Press release by the Shan State Farmers' Network

November 28, 2016

1,500 farmers demand cancellation of Upper Yeywa Dam as war in N. Shan State escalates

On November 27, 2016, over 1,500 farmers from 19 townships gathered on the banks of the Namtu river in Hsipaw to demand an immediate cancellation of the Upper Yeywa dam in northern Shan State, where conflict has escalated dramatically in the past week.

The Upper Yeywa dam in southern Kyaukme township, is one of four new dams planned on the Namtu river. Despite preparatory work at the site since 2008, construction of the actual dam has not yet started. Heavy flooding along the river in recent years has caused repeated delays.

The dam, being built by Chinese, Swiss, German and Japanese companies, will create a 60-kilometer-long reservoir, flooding up to Hsipaw town and submerging the homes and lands of about 650 villagers at Talong, an agricultural community renowned for its organic oranges.

The dam site and planned reservoir lie in an area of active conflict, where the Burma Army has been launching offensives in the past few months against ethnic resistance forces and committing grave human rights violations, including torture and killing of civilians. On October 23, over 2,000 villagers fled from their homes after a Burma Army attack only 20 kilometers east of Ta Long. The recent escalation of fighting in northern Shan State during the past week has caused more IDPs to flee to Namtu.

Burmese troops regularly patrol through Ta Long, causing fear among the local residents, and are posted on a hill-top overlooking the Upper Yeywa dam site, to provide security for dam construction.

The Shan State Farmers' Network urges the NLD government to immediately cancel the Upper Yeywa Dam, which is strongly opposed by local communities along the river.

"Control of natural resources is a root cause of the conflict in Burma. If the government proceeds with new dams on the Namtu river against the wishes of local communities, this will only fuel the fighting in northern Shan State," said Sai Thum Ai of the Shan State Farmers' Network.

The Shan State Farmers' Network also urges foreign companies involved in the Upper Yeywa dam to pull out immediately from this controversial project, as they are complicit in the Burma Army's abusive military operations to secure the area. In particular, Stucky SA should withdraw, given Switzerland's proclaimed role as "peace-builder" in Burma.

The Shan State Farmer's Network is calling for federal devolution of power, so that people in ethnic states can own, control and manage their own natural resources.

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