

A new report by THWEE Community Development Network, the Karen Environmental and Social Action Network (KESAN), and the Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) reveals how the brand new Asian Highway in Karen State has been built at the expense of communities who had the misfortune of standing in the way of transnational trade interests. The Asian Highway route has contributed to conflict, displacement and involved numerous human rights violations.

As foreign investment continues to pour into Burma/Myanmar, large-scale infrastructure development projects are being implemented at a rapid pace throughout the country. In order to better connect Special Economic Zones like Dawei to the existing trade networks of mainland Southeast Asia, smooth new roads like the Asian Highway are being paved across Burma/Myanmar. The Asian Highway is part of the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) East-West Economic Corridor, intended to ease the flow of trade between Burma/Myanmar and Thailand. However, contrary to development actors' claims, economic growth does not benefit all people in Burma/Myanmar equally.

The report, "[Beautiful Word, Ugly Actions: The Asian Highway in Karen State](#)," documents how various development actors and financiers have contributed to an infrastructure project that violates human rights, and further impoverishes Karen communities that have suffered from conflict. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Thailand's Neighboring Countries Economic Development Cooperation Agency (NEDA) have been financing the construction of the Asian Highway through active conflict zones in Karen State, disregarding international safeguard standards and causing highly destructive environmental and social impacts. It is highly irresponsible for the ADB to finance and endorse a development project in an area where land rights are not clearly defined, and where armed clashes are liable to break out at any time.

Villagers living along the highway route are subject to the whims of the Ministry of Construction, and have been displaced and coerced into accepting unfair compensation for the loss of their lands. They have also had to endure the ravages of armed conflict between the Myanmar military and Ethnic Armed Organizations such as the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army, spurred on by the lucrative trade route that has dispossessed them of their homes and farms. Over 1,000 people had to flee their homes due to clashes over the control of the Asian Highway in July 2015. One year later, not all have been able to return home. For those who have been able to, many are fearful that bullets and mortars will visit their villages once again, as violence has broken out as recently as August 2016.

THWEE, KESAN and KHRG call on the central government, its Ministry of Construction, and the Asian Development Bank to halt the dispossession of people's lands and suspend construction activities in an active conflict zone. An independent review of the already completed Thin Gan Nyi Naung to Kawkareik section of the highway needs to be conducted to adequately compensate and rehabilitate displaced people. Development project actors must respect human rights, and development financiers like the ADB must ensure that their borrowers adhere to international safeguard policy. If the ADB and the government of Burma/Myanmar truly want to achieve sustainable development and alleviate poverty, they must listen to and seriously address the local communities' grievances before the Kawkareik to Eindu section of the highway project goes forward. Large-scale infrastructure projects can contribute greatly to a

nation's economic development, but cannot do so at the expense of those who have already been marginalized.

Please join our press conference at – Myanmar Journalist Network, No. (181), 2nd Floor (B), 36th Street (Middle Block), Kyauktada Township, Yangon.

Time – 11:45 am – 1:30 pm

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