



Statement opposing the planned restarting of the Tigyit coal fired power plant

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By the Tigyit Communities and Pa-O Youth Organization (PYO)

Local communities are greatly concerned at recent news that the Tigyit coal fired power plant will be restarted after a one year testing period, and are calling for the plant to be permanently shut down.

Brief background of the Tigyit coal mine

The Tigyit coal mine is the largest coal mine in Burma, producing up to 2,000 tons of coal a day. The mining area, including large waste piles, covers 500 acres, and is continually expanding. Since the start of mining in 2002, dynamite explosions have caused cracks and shaking of nearby houses.

In 2014, coal mining was temporarily suspended, when the coal fired power plant stopped operating. However, it has since resumed, and the piles of mining waste are growing larger. This year combustion of coal in the mine has been so bad that fire engines have had to come and put out the fires.

Background of the coal fired power plant

In 2001, the SPDC government began setting up a 120 megawatt coal fired power plant at Tigyit. In 2002, the China National Heavy Machinery Corporation (CHMC) took over the operation.

In 2014, due to poor engineering, the two 60 megawatt turbines were not producing the targeted amount of electricity, so the operation of the plant was suspended. The Myanmar Investment Commission then permitted the Wu Xi Hua Guang (Myanmar) company to repair the plant. After repairs were finished in 2017, test operations began at the plant, and have been continuing for a year until May 2018. Local people were recently invited to meet government authorities and company officials, and were informed that the plant would soon reopen again.

Impacts of the mine and power plant during the past 10 years

When coal digging first began in 2003, the two nearby villages of TaungPola and Lai Khar, with a population of over 400 people from over 70 houses, were forced to move. During the past ten years, local people have suffered from environmental problems, community divisions, farming problems due to loss of lands and soil erosion, water shortages, difficulty in travelling, and health problems, including high blood pressure, headaches, premature and underweight births, and skin diseases. Now, instead of solving these problems, the authorities are planning to restart the plant, despite the fact the project is clearly a failure, due to poor management, bad decision making, and poor technology.

Effects of the one year trial period of the power plant

1. During the one year trial operation of the plant, the noise of the coalblasting and the running of plant machinery have made it impossible for people living nearby to sleep well, even though they are exhausted from working in their farms.
2. The health problems of people living in the Tigyt area have worsened. If the plant is restarted and run for a further 22 years as planned, they fear they will suffer these health problems for their entire lives. Even though health officials know about the health condition of people in Tigyt, they say these are just normal health issues. Domestic animals of each household, such as chickens, are also facing unusual diseases.
3. Local farmers have no choice but to use water sources which have been polluted by waste water from the mine, even though this is causing dangerous contamination of farms and farm produce.
4. Local people are only being told positive results of the trial operation of the plant, as a justification to reopen it. They are not being told any negative results.

Local people's fears about restarting of the power plant

"I dare not think what will happen to the next generation if the plant runs for another 22 years. We got no benefit from the past ten years when it was running. Local people will have to inhale polluted air. I worry for people's farming livelihoods. Drinking water will be contaminated by ash, and become scarce. I worry all these problems will recur."

"I am very worried about the impacts of coal on the health of pregnant women, children, youth, and old people. Life expectancy will be reduced." "Local people, who rely on nature, must bear the negative impacts of environmental destruction, including air, water and ground pollution."

"I worry that social assistance funds from the project will be unequally shared and cause divisions among the community." "The government, which was elected by the people, should respect the needs and wishes of the people."

"They don't deserve to be government leaders if they ignore people's feelings and needs, and don't take responsibility for them."

"Local people want development based on justice and environmental sustainability. They want the right to freely participate in decision making about local development, and the right to manage it themselves. A government on the path to democracy should take care about this."

Recommendations to invested company and the government

1. To immediately stop the Tigyt coal fired power plant.
2. To solve the problems caused by the project for local people and give adequate compensation.
3. To draw up a local development framework based on local benefit, local management and local decision making.

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