaw. On October 13, 54-year-old farmer Loong Sarm trekked up to the mines with fourteen other villagers to monitor the ongoing excavation, but was killed when Burmese government troops guarding the mines opened fire. A bullet hit him in the leg, causing him to bleed to death.

Local villagers are demanding that those responsible for the killing are brought to justice. The troops who opened fire, from Battalion 330 in Mong Phyak, are claiming they shot in self-defence, despite the fact the villagers were unarmed, and were already leaving the mining area when they were shot at. Military authorities blocked relatives from seeing Loong Sarm's body for a day after the killing, and ordered villagers not to publicize the incident.

Details of the ongoing gold mining and events surrounding Loong Sarm's killing are documented in a new booklet released today by the Shan State Farmers' Network: "Broken Promises – Deadly gold mining continues in Mong Len."

Villagers are reiterating their demands for an immediate halt to the mining, compensation for damaged fields, and restoration of waterways. They are also calling for a ban on the use of cyanide and other dangerous chemicals in mines throughout the country.

The booklet can be viewed on www.shanhumanrights.org

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