

Media release by Shan State Farmers' Network (Nam Ma)

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**600 villagers hold forest blessing ceremony to oppose coal mining in Nam Ma**

On June 23, 2017, about 600 people from over 30 villages gathered in Nam Ma village tract, Hsipaw township, northern Shan State, to hold a religious ceremony to bless the forest and call for a stop to coal mining in the area.

The ceremony, led by fifteen monks, was held at the Ho Na Pa forest area, the main watershed for farmers in Nam Ma tract. Rituals began at 9 am, with monks conferring blessings on the surrounding forest, and villagers praying for the longevity of the forest and natural surroundings. Farmers from southern and eastern Shan State also attended.

Over 3,000 residents of Nam Ma tract and surrounding areas have suffered impacts from the coal mining for over ten years, including loss of farmlands, disruption of water supplies, and dust pollution.

Most of the mining is taking place near Na Koon village, using underground tunnels. In recent months, villagers have been alarmed to see cracks appearing in the earth nearby. On June 24, 2017, a 25-foot deep sinkhole suddenly appeared in a cornfield west of the mine. The next day, smoke suddenly began pouring out of one of the mining tunnels.

Another coal mining site in Nam Ma, at Pieng Hsai village, stopped operation in 2015, but the land has not been restored. The mining pit has filled with water, causing nearby land to subside.

The Shan State Farmers' Network (Nam Ma) is demanding a complete stop to the coal mining.

"Stop Coal Mining in Nam Ma" a booklet by the Nam Ma Shan Farmers detailing impacts of the mining is available on (<http://shanhumanrights.org/eng/index.php/shrf-archives/shrf-english-newsletter/323-stop-coal-mining-in-nam-ma>).

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*Monks presiding over forest blessing ceremony*



*Villagers attending forest blessing ceremony*



*Sinkhole which appeared near Na Koon coal mine on June 24, 2017*



*Smoke from coal mining tunnel near Na Koon, June 25, 2017*