

# Kaladan Movement

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## **The Kaladan Project in India and Burma: Transparency and local benefits essential, say activists**

**[Bangkok, Thailand]** A new report by the Kaladan Movement raises community concerns about the lack of government transparency surrounding the implementation of the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project. The \$214 million Kaladan Project – estimated to be fully operational in 2015 – will see the construction of a combined inland waterway and highway transportation system connecting Mizoram State in Northeast India with a Bay of Bengal deepsea port at Site-tway, Arakan State in western Burma. The deepsea port will transfer cargo from large container ships to smaller 300 tonne barges (from 50 to 200 metres in length) that will ply the 160 km inland waterway north to a currently under construction port complex at Paletwa Town in Chin State. At the Paletwa port, cargo will be transferred to trucks, and driven on a yet to be built 130 km highway connecting to a new Land Customs Station at Zorinpui on the southern-most tip of the 1,634 km India-Burma border. The Project, classified as Indian development aid to Burma, is a cornerstone of India’s “Look East Policy” aimed at expanding Indian economic and political influence in Southeast Asia.

The report, titled *One cannot step into the same river twice: making the Kaladan Project people-centred*, provides an overview of the current on-the-ground impacts arising from the lack of transparency, and focuses on the concerns and hopes of the local people. The report also aims to highlight the potential benefits of the project, particularly for Arakan and Chin States, the two most impoverished regions of Burma. The report acknowledges the need for improved infrastructure and the potential benefits of increased trade opportunities for local farmers and producers, but raises tough questions about the prospect of further land confiscation and forced eviction, disruption and loss of existing livelihoods, and increased militarization in connection with the project.

“Local people must have full participation in major development decisions in Burma,” said Twan Zaw, Executive Director of Arakan Rivers Network, a core member of the Kaladan Movement. Twan Zaw added, “Comprehensive environmental, social, and health impact assessments should be conducted and made public before the Kaladan Project proceeds any further. Unless the Kaladan Project is implemented with a people-centred approach, it may lead to increased tension between India and Burma rather than improving ties.”

Zo Indigenous Forum Director C. Lalremruata said, “People living in the project area in Mizoram State want the Kaladan Project to be a sustainable development which brings local economic benefits and does not destroy the environment. Indigenous peoples in both India and Burma must be involved in all decision-making regarding their ancestral lands, and the principle of free, prior and informed consent must be the foundation of this kind of infrastructure development project. There must be fair compensation for land acquisition for the Kaladan Project.”

The report – based on the findings from field research conducted by the Arakan Rivers Network in Arakan State, the Chin Human Rights Organization in Chin State, and the Zo Indigenous Forum in Mizoram State – points out that negative impacts have already been experienced by people living along the Kaladan Project route, including land confiscation and forced relocation without adequate compensation in Mizoram State, and labour discrimination and destruction of local cultural heritage in Arakan State.

The report calls for full transparency and local public consultation and participation in the project. Salai Za Uk Ling, Program Director at the Chin Human Rights Organization, said, “Local people in the Paletwa area of Chin State haven’t even been informed about the route of the highway in their area. How can they benefit from the project if they know next to nothing about it, or how it might affect them?”

The Kaladan Movement’s report says that the 1.2 million people living along the route of the Kaladan Project should be the main beneficiaries of this large-scale infrastructure development. The report cautions that under no circumstances is it acceptable for human rights violations to be perpetrated during the implementation of the Project, and calls for accountability for all stakeholders involved in the project.

Salai Za Uk Ling added, “The benefits of this project should go to the least advantaged communities. Unless and until the essential elements of full transparency, public consultation and participation, and accountability are met, the Kaladan Project should be suspended.”

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For more information and interviews, please contact:

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**Notes to editors:**

The full report and photos for media use can be downloaded at [www.kaladanmovement.org](http://www.kaladanmovement.org)

#### **About the Kaladan Movement**

The Kaladan Movement is an alliance of civil-society organizations concerned about the human rights, social, economic, and environmental impacts of the Kaladan Multi-modal Transit Transport Project for local residents. The core members of the Kaladan Movement are the Arakan Rivers Network (ARN), the Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO) and the Zo Indigenous Forum (ZIF).

#### **About the speakers**

**Salai Za Uk Ling** is the Program Director at CHRO who has been working with the organization for more than 12 years. He is the co-author of the CHRO’s 2004 report *Religious Persecution: A Campaign of Ethnocide against Chin Christians in Burma*. He has travelled around the world to lobby governments and the United Nations to promote human rights in Burma.

**Twan Zaw** is the Executive Director of the Arakan Rivers Network, having 10-years work experience in the democracy movement for human rights, social and environmental justice for Burma. He also has been struggling for civil and political rights in Burma, taking part in political organizations such as the Arakan National Council and the United Nationalities Federal Council.

**C. Lalremaruata** is the founder and Director of the Zo Indigenous Forum based in Mizoram, India. After graduation, he became actively involved in the human rights movement in Mizoram State. Since 2011, the Zo Indigenous Forum has been campaigning for the rights of the indigenous peoples in the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project area in Mizoram and has organized a series of seminars and consultations, as well as publishing analysis of the Kaladan Project in the Mizo language.