



International Day of Action for Rivers: Statement by Burma Rivers Network (BRN), Save the Salween Network (SSN) and the Burma Environment Working Group (BEWG)

Countrywide gatherings on International Rivers Day to oppose large dams in Burma's conflict zones

Today, on the International Day of Action for Rivers, communities around the country are gathering to oppose plans by the Burmese government and global hydropower industry to build cascades of large dams on Burma's major rivers, mostly in ethnic conflict zones. Events will be held in Kachin, Shan, Karenni, Karen and Mon State.

Under Burma's Energy Master Plan, over 50 planned dams, mostly on the Salween and Irrawaddy rivers and their tributaries, will massively increase hydropower production from 3,000 to 46,000 megawatts by 2030, three quarters of which will be exported to neighbouring countries.

The dams will have devastating, irreversible impacts on Burma's rivers, which are vital arteries for millions of people, nourishing livelihoods and fragile ecosystems -- already under threat from climate change and widespread deforestation.

The dams are also spearheads of Burma Army expansion into contested ethnic areas, and are fuelling the decades-long conflict. Planned dams on the Salween, Shweli and Namtu rivers in northern Shan State and on the Irrawaddy and its tributaries in Kachin State are all catalysts for escalated offensives and counter-offensives in these areas. Nearly all are joint foreign investments.

"Foreign investors should not be building dams in Burma's conflict zones," said Mi Ah Chai, coordinator of Burma Rivers Network. "The dams are fuelling conflict, human rights abuses and displacement, and destroying local environmental resources."

The decision by the Naypyidaw government to push ahead with unpopular dams in ethnic conflict areas also raises serious doubts about their sincerity towards the peace process.

"What is the point of the dialogue process, if the central government has already sold off all our natural resources?" said Mi Ah Chai.

BRN, SSN and BEWG are calling for a moratorium on all large dams until there is a federal settlement to Burma's conflict, giving ethnic peoples the right to decide on their own resources.

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