

GRAB FOR WHITE GOLD

PLATINUM MINING IN EASTERN SHAN STATE





PREFACE

The aim of this report on platinum mining in Eastern Shan State is to expose the human rights abuses being suffered by local Lahu and Akha villagers due to the mining activities. Some people assume that because Lahu areas are under the control of pro-government militias and Border Guard Forces, our people are not facing serious abuses, but in fact Lahu and Akha people are being denied our fundamental rights.

The Lahu Women's Organisation was set up in 1997 to address the needs of Lahu women and children from Burma displaced to Thailand. It works to empower Lahu women and promote their participation in politics, education, health and other sectors, through capacity building training, internships, women's exchanges and other related women's development programs.

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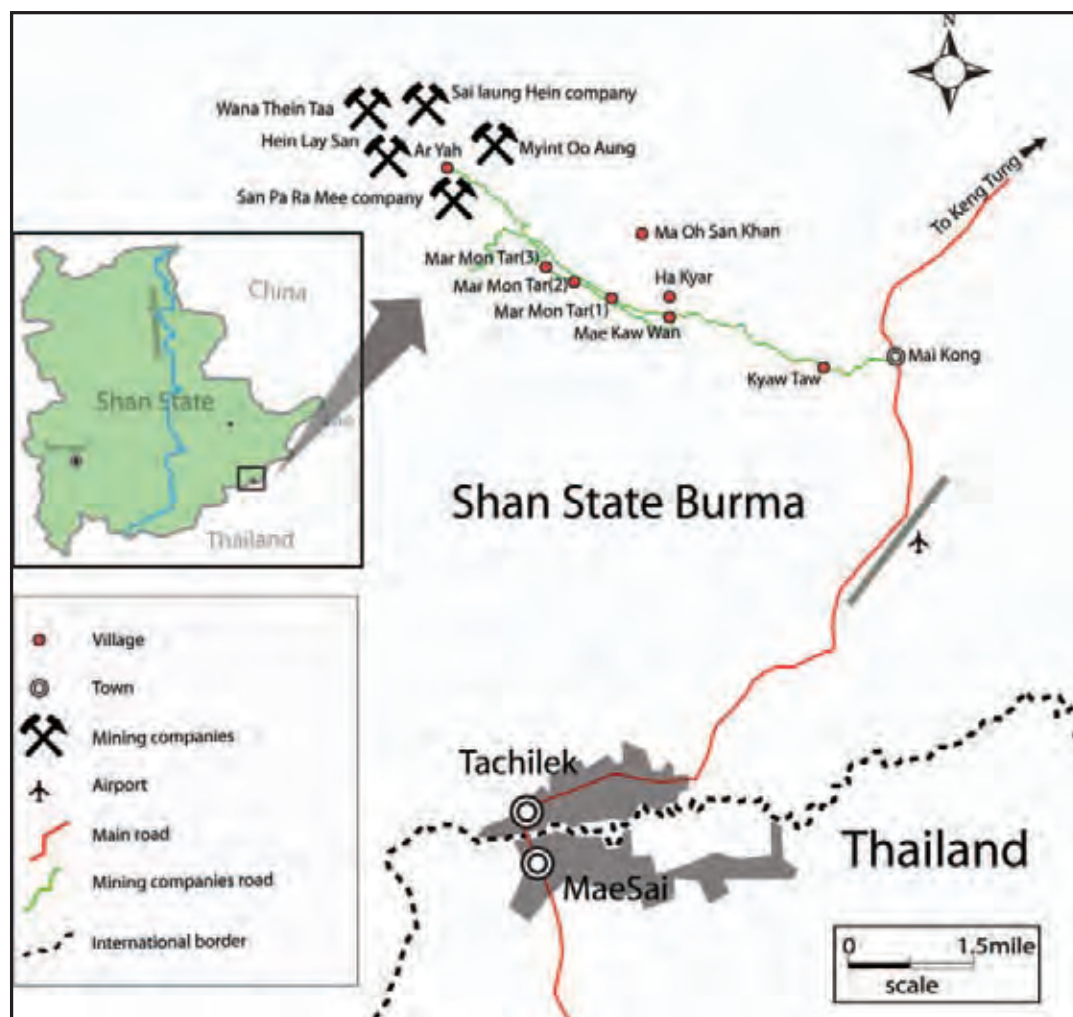
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Platinum mining in eastern Shan State



SUMMARY

Since 2007, destructive platinum mining has been taking place in the hills north of Tachilek, eastern Shan State, impacting about 2,000 people from eight Lahu, Akha and Shan villages. The platinum is being extracted by Burmese mining companies and exported to China and Thailand.

Five companies are currently operating around the Akha village of Ah Yeh, 13 kilometers north of Tachilek. They have forced villagers to sell property and land at cheap prices, and confiscated other lands without compensation. Hundreds of acres of farms and forestland have been seized, or destroyed by dumping of mining waste. The villagers' access road to the main highway has been ruined by the passage of heavy mining trucks and machinery.

The main water source for local villagers has been diverted and contaminated by the mining, causing tremendous hardship for local women, who must now walk long distances to do their washing.

Women are also facing increased security risks from the influx of migrant male miners into the area. There is regular sexual harassment of women going to their fields. Young women are being taken as minor wives by the miners; some are also becoming sex workers. Mining staff have also been involved in trafficking of local women.

There is no rule of law protecting the rights of the local villagers. By paying off the local Burmese military, mining companies are able to carry out operations without adhering to any social or environmental standards. The companies and platinum buyers in neighbouring countries are therefore maximizing profits by avoiding responsibility for the social and environmental costs of the mines.

The Lahu Women's Organisation therefore calls on the Burmese government to put an immediate stop to these destructive mining operations, which are not contributing to local development, but are causing poverty and environmental degradation.



Where is the platinum going?

The ore is being piled up at a site near Mong Ko, then sent up to China via Kengtung and Mong La, and to Thailand via the Mekong River at a price of US\$3,000 a ton.



What is platinum?

Platinum is an extremely rare, precious metal commodity, mainly mined in South Africa. The annual supply of platinum is only a few hundred tons. 10 tons of ore must be mined to produce just one ounce of platinum. Resistant to corrosion and high temperature, platinum is mostly used for industrial applications; some is also used to produce fine jewelry. Platinum is normally more valuable than gold.

TIMELINE

- 2007** Sai Laung Hein Company sets up a workers' compound next to Ah Yeh village, and starts surveying around the area.
- 2009** Sai Laung Hein Company started confiscating the villagers' land, offering compensation well below the market price. Seven families agree to take compensation and move out of the village. Myint U Aung Company also starts surveying in the area.
- 2010** Sai Laung Hein Company expands to 200 workers, and starts excavating on a large scale around Ah Yeh village.
- 2011** Three companies, Hein Lay San, San Baramée, and Wonna Thein, start surveying in new concession areas around the village. Sai Laung Hein company begins digging and transporting about 5,000 tons of ore a month out of the area.

COMPANIES INVOLVED

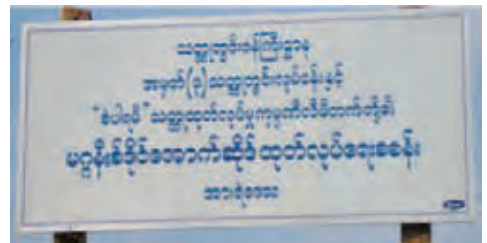
Sai Laung Hein Company

The first company to survey in the area (since 2007); currently has the largest mining operation, with over 200 workers. Although it is a Burmese company, it is known to have Chinese backing. During 2011, the company has been digging up about 5,000 tons of ore each month.



Myint U Aung (Moe Seit Mwe) Company

Began operations in 2009; since 2011 employing about 50 workers; has office in Tachilek.



Hein Lay Say Company

Began surveying in 2011; currently employs about 20 workers; has an office in Tachilek.

San Baramée Company (Ministry of Mines No. 3)

Began surveying in 2011; currently employs about 20 workers.

Wonna Thein Than Company

Began surveying in 2011; currently employs about 20 workers; has an office in Tachilek.



IMPACTED VILLAGES



These communities rely on farming for their livelihoods. They grow rice, tea, fruit and vegetables, rear goats, and grow cassia trees for firewood and construction purposes. Formerly they were able to take their surplus produce for sale in Tachilek. They were also able to collect forest products, such as honey, for sale in the town.

Platinum mining is being carried out around the Akha village of Ah Yeh, in Maing Ko tract, Tachileik township. In addition to Ah Yeh, seven nearby villages populated by indigenous Akha, Lahu and Shan, are also being impacted by mining activities.

Village name	Households	Ethnicities
Ah Yeh	18	Akha
Kyaw Taw	200	Shan
Mae Kaw Wan	85	Lahu and Akha
Ma Mon Ta (1)	20	Lahu
Ma Mon Ta (2)	20	Lahu
Ma Mon Ta (3)	18	Lahu
Ha Kya	26	Lahu
Ma Oh San Khan	6	Lahu and Akha
Total	393 = approx 2,000 people	



Mining proceeds without public consultation or transparency

The local people were neither informed nor consulted before the mining companies moved into their area. They only knew that the companies had received permission from the Burma Army commander Khin Maung Soe in Tachilek to begin operations, and that each company has to pay 5,000 baht each month to Burma Army Light Infantry Battalion 526, in Tachilek as security fees.

Following the entry of the mining companies, the Burma Army has increased its patrols in the area. Moreover, whenever the chief commander of the Golden Triangle Division comes to visit Tachileik, villagers are forced to pay money for the costs of entertaining him. Local authorities from Tachileik also demand money from mining companies.

Even though Ah Yeh and nearby villages are under the control of the pro-government Lahu militia group based at Mong Ko, the militia leaders were not consulted about the mining projects, and received no payment.

MINING IMPACTS

Land Confiscation

"The best way to solve your problems is to move somewhere else"

In 2009, Sai Laung Hein company began pressuring Ah Yeh villagers to move out of the area, offering to pay compensation to any family that had house registration documents. Only about half of the families possessed such documents.

Most of the villagers did not want to move away, but seven families decided to accept the company's offer, fearing that otherwise they might end up with nothing. They were also worried that it would be difficult to relocate to new places in a hurry if the authorities suddenly forced them to move. They were told to go and sign documents at the local government office in Mong Ko.

The villagers had been told they would receive the market price for their houses, but in fact only received half the actual value from the authorities. The documents they signed did not state what amount of money they would receive, so they did not know if the company had paid less money to the authorities, or whether the authorities pocketed half the money. Even though they had legal house registration documents, they did not dare complain, as they were too afraid of the Burmese military, and were worried they would end up with nothing. These families have all moved to live with relatives in nearby towns, and are facing difficulty surviving without any lands to farm.

Villagers who received money for lands taken

Family (father's name)	Property lost	Compensation from company	Actual value of property
Ah Saw	House and yard	50,000 baht	100,000 baht
Ah Lo	House and yard	30,000 baht	60,000 baht
Ah Bay	House and yard	30,000 baht	60,000 baht
Law Sheh	House and yard	40,000 baht	80,000 baht
Thein Phein	House and yard	40,000 baht	80,000 baht
Ah Lu	House and yard	50,000 baht	100,000 baht
Ah Thoo	House and yard	50,000 baht	100,000 baht

During 2010, Sao Laung Hein company began widespread mining excavation in the area, impacting about 200 acres of farmlands cultivated by Ah Yeh, Mae Kaw Wan, Ma Mon Ta and Ha Kya villagers. These lands were used for growing rice, tea, bananas, corn, jack fruit, bamboo shoots, vegetables and cassia trees. A further 200 acres of forested area was also destroyed, where villagers used to collect forest products, including honey and herbal medicines. The villagers have not received any compensation at all for the loss of these lands. In some areas, the lands have been dug up, in other areas the excavated earth has been dumped on villagers' fields.

The wife of the Ah Yeh village headman complained to the manager of Sai Lao Hein company about the impacts of the platinum mining, including the loss of farmland and goat pasture. The manager simply replied: "We got permission from the officials and we have invested a lot of money on this project. The best way to solve your problems is to move somewhere else!"



village lands taken over by mining project

Villagers who have lost lands to date

Company	Village	Impacted villager	Acres
Sai Laung Hein	Mae KawWan	U Kya Yin	2
	MaeKawWan	U Li har	2
	Mae KawWan	U Kya kyo	½
	Mae KawWan	U Li Har	½
	Mae KawWan	U KyaYin	½
	Mae KawWan	U Yaw Latt	½
	Mae Kaw Wan	U Kya Lae	3
	Ah Yeh	Village headman	5
	Ah Yeh	U Ah Wai	8
	Ah Yeh	U Ah De	1
	Ah Yeh	U Ah Kaw	2
	Ah Yeh	U Ah Kya Lo	1
	Ah Yeh	U Ah Do	1
	Ah Yeh	U Meh Je	1
	Ah Yeh	U Ah Nin	2
	Ha Kya	U Ah Hay	1
	Ha Kya	U Lot Aw	1
	Ma Mon Ta (2)	U Yaw Nu	1
	Ma Mon Ta (2)	U Ar Paw	1
U Myint Aung	Ha Kya	U Yar Par Ei	1
	Ha Kya	Head villager U Ah Saw	15
	Ha Kya	U Mae Ju	15
	Ha Kya	U Ya Ti	5
	Ha Kya	U Ah Pa	5
	Ha Kya	U Ya Kar	7
	Ha Kya	U Ah Ti	5
Hein Lin San	Mae KawWan	U Kya Ye	2
Wunna Thein Than	Mae KawWan	U Li Har	3
Total			92

Destruction of roads

In 2007, when Sai Laung Hein company first began surveying in the area, some company staff met with local headmen and promised them that once the mining project began they would build a cement road to cover the 8 mile distance from Mong Ko to Ah Yeh village. The local people were happy because this would upgrade the existing dirt road and improve transportation in the area. However, even though the company has been operating in the area for almost five years, it still has not built a concrete road.

Furthermore, the heavy vehicles used by the company have badly damaged the road. As a result, local people have been facing difficulty traveling between villages, or going to their farms. The road is completely impassable by cars, motorcycles and even bicycles in the rainy season.

In 2010, 65-year-old Daw Na Va from Meh Kaw Wan village complained to one of the company drivers about the damage to the road, and the noise of the vehicles, reminding him that the company had promised their headman it would rebuild the road. The driver replied to her: “Shut your mouth! Don’t blame us. We got permission from the Burmese army commander. If you have any problems, just go talk to him!”

In January 2011, one of the local militia leaders went to request the manager, Saw Thwe, of Sai Laung Hein Company to help rebuild the road. However, Saw Thwe replied:



Damage to water sources

Villagers in Ah Yeh, Mae Kaw Wan and Ma Mon Ta rely on water from a stream flowing near Ah Ye village. Six years ago, the international NGO World Vision built a water system which piped water from the stream to storage tanks and houses in each village.

The mining companies have been piping water directly from this source for their own use, which is reducing the amount of water flowing downstream. Mining is also being carried out directly alongside the stream, causing the water to become dirty, and become blocked frequently by earth and stones.

Villagers are now facing water shortages for agricultural and domestic needs. They are unable to water their vegetable gardens in the dry season. Tap water in their houses is dirty and muddy, or else does not flow at all. Villagers often have to go up to the mining area and manually unblock the stream so that the water will flow again.

Although the village headmen and local militia leaders have requested the Sai Lao Hein manager to help build a new water system, he has refused, saying that the company does not have money for this.



local waterways are blocked and polluted by mining activities

No mining jobs for local people

Since the mining companies moved into the area, they have not offered employment to local people. All of the workers are from other parts of Burma. In 2009, village leaders from Ah Yeh and Meh Kaw Wan asked Sai Laung Hein company manager Saw Thwe to provide jobs for local villagers, but he told them:

“We only want workers who can work full time on this project. We don’t want to employ you because you need to rest every Sunday, and when you want to work on your farms, you won’t be able to work for our company.”



farm fields are now off-limit areas

In 2010, a woman called Daw Na Heh from Meh Kaw Wan village told Saw Thwe that there were many local youth, both men and women, who had left school and had no jobs, and she requested him to let them work in the mining project to get income for their families. However, he told her:

“We don’t want female workers because we are worried that they won’t be able to work properly, and they might cause problems with the men.”



without their lands or new jobs, locals are worried for their future

IMPACTS OF THE PROJECT ON WOMEN



women have to carry water for the household

Need to walk long distances for household water

Due to the gendered expectation that women should do most of the household work, they are suffering in particular from the contamination of the local water source. They now have to walk for one kilometer to another stream to do clothes washing and fetch water for consumption and household use. This is causing a huge added burden to their lives.

A woman from Mae Kaw Wan complained: "I have six children, so I need to wash clothes every day. Before, I used to wash clothes at home, but since the platinum mining companies started taking the water, it has become dirty and we need to go to the stream for washing. It takes so much time to carry all the clothes and my baby to the stream. Washing has become a big job now."

Sexual harassment by mine workers

Not only have local women not been able to find jobs on the mining project, they now feel unsafe to go to work on their farms because of frequent verbal sexual harassment from the mine workers. Such harassment

also takes place when workers come into the village in the evenings to drink whiskey.

Girls becoming sex workers

The presence of hundreds of male mine workers has led to a demand for sexual services. As a result, some local girls, as young as 14, have started selling sex to the workers, usually in order to earn money for their families. Men make appointments to meet the girls either in the fields around the mining area, or in the girls' houses.

A young local woman explained why she decided to become a sex worker:

"We have a big family so I left school after grade 7. I wanted to support my brothers and sisters. I didn't want to do this work, but the company dumped soil on our farm, so we can't work on it any more. I know I will get a bad name for doing this work, but I need to help my family. With more companies setting up here, I hope to earn more money."

Mine workers taking young girls as “wives”

Two workers have started living with teenage girls in the village, promising the girls’ parents they would hold a traditional Akha marriage ceremony when they earned enough money from their work.

Girl cheated into marriage

The company manager Saw Thwe cheated a local 14-year-old girl into marriage in May 2010. He already had a wife in Mong La, but lied to Na Bon that he was unmarried. He pretended to conform to traditional Lahu custom and went to Na Bon’s parents with 10,000 Baht, asking permission to marry their daughter. After marrying, they rented a house to live together in Mae Kaw Wan village. However, after five months, his first wife from Mong La came to visit her husband. As soon as she arrived at Meh Kaw Wan village, she scolded Na Bon and threw her out of the house. Na Bon then had to return to her parents in Ma O San Hkan village. The manager didn’t give any compensation to Na Bon.



Abduction for trafficking

In August 2011, a 20-year-old villager from Ah Yeh called “XX” was abducted to Tachilek by a Sai Laung Heng staff. She and her friends had gone to tend their fields near the village.

While working alone in a field, she was seized by two men, blindfolded and gagged, and then taken to Tachilek. When her friends realized she had disappeared, they went and told the village headman. All the villagers searched for her for two days, but couldn’t find any trace of her. Very fortunately, a week later, a local religious leader found XX sitting in a tea shop in Tachilek with the Sai Lao Hein assistant manager, and brought her back to the village. She was traumatized, and explained that she had been transferred to three different places in Tachilek, but had not dared run away. She was been told by the assistant manager that he was going to send her to Thailand where she could make a lot of money.

When the headman went to complain to the Sai Laung Heng manager about this case, he simply gave 30,000 baht to the headman and XX as compensation, and requested them not to mention the incident to anyone else. The assistant manager who abducted Ya Mi Ku is still working at the project site.



CONCLUSION

The platinum mining operations in the Ah Yeh area are extremely harmful, causing poverty and environmental degradation. About 2,000 local villagers have suffered negative impacts from the mining, including forcible displacement and destruction of farmlands, forests, water sources and roads. Due to deep-rooted gender inequities, women in particular are suffering from these impacts.

There is no rule of law protecting the rights of the local villagers. By paying off the local Burmese military, the mining companies are able to carry out their operations without adhering to any social or environmental standards. The companies and the platinum buyers in neighbouring countries are therefore maximizing profits by avoiding responsibility for the real social and environmental costs of the mines.



The Lahu Women's Organisation therefore makes the following recommendations:

To the Burmese government

- To order all the mining companies to immediately stop their mining operations in the Ah Yeh village area.
- To order and ensure that the companies provide adequate compensation for the damage already caused to villagers' property, and to restore the terrain as much as possible to its former state.

To local communities

- To take action to protect their lands and livelihoods from these destructive mining operations.



Burmese and Chinese companies are pushing aside Akha, Lahu and Shan villagers in eastern Shan State in a grab for platinum (“white gold” in Burmese). Women are facing particular hardship due to the loss of livelihood and the contamination of water sources. The Lahu Women Organization is calling for an immediate halt to these damaging mining operations.

We Lahu Women Organization would like to express our gratitude to the donor Organization for making this project possible.

We also want to thank our field workers in inside Burma.

www.lahuwomen.org