

Inside News

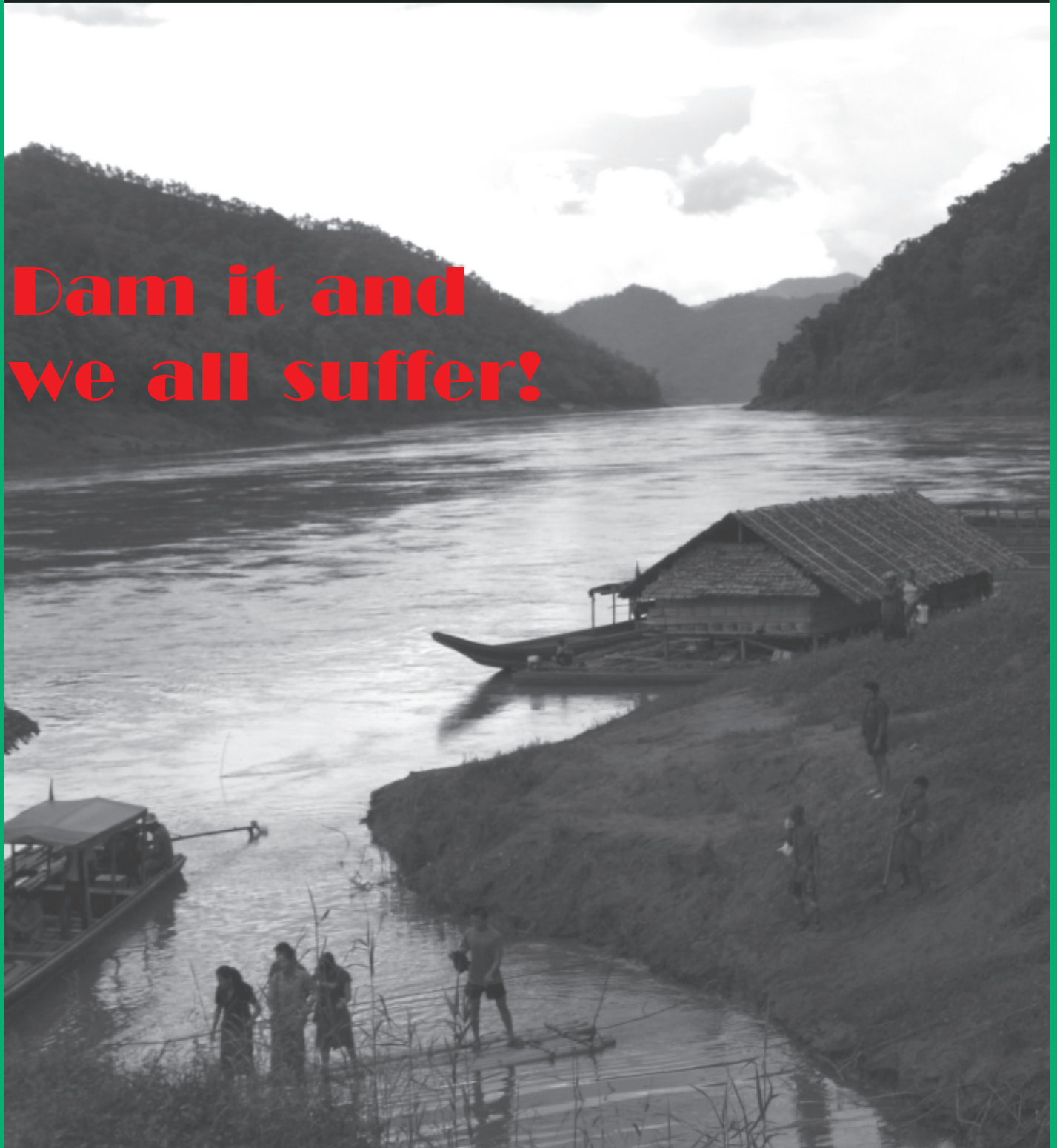
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**Dam it and
we all suffer!**



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE COMMITTEE FOR INTERNALLY DISPLACED KAREN PEOPLE (CIDKP)



*Saw Ba Oo Gyi, father
of Karen resistance*

CIDKP

P.O Box 22
Maesot 63110
Tak, Thailand

Central

Phone:(66) 055 531330
(66) 0815328433
Fax: (66) 055531330

Email:kidpc@cscoms.com
hlahenry@hotmail.com

Northern

Phone:(66) 053681854
Fax: (66) 053 681854

Southern

P.O. Box 11
Kanchanaburi 71000
Thailand

Phone:(66) 034517213
Fax: (66) 034 517213
Email:scidkp@ksc.th.com

Writing, editing and
photos: BLEEDIN' HEART
MEDIA and CIDKP
Reporters.

Design: Blacktown

Cover Photos:
Phil Thornton



Dam it!

Plans to dam the mighty Salween River will bring devastation to tens of thousands of villagers who depend on its water to live. The Salween River is more than a romantic illusion for activists and environmentalists, as claimed by investors in the dam projects. Villagers depend on it for its rich and unique eco-system. Karen people have nurtured the river for centuries. They know what to do when it naturally floods, what to grow in the dry season and how long the river's tides last. They understand where and when to fish and when to be wary of its dangerous currents and twists.

Now, all this is in jeopardy. Southeast Asia's longest free-flowing river is now at risk from Burma's military regime and their Chinese and Thai investors who plan to choke the life out of the Salween with their dams.

It is well understood from studies from previous dams that the long-term negative effects include increased salinity, undrinkable water pools, erosion, the destruction of islands, floods, declining fish stocks, the end of unique ecosystems and the loss of biodiversity. The planned dams will also bring more forced labor, relocation, torture and human rights abuses to the Karen people.

Earth Rights International recently released the results of a long-term survey in Karen State that exposed a rise in land confiscation, displacement, forced labor, travel restrictions and arbitrary taxation. The report also quoted a Karen farmer who best summed up what the construction of dams on the Salween will mean.

"We all suffer, but in different ways...Some people suffer from mining, some from damming, some from taxes and some from oppression...What we once considered our treasure has become our sorrow."

MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

If you want to find out how you can help internally displaced Karen people: email kidpc@cscoms.com hlahenry@hotmail.com or write to CIDKP, PO Box 22, Mae Sot, Tak 63110, Thailand.

The activists --- Karen River Watch

Karen River Watch (KRW) reports that two hydropower plants planned at the Wei Gyi and the Dagwin dams sites on the Salween River will supply electric power of 5,300 megawatts. The Electric Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) will invest 5.5 billion on these two dams.

The proposed construction sites are located in an area renowned for repeated military offensives between the Burmese military and the Karen resistance.

According to the KRW Report, 'Damming at Gunpoint', as a result of these conflicts many villages have been destroyed. Now because of the dam project many thousands of acres of land will be destroyed, wild animals drowned and result in massive displacement of civilian populations. The report says.

"The recent military campaigns have decimated the local population [Eastern Papun district Karen State]. 210 villages have been destroyed, and villagers forcibly relocated to 31 relocation sites. where movement has been strictly controlled, and villager are subject to forced labor and other human rights abuses. Tens of thousands of villagers have fled to Thailand as refugee: others live in hiding in the jungle, where they live in constant fear of being found and tortured or killed."

KRW Report says that "in 1992, there were estimated to be about 107,000 people in Mu Traw District. Now this has been halved to about 54,000, of whom about 35,000, or 60 percent, are internally displaced in the jungles. The rest have fled to Thailand or other parts of Burma."

The KRW report also found that many communities who farmed and traded along the Salween River have fled to Thailand.

"Out of 85 original villages in the mountainous areas of

Eastern Papun directly adjoining the planned dam sites, only a quarter remains."

KRW says thousands of villagers still hide in jungles, facing severe food shortages and health problems. Villagers also face the dangers of forced labour and landmines planted on roads and farms by the Burmese military. KRW says villagers have been left in the dark about the dams.

"There has been no consultation with local communities about the dam plans. If the dams are built, the floodwaters will permanently displace many of the communities currently in hiding or living as refugees in Thailand. The increased military security for the dam sites will also inevitably mean further abuses against local population." KRW says the Salween River, at 2,800 km, is the longest river in Southeast Asia not yet been dammed.

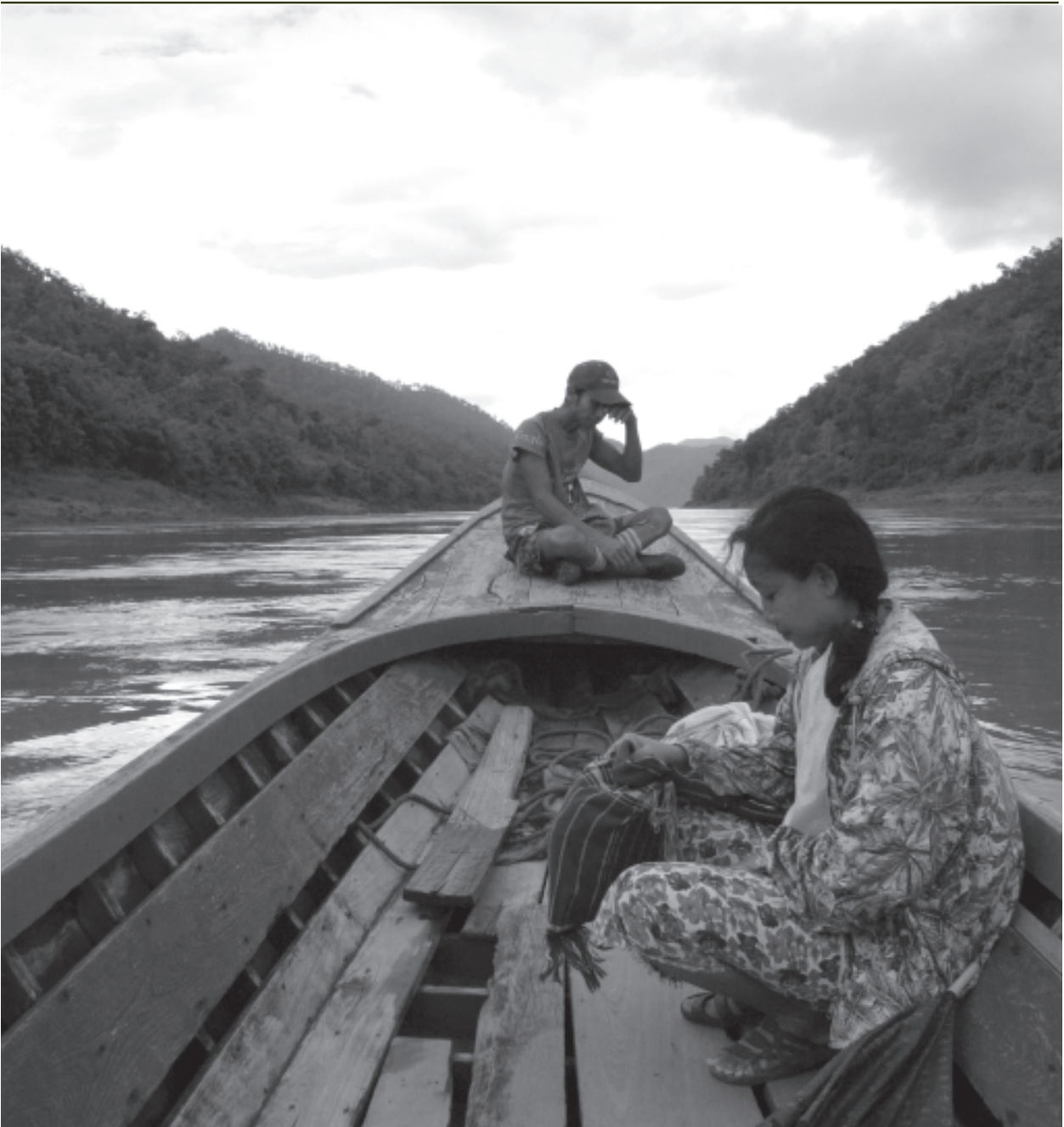
"Its source is in western China, eastern Tibet; it flows for half its length through southwestern China, then through Burma's eastern ethnic states, except for a very short course (120 kms) along the Thai-Burmese border. It empties into the Andaman Sea in Burmese territorial waters. The average annual river flow of the Salween is said to be 124,000,000,000 cubic meters per year."

KRW says the dams are part of an ambitious strategy by Thailand "to establish a South-east Asian regional energy grid."

According to KRW, Thailand opted for dam investments along the Burma border to fend of concerns by international financial donors if they were built inside Burma.

"This reflects concerns by international funders about lack of transparency, further sanctions and lack of security inside Burma."





The Living River...

The Salween River, Southeast Asia's second longest river, flows 2,800kms out of the Tibetan Plateau. It twists its way through China, the Shan and Karen States along the Thai-Burma border before finally emptying into the Indian Ocean in Mon State. Now China, Burma and Thailand plan to start building, in December this year, the first of five major dams on the Salween River. Karen Rivers Watch (KRW), estimate as many as 10 million people from at least 13 ethnic

groups in China, Burma and Thailand depend on the river and its abundant natural resources for their living. Salween Watch says that at least 83,000 people from Shan, Karenni and Karen states in Burma and villagers in Mae Hong Son province in Thailand will be made homeless. *Inside News* sent nine student journalists to talk to workers and villagers. from Kho Kay village who rely on the river for their living. Here are their stories.

The Teacher...

Saw Alex, teaches at Kho Kay village high school and says.

“When our school goes under water, what will the students do? They will scatter and the teaching and learning process will stop. Families will be dispersed to different places.” Saw Alex says villager already have a hard time making a living for their families but it will get more difficult.

“How will families with sick people cope? Farmers, fishermen and plantation growers who depend on the river water will face problems.”

Kho Kay village high school is located on the banks of the Salween River and very close to Wei Gyi, proposed dam site. Kho Kay has a primary, high and a post-ten Karen Teacher Trainer College (KTTC). Saw Alex started teaching at the high school this year.

“We have 115 students and 15 teachers. I teach burmese, history and geography from fifth to ninth standards.”

Saw Alex first heard on the radio about the dam and feels powerless to do anything about it.

“This news is a great sadness for me. I heard the Burmese and Thai government plan to construct a

dam near Kho Kay village. I can do nothing about it. Some people will oppose and some will support it. I do not have power to stop them but to wait and pray.”

Surprisingly, Saw Alex says he being schoolteacher was never a dream or aim.

“I never wanted to become teacher. A teacher needs to be patient and humble which is not easy for me. Because of their need, people asked me to help and it has become my duty. I will try to do the best for my people.”

Saw Alex’s work does not earn a big salary. But for him it is a way to help his people.

“I get 500Baht a month (\$20 dollars), but I am glad that I can share what I have with my people. Through teaching, I will gain experiences. Learning never ends for me.”

Saw Alex says the dam project will bring hardship for the villagers.

“For our Karen people, this project is a sad thing. My house, school, land and everything I have are close to the dam and will all be drowned.”

Saw Alex says some of his students help their parents while they still attending school.

“Many students help their parents by farming in the rain or under the hot sun. If the dam project is to be implemented, all local people will lose their lands and will face huge problems.”



The Farmer...



Erasing the Legacy of Generations

Family farms bequeathed from generation to generation now face extinction because of proposed dams on the Salween River.

Saw Ta Ya, 48, lives in Kho Kay village with his pregnant wife and five children. The construction of a dam on the Salween River scares him.

"If they build a dam near our village, the flooding will destroy our homes and land. I don't want to move to another place but I don't know where we can go."

It is not the first time Saw Ta Ya and his family moved because of an intruding Burmese Army.

"They destroyed our old village," Saw Ta Ya said. "Now it looks like we will lose everything—my betel nut and orange plantations, and everything we have inherited down through the generations."

The latest Karen River Watch (KRW) report states that Thailand signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Burmese military regime in 1996 to buy electricity from Burma by 2010—with the possibility of future MOUs to build more dams with the regime.

According to KRW, Burmese military campaigns have decimated local communities in the areas where dams are planned. As many as 210 villages have been destroyed and villagers forcibly relocated to 31 relocation sites.

The military strictly control villagers' freedom to move around, and forced labor and other human rights abuses are common. The result of the military offensive against villagers is that tens of thousands of villagers have fled to the Thailand-Burma border, but many more are hiding in the jungles.

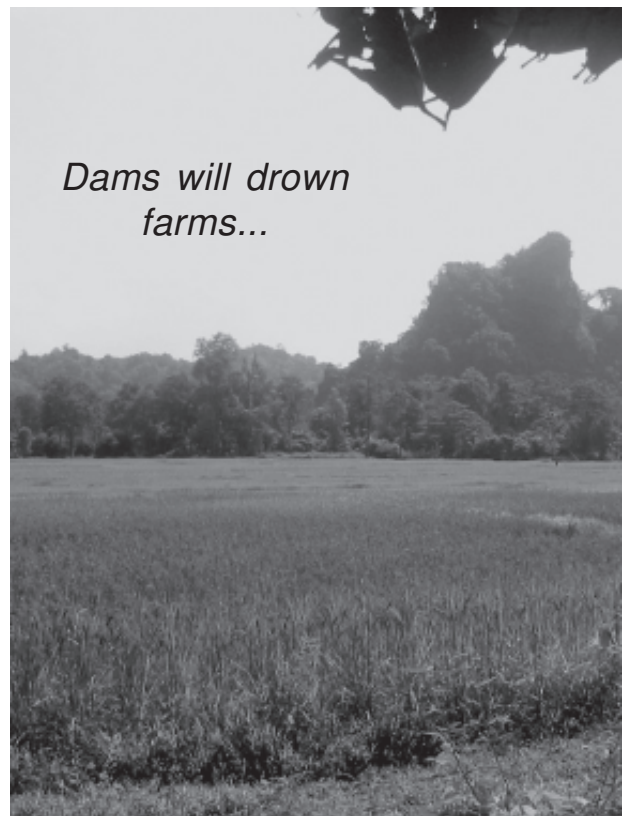
According to KRW, roads to the planned dam sites have been built using forced labor and landmines have been planted alongside roads. In many communities, forests will be destroyed and flooding will wipe out the environments of at least 235 wild animal species.

Saw Ta Ya says he has preserved his plantations to pass on to future generations. "If dams are built, our betel nut and orange plantations that we have worked for many years will be lost. I worry and feel sad."

Local villagers won't be compensated for their losses or hardship, says Saw Ta Ya.

"I know the dams will not benefit us. Nobody in authority has talked to us about the dams. All we've heard is that we are not allowed to cultivate our lands anymore."

He adds that Kho Kay village has schools, a hospital and many organizations that have been set up to support them. "We are comfortable here, we encourage our children—the parents of the future—to care for the land, but if dams are built, many villages will be lost and we will be scattered to many places."



Dams will drown farms...

The Health Worker...

Saw Thi Ha, 23, is a health worker responsible for checking and registering patients at the clinic in Ei Tu Hta, an internally displaced people (IDP) camp situated on the Burmese side of the Salween River. Ei Tu Hta camp was set up in 2006 to help Karen people displaced by a full-scale military offensive in northeastern Karen State. According to international humanitarian aid groups, Burmese army soldiers drove 27,000 people out of their homes. Many thousands of villagers are still living in jungle hideouts, and 3,500 have made the arduous trip to Ei Tu Hta.

Saw Thi Ha, originally from Htee Pha Doh Hta village, is happy to help his people, but he's worried for their future.

"We're always fearful for our security. Our camp is not far from the army outpost. They [soldiers] can come up at anytime and destroy our lives. We always have to be prepared."

Thi Ha says the people now have to be worried about the cooperation between the government of Thailand and Burma to build dams on the Salween

River.

"It will affect Ei Tu Hta camp, and I don't think there will be any benefit for the Karen people if there are dams on Salween River. Villages and our camp, located along the river, will all be covered and destroyed by water. The flooding will destroy villagers' property, such as betel nut and durian plantations, farmlands and other possessions. Families will also be scattered, displaced and will have to rebuild their lives from the start again."

Saw Thi Ha said that if the dams go to plan, they will damage local businesses and the livelihoods of local people.

"This will hurt those trading along the river, transporting passengers, animals and other goods. People who work to earn a living in these ways will lose their jobs and will face major problems."

Saw Thi Ha has made his opposition to the dams clear. "Dams are no good for the Karen people. I oppose the dam projects. I support and participate with any organization or activists that are working on the environment and oppose those who are involved in these dams. I don't want to move anymore, I don't want my people to move again and have to go further from our birth land."





The Soldier...

Saw Blet Say, 48, from Lay Hta Mai Thu village Karen State, has been a soldier for 10 years and is the security headman in Ei Tu Hta camp on the bank of the Salween River. Saw Blet Say came to the camp a year ago and explained how he works.

“We divide our security structure into two groups: soldiers for external security and civilian personnel for internal. The security men working inside the camp are responsible for the internal security, soldiers stay out of the camp but if they know or hear that troops are approaching the camp, they inform the security inside the camp. I tell people to prepare to move and get ready to defend ourselves.”

Saw Blet Say considers the prospect of an attack very likely, as the closest Burmese army camp is only three hours walk from Ei Tu Hta.

“The people have faced many persecutions—forced relocation from their houses, farms and villages, and

their lands destroyed by troops. If dams are built, this camp will need to move. At the moment people have just got settled. They don’t know where to move too. All they want is a safe place free from Burmese soldiers and where they can grow their crops.”

Ei Tu Hta camp is wedged between two sites where the Burmese, Thai and Chinese governments plan to build the Wei Gyi and Dagwin dams.

Saw Blet Say and local people depend on the Salween River for travel by boat and are worried. “If there are dams on this Salween River, we will face many problems. The camp will be under water, it will be difficulty to travel and have contact with our security in different places.”

Saw Blet Say is eager to work with his people in the camp to oppose the dam projects. “Before the projects are implemented, we have to be united to try and work as hard as we can to oppose it. We need to have concord and then our voice will be in harmony. When there is unity, no one can neglect our voice. Unity is the most important weapon we have.”

The Villagers...

The Salween River has brought life to millions of villagers who line the banks from its source in Tibet, through China, Thailand and Burma. Plans to dam the river by China, Burma and Thailand have caused distress and concern to villagers who depend on the flowing river for their existence.

Karen River Watch (KRW) reports that the upper dam site at Wei Gyi and the lower dam site at Dagwin will flood 965 km of land. Most of the flooded land will be in Karen and Karenni states. Mae Kah Hta village, located on the Thai side of the Salween River, is home to 70 families. Most villagers use the river water to farm, fish and for their plantations. Others use it to transport passengers and goods.

Mu Gar Dah, 36, like many of his fellow villagers, is confused about the dams project. “We are not sure what benefit it will bring us. For villagers on the Thai side, we’ve heard that we will be compensated for having to move and for all of our properties that will be destroyed.”

Mu Gar Dah does not trust the government promises. “We do not believe the government at all, so we will make sure and discuss with them before the dam is built, and if they don’t give us what we want, we won’t support their project.”

Mu Gar Dah’s village and other villages on the Thai

side have heard that the authorities will come and talk with them about the dam before it is built.

This is in stark contrast to villagers on the Burma side of the river. Mu Gar Dah says he worries for the Karen people on the Burma side.

“We can’t predict how the government in Burma will act. I think if the dams are built, they will use their military to force villagers out. They will not be compensated, and it will cause many more problems for the villagers.”

Villagers on both sides of the river are united in their worry about their futures.

Naw Ben, 28, lives on the Burmese side of the river in Ma Nge Lu in the Kho Kay area. She worries that the Burmese army will attack her village and force residents to leave.

“If there is a dam at Wei Gyi, we dare not stay in our village because our village is close to Wei Gyi.”

Most villagers in Kho Kay build their houses on the hillsides and work as farmers. A recent KRW report says the dam project will destroy the village, farmlands, many old plantations and will cause mass displacement.

“If the dam project is implemented, we don’t know where we will move to and how we will feed our future life,” said Naw Ben. “Many other villagers worry about this, too. It is not possible to relocate to a new place. For our properties that will be destroyed and for our relocation, the Burmese government has no agreement to compensate villagers.”



The Shopkeeper...



"We don't want a dam!"

Naw Tha Wah, 30, lives in Kho Kay village in Ma Nge Lu, where she runs a small shop from her house on the bank of the Salween River. She says she doesn't want either the dams or their electricity if it means the end of the river as she knows it.

"I've heard about the dam project and I've decided that if I have to move to another place, I will not have this shop anymore. I don't want these dams and I don't want to move to other places. I will never leave my property and my birth place."

Naw Tha Wah opened her shop in 2004. "I have to go by boat to get goods from Mae Sam Laep (about three hours downriver). There are not so many households in the village so I do not make big money. I can only earn 30 to a maximum of 100 Baht a day (US \$1 to \$3)."

Naw Tha Wah says she is confused and worried about what the dam will bring. None of the governments involved—China, Burma or Thailand—have consulted with communities along the river.

The Burma Rivers Network (BRN), representing dam-affected villages, says governments involved in the dam construction have taken advantage of the lack of regulation in Burma for their own economic interest.

"These massive dams would definitely cause permanent problems for the livelihood of the people and the river's ecosystem," said BRN.

Naw Tha Wah worries that she will not be able to live in her village anymore and she will have to leave behind everything she loves.

"I will lose my home, farm, plantation and other possessions inherited from my parents. They will all be destroyed by the flooding."

Naw Tha Wah has learned that it is hard to earn a living in the area. Many people have to borrow things from each other to keep afloat.

"Sometimes, people also borrow from my shop. Although my goods are gone, I do not get money. They pay me later on."

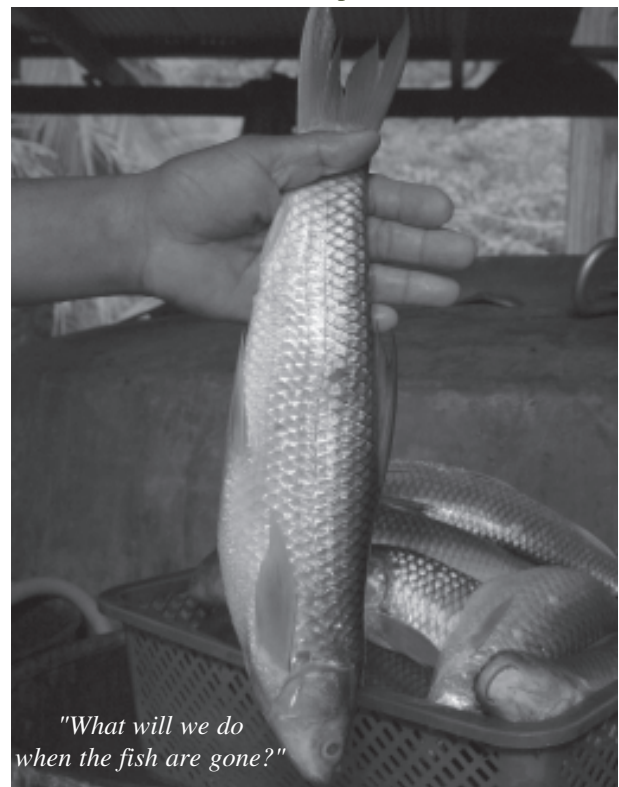
She started the shop with the help of her husband. "I saved from my husband's teaching salary. When I saved enough, I started the shop. Sometimes, I am very happy for my job and sometimes it makes me very tired. I have to go and take goods for my shop quite far and the transportation is expensive."

Despite the hardships of her life, Naw Tha Wah says the dam will bring no benefits to her people. It will only add more trouble.

"I know these dams will bring no benefit for me. Instead if it is built, it will cause more problems for us. For us who have houses built on the bank of the river, it will drown everything, and we won't be able to use the river for our transportation."

Naw Tha Wah has lived in Kho Kay village since she was a small girl. "My father died early and I was brought up by my mother. We mainly worked in slash-and-burn cultivation. We had jackfruit and betel nut plantations. My husband has to work both in his school and in the plantation, but I don't have time to help him. I don't even have time to rest from working in my shop. I have three children, but they are too young and can't help us yet. We send them to school."

Naw Tha Wah urges activists and groups opposed to dams to stop the projects. "I want people to try very hard to oppose the dam construction until it is stopped, and I will not have to move to other places."



"What will we do when the fish are gone?"

"We do what we can..."

After the Burmese army attacked villages in northern Karen State in 2006, more than 3,500 people forced from their homes have trekked to the banks of the Salween River.

They set up a camp called Ei Tu Hta and by the end of the year had built houses, schools, a clinic and established vegetable gardens.

Karen villagers living at Ei Tu Hta still talk fondly of their betel nut and fruit plantations destroyed by the army. They remember a Burma rich in natural resources, full of green forests and many giant trees. But they also remember an army that forced them to build roads and army camps, and to log the woodlands—an army eager to take any and all natural resources and anything else of value.

When the army orders forced logging, it pretends the work is for the sake of development. They order villagers to log the forests for wood to build roads, army camps, schools and bridges, but in reality most of the wood is exported abroad. Money is then used to strengthen the military's control over the country. Ei Tu Hta's population has now exceeded the area originally laid out for the camp.

Its leaders saw that this put a strain on local natural resources. In an effort to preserve their immediate

environment, a public meeting was held with the Karen National Union forestry department and the camp committee.

Since the military offensive forced an estimated 27,000 people from their villages, Ei Tu Hta sees a steady flow of new arrivals. These people need housing and further strain the local water source—a small stream that serves the entire camp.

At the meeting, it was agreed that the harvesting of trees, bamboo and other plants along the stream and near the camp should stop. Camp residents also agreed to stop making charcoal and catching fish, frogs, crab and shrimp from the stream. A member of the camp was appointed to make sure that no one violates the agreement.

The meeting addressed the danger posed to the stream if restrictions were not imposed. Attendees were told that if the stream habitat was destroyed, the water would dry up and the local wildlife would be lost.

Excessive logging, the attendees were told, could make the land arid and drive away local wildlife that depended on it for survival, such as tigers, deer and elephants, and that certain endangered species could become extinct.



Forced from their homes into jungle hideouts, Karen villagers still save the trees.



Photo:KRW

Salween Dams Threaten Lives, Heritage of Ethnic Villagers

A Proposed dam project on the Salween River by the Thai and Burmese governments threatens to uproot tens of thousands of local villagers, according to environmental activist groups. Poe Zaw reports for *Inside News*.

Salween Watch, an environmental advocacy group opposed to the project, estimates that as many as 83,000 Burmese and Thai villagers in the region will be driven out of their homelands in Shan, Karenni and Karen states in Burma, and from areas in Mae Hong Son Province in Thailand.

Villagers affected by the dam project also face being cut off from their livelihoods, culture and communities established generations ago.

According to local residents in the dam areas, their homelands will be flooded when the dams are complete, destroying their farms and fishing industries. Moreover, they say Burmese authorities have no plan to resettle villagers peacefully to areas where they can resume their lives.

Burma's military government has used force to implement the Salween dam project since 1999, according to a Shan environmental activist group. "The Burma Army has relocated more than 60,000 villagers from areas adjoining the dam site and

projected flood zone," the Shan Sapawa Environmental Organization (Sapwa) said recently. The statement added: "Villagers found in hiding who have remained in the vicinity have been tortured, raped and killed."

Thailand's Ministry of Energy and the Burmese Ministry of Electric Power signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) in May 2005 to build five hydroelectric dams on the 2,800-km Salween River, which runs from Tibet through eastern Burma and, at one point, defines the Thai-Burmese border.

Projected dam sites include Hat Gyi and Wei Gyi along the upper Salween, Dagwin in Karen State, Ta Sang in Shan State and Mone Tar. The deadline for completion of all the dams remains unclear.

Villagers in the project regions have petitioned Thai and Burmese authorities to cancel the agreement. In mid-march, a group of more than 500 ethnic villagers in Burma gathered on the banks of the Salween near the Thai-Burmese border to pray and to demonstrate against the project.

Despite the protests and growing international concern about the environmental impact of the project, Burmese officials and representatives of the

continued page 13...

Thai company MDX held an official celebration to launch construction of the 7,100-kw Tasang dam in Shan State on March 29.

Ta Sang is the first of the five proposed dams to be built and construction is expected to take up to 15 years, according to the group Towards Ecological Recovery and Regional Alliance (TERRA), an environmental activist organization focused on preserving the Mekong Valley region.

"It won't benefit the people..."

While Thai and Burmese authorities claim the dams will benefit villagers in both countries, advocacy groups say the project endangers local villagers and will serve only government interests, particularly in Thailand.

"In this project, there are many risks for local residents if we compare advantages and disadvantages," said Sai Sai, a spokesperson for Sapwa. "There is no compensation for relocated villagers. Obviously, we can see it [the project] is for selling electricity to Thailand, while there is no guarantee of electricity for local villagers."

Activist groups in Karen State say Burma's military government has used the dam project to increase its presence in the area, where fighting between government troops and the armed ethnic group Karen National Union has continued since 1948.

"Now they [the Burmese government] are not yet building the dams but they have put more soldiers in this area and force the relocation of villagers," said Naw Rebecca Dun, a spokesperson for the Karen Human Rights Group in Mae Sot in Thailand's Tak province. "We are against the dam projects because they won't benefit villagers. Burma's government will sell 85 percent of the electricity to Thailand," she added, citing details from a report in Burma's *Myanmar Times*.

Ban the dam

Communities in Thailand that will be affected by the dams have also expressed opposition to the project. A group of Thai journalists, activists and villagers met Thailand's energy minister, Piyasawat Amaranand, in late

February and urged the cancellation of the dam agreement.

"We met Mr. Piyasawat Amaranand and explained why we are against the project," said a journalist from the Salween News Network. "He said the project has been postponed by the interim government, but that could change with the next government."

Current Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont and the Committee for National Security took control of the Thai government following a coup last September that ousted former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. Elections are expected to be held later this year to replace the interim government.

The Living River Siam-Southeast Asia River Network, a Thai environmental organization devoted to preserving Southeast Asia's rivers and the communities that depend on them for their livelihoods, says that how the country decides the issue of the dams will say a lot about Thailand's commitment to the environment and its people.

"Thailand is at the crossroads of choosing between the profits from the Salween dams or its dignity," the group said in a 2007 documentary video about the Salween projects.



Mining and Logging Destroy Village Life

Saw Lah Soe, a CIDKP Mine Risk Educator, has just returned from Karen State and reports for Inside News of a gold mine that is destroying the environment and the lives of villagers.

Burma's military government approval of a gold mining operation in Kler Lwee Htoo District has destroyed life for the Karen villagers who live there. Forests have been cut down, rivers polluted and plantations and farmlands ruined since the mining began in 2005.

Burmese troops protect the mining company, Aye Mya Pyi Zon, and the migrant workers who invaded Hsaw Hti Township in Kler Lwee Htoo district looking for gold.

Today, the mine is still working and eating village land. Villagers say the 24-hour industrial noise from heavy machinery and mine explosions is also spoiling their lives. "If we attack them and make them stop mining, only civilians will die. The people have no choice, they can't do other work besides farming," said Saw Say Wah, a Karen National Liberation Army soldier from Hsaw Hti Township.

Saw Say Wah says the Burmese army controls the area and restricts where and how people work. "This is the only job open for them and they have to take it. Hundreds of acres of village lands were destroyed because of this gold mine."

Saw Lah Soe said that when he went to the Ler Khaw Day area in Hsaw Hti Township, he could see from the top of the mountain the destruction to the landscape by the mine even though he was still four hours walk away.

"The run-offs from the goldmine have polluted the river and streams in the area. Villagers are getting sick from drinking and washing in the muddy water."

According to the local Karen National Union, the Burmese army has also planned to attack KNLA positions and forcibly relocate villagers from Mone and Ler Doh townships. The KNU official says once the villagers and the KNLA are gone, logging and mining of natural resources will begin in earnest in the area.

"The Burmese troops have been driving out villagers in Mone Township since 2006," said Saw Htee Moo Klo, a district CIDKP field worker from Nwar Lay Kho, Mone Township. "They camped in the area to provide security for the logging and mining businesses. Many of the people who were driven out from their home had to flee to Ei Tu Hta camp [for internally displaced people]."

Saw Maw Teh from Mu Khee village in Ler Doh Township said the Burmese army plans to do the same to his township as they did in Mone and Hsaw Ti.

"During January 2007, the soldiers sent up a lot of food supplies to the front, where they have plans to launch the offensive and force villagers to do logging, mining and relocate."

When Lah Soe conducted a land mine survey in Ler Doh Township, he was amazed to see so many forests burned down in the area.

Saw Klo Say, a village tract leader from Thaw Ngeh Der village, said villagers burn the forest to destroy above-ground landmines so they can travel, hunt or forage safely.

Earning a living is hard for villagers in the area. They have to avoid landmines and other threats to their life, as the civil war is still going on. Almost all of the villagers living in the mountainous areas have no choice but to do slash-and-burn farming.

The practice is detrimental to the environment. Every year villagers clear land to farm and then have to move to different places the next growing season.

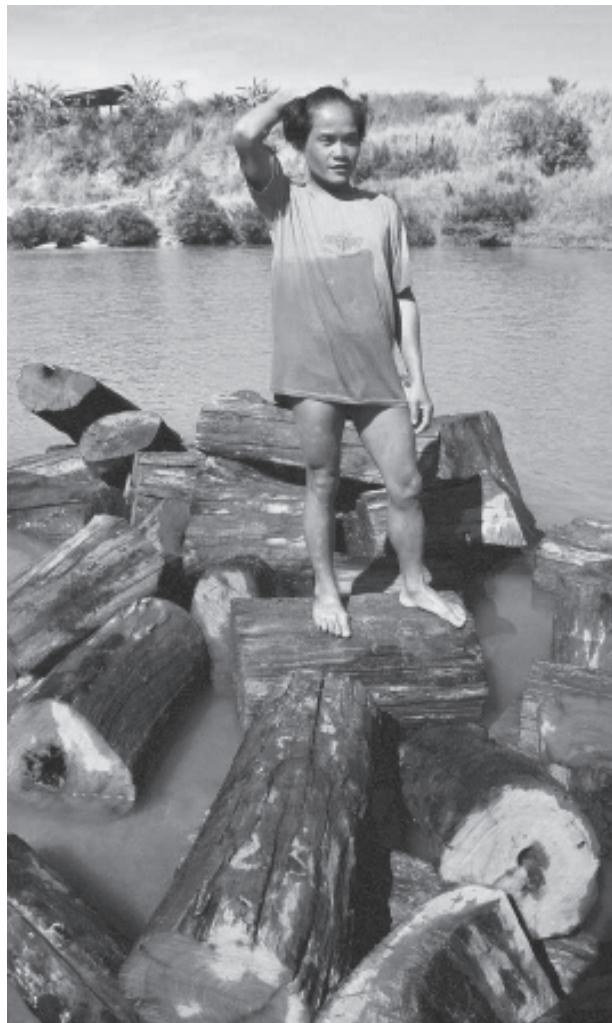
Saw Ta Thaw, Company Commander of Karen National Defence Organization in Ler Doh Township said: "Slash and burn farming is hard work, but villagers have to do this for their survival. They do not have a permanent home and do not have other businesses or ways of earning a living except slash-and-burn farming."

He adds that villagers have little choice, as Burma's military government is intent on using military force to solve its problems.

"The war is still going on and many villagers face more difficulties because they have been forced from their homes and are now internally displaced people."

War and the greed of the army causes many problems for villagers and the environment. In Kler Lwee Htoo District, Lah Soe saw many lands and forests destroyed because of mining, logging and slash-and-burn farming.

But there will be further destruction of the environment if Burma's political situation does not change soon.



Guerrilla Farming



Villagers pushed further into Burma's forests by dam construction are forced to use dangerous methods and work virtually under the eyes of Burma's watchful military.

Villagers in proposed dam sites along the Salween River say that their forced relocation by the government will have a devastating affect on local forests.

Pado Saw Htoo Paw says villagers are aware that slash-and-burn is not the way to farm, but they have little choice when they are forced to relocate by the Burmese army, which is trying to secure construction sites for the dams.

"We are aware of what we should do to protect the forests, but if we do not do slash-and-burn farming we will starve. We are being forced further and further into the deep forests in Kler Lwee Htoo district."

Pado Saw Htoo Paw says he has noticed that the forest is diminishing and local weather patterns have changed.

"There is now heavy rain and flooding in the area where there never used to be. Wild animal populations are also decreasing, and some species are now extinct in Burma."

Villagers in the Wei Gyi area have already felt the impact from increased Burmese military activity in dam construction areas.

In early 2007, the military sent three army divisions to Mu Traw District. Saw Na, a Karen IDP, says the extra army activities are putting increased pressure on villagers uprooted from their homes and forced to hide from the soldiers.

"Karen villagers living close to car roads between Mu Traw and Kler Lwee Htoo districts have had to abandon their slash-and-burn farms and move into the forests," said Saw Na. "Villagers' paddy fields were destroyed by troops, and finding wild deer, pigs and other animals is getting harder."

Saw Na says people are now facing severe food shortages. "For their survival, they have to collect yams, bamboo shoot and other edible things from the forest. Many villagers, especially children, are suffering from malnutrition, and malaria and diarrhea are common. Whenever the troops launch their offensive against villagers, many children die from these diseases."

The presence of Burmese troops in the area makes farming difficult and dangerous for local villagers, according to Saw Na.

"During this farming season, most of the villagers living between Mone and Ler Doh townships in Kler Lwee Htoo district have to clear land for farming that is very close to the troops' positions, and it is dangerous for them. There is no land that is far from the army anymore. They have no choice but to take risks for their survival."

He says that villagers from T' Kaw Der village in Ler Doh Township have their farms near the car road now used by soldiers.

"Villagers must have sentries while they are working on the farms and have to run away when they hear the sound of car engines."

Burmese soldiers arrested five villagers from Saw Kha Der in February 2007, according to Saw Na. "They were working their farms near the car road. Since the arrests, villagers have gone deeper into the forests to farm. They have no choice."



Trees Out --- Mines In

Saw Min Soe, a CIDKP Mine Risk Educator, has just returned from Karen State and reports for Inside News of a gold mine that is destroying the environment and the lives of villagers.

In March 2007, I visited Taw Oo District in Karen State to carry out a landmine survey. During my trip, I talked to villagers about the destruction gold mines have caused to their lands: deforestation, drought and disease.

Saw Hla Min, a day laborer, said he had little choice but to work in the mines. "It is very difficult depending on the mines, but there is no other option to find other work. Most of us in this area earn our living from the gold mine."

Gold mines operate in Dawh Pha Kho Township and in Htee Nya Per, where farmlands and forest have been destroyed to make way for them. The Burmese government and local authorities are also logging in the area. Most of the forests have gone and there are no more old growth trees left.

With the loss of the forest, water sources have dried up and caused drought conditions. Pollution from the mines has also spoiled local streams and rivers, while sediments from the mines have blocked or changed underground water routes.

Villagers face health issues as their drinking water has been contaminated by chemicals used by the goldminers.

These villagers they live far from a health clinic or hospital. Many of them have died of treatable diseases such as malaria and dysentery because the only medicine available is traditional or herbal.

Burma's military government have said they plan to expand their mining operations in the future.

Villagers say the damage to Karen State will be unimaginable if the government implements plans to expand gold mining throughout the district.

Dam Lies

No one denies that electricity has brought great benefits to people, especially if used for hospitals, schools, villages and refrigeration. But according to Karen National Union (KNU) general secretary Pado Mahn Sha, the Burmese people will not reap any of these benefits from the military regime's plans to dam the Salween River.

The Burmese military regime claims that its plans to dam the Salween River is part of an overall strategy to provide its citizens with hydro-power generated electricity, a claim contested by environmental groups, Burmese political opposition and tens of thousands of villagers.

If reports in *The Myanmar Times*, a government sanctioned paper, is anything to go by, the people of Burma will not use the electricity from the dams.

The Myanmar Times reported that the Hutgyi hydropower dam, built with Thailand and China, will cost \$1billion, and will export 60 percent of its electricity to Thailand.

The newspaper said another dam to be built on the Salween River with the "Thai energy firm MDX Group will cost \$6 billion and "...Thailand will receive 85 percent of its electricity."

Mahn Sha says the dams will be built on the back of human rights abuses.

"In Burma, 'development project' is shorthand for forced labour, forced relocation, extortion and land confiscation."

Manh Sha told *Inside News* that plans to build the



dams has already cost the Karen people their homes and farmlands and said the KNU called on both Thailand and China to pull out their financial support. "China and Thailand should stop helping them [Burma's regime] if they genuinely want to see improvement in human rights in Burma. Regime investments are bad for the people of Burma."

Mahn Sha says money generated by the dams will be not be used to build hospitals or schools but used to increase the regimes budget for weapons and more soldiers to control the people.

"Soldiers will be used in the dam areas and we know where there's troops there are human rights abuses. If the dam puts our people in danger we will not accept it," Mahn Sha warned.

Mahn Sha says the people of Burma have never accepted the military dictatorship.

"There has not been any discussion with the people affected by the damming and no one will be compensated for the loss of their lands. It's not only the Karen against the dams, but the Shan, Mon and Thai. By supporting the dams investors are supporting the regime. Our people are being killed and their lands destroyed, how can they say their investments are worth it."

Mahn Sha says big dam projects generate trouble. "They're not workable, they're problematic, see what has happened in China. The people and countries down stream lose access to water, teak and other forests are destroyed, villages drowned, waterways polluted and fish stocks ruined."





Why damming the Salween is a crime

Burma's military regime, the Thai government, and the Chinese state-owned Sinohydro Corporation plan to build large hydropower dams on the Salween River — even though tens of thousands of villagers don't want the dams. The dams are in a conflict zone where people are being systematically displaced, robbed, tortured, raped and killed by the Burmese army.

Forced Labor, Forced Displacement and No Compensation

Where the Salween runs along the Thai- Burmese border, at least thirteen ethnic groups, including the Shan, Karen, Karenni, Mon, Wa, Pa-O, Lahu, Padaung, Akha, Lisu and Palaung live along its banks. It has been well documented by international human rights groups that construction projects in Burma are built using forced labor and the military force villagers to relocate and do not compensate for loss of land.

Environmental Damage

The environmental costs of the proposed dam projects will be massive and permanent. The Salween River, also known, as the Nu River in China and the Thanlwin River in Burma, is the longest free flowing river in Southeast Asia. It has been chosen as the Three Parallel Rivers UNESCO World

Heritage Site in Yunnan, China. Over one 100 species of fish migrate between the Nu/Salween River and its tributaries. This finely balanced eco-system is now at risk.

Dams Used as Weapons of War

In the context of the almost six decades of war against the Karen people of Burma, the dams give a strategic, political and economic weapon to the military regime. Preparation for the dams has already caused suffering and forced relocation for many villagers, and if the dams are eventually built, further abuses against local communities will result. Political and financial support for dams in this conflict zone is direct complicity in the Burma Army's oppression of the peoples of Burma.

Largest Dam in Southeast Asia

The dams in Burma and on its borders would have a combined capacity of over 12,500 megawatts and would include the single largest dam in Southeast Asia.

Two of the planned dams are inside Burma and two are on the Burma-Thai border. The 7,110 megawatt Tasang dam, will have a reservoir approximately 300 kilometers long and a concrete wall 228 meters high.

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Tasang dam pre-construction preparation is at an advanced stage, with the detailed design in progress and agreements already signed for financing its construction.

Military Violence

The first dam in the series to be built will be the 600-1,200 megawatt Hutgyi Dam in northern Karen State - where the Burmese army's largest offensive against the Karen people in the last decade is happening. The offensive resulted in 27,000 people forced from their in the past 12 months — 3,700 now live in Ei Tu Hta camp on the Burma side of the Salween River. Meanwhile Burma, China and Thailand are signing agreements to build dams.

No Discussion, No Transparency and No Public Participation

According to Aidwatch (Australia), the MoU between the Thai and Burmese governments, Section 6 says.

“Each Party shall strictly keep confidential any and all technical, legal and commercial data and information disclosed by the other Party.” Also, “none of the results of the joint study shall be disclosed by any Party to a third party

without the prior written consent.” This goes directly against the Thai constitution where Article 59 states “A person shall have rights to receive information, explanation and reasons from state agencies before the government gives permission for any project that could affect the quality of the environment or life.”

The MoU confirms the government activities are shrouded in secrecy and are decided in ways that violate the Thai constitution and the principles of the World Commission on Dams.

Multi-Billion \$\$\$ Investment for Burma

Transparency International rates Burma as one of the world's five most corrupt countries and the Salween dams would be by far the biggest ever investment in Burma at US \$10 billion, with unexpected costs and delays easily doubling the costs. Even building the Tasang dam would pour a minimum of US \$7 billion into the country and the contracting companies, revenue that helps keep the dictatorship in power. Burma faces a major and prolonged energy crisis, but the country and its people will receive little electricity from the Salween dam projects, as it has been agreed to provide Thailand with the electricity.

"...the dam will drown our village"





Sinking the Salween's Boatmen

Flooding from dam construction on the Salween will destroy vital fishing grounds and scuttle river transport and trade.

Plans by Burma, the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) and China's Sino Hydro Corporation to build five dams on the Salween River are striking fear into local villagers affected by the projects.

Villagers will lose their farms, plantations, trade and transport along the river.

Boatman Saw Tin Aung depends on the river to earn his living so he can feed and educate his family.

"My life is driving boats on the Salween River. I travel up and down this river everyday and I have a good relationship with local people in the area. I have worked this river for many years, but when the dams come to the Salween River it will be the end for our boats."

Saw Tin Aung, 45, lives in Mae Sam Laep and has driven a boat since he was 20. "If dams are built, the boat people will not be able to travel the river anymore. It'll stop my transport service

and cause problems for my livelihood."

According to Saw Tin Aung, local villagers in projected dam areas are worried about the destruction the dams will bring to the natural environment.

"The dams will destroy fishing grounds, drive out wild animals and flood forests. Rivers will be polluted and tens of thousands of people displaced. None of it can be replaced once we lose it."

Saw Tin Aung says the end of his way of life will also happen to all the villagers in the area.

"I have many friends who are doing the same job as I am. So, they are saying that if the dams are built, it will hurt and destroy our livelihood. The local people living along the river are also worried their homes and farmland will be destroyed by the flooding."

Saw Tin Aung says it is always the little people who lose. "Nobody from the government has talked to us about the future of the dams, but then they never do."