

Press Release

Shan communities and MPs call for cancellation of dams in conflict-torn northern and southern Shan State

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Shan communities and local Members of Parliaments are holding a press conference today in Yangon, to call for an immediate cancellation of the Upper Yeywa dam in northern Shan State and the Upper Kengtawng dam in southern Shan State, citing devastating social and environmental impacts which will inflame the ongoing conflict.

Both dams, still under construction, were started under the previous military regime, without informing or consulting local communities, and lie in heavily militarized conflict zones. Villagers in Hsipaw – where fighting rages until today -- have repeatedly petitioned to stop the Upper Yeywa dam on the Namtu (Myitnge) river, but efforts by Shan MPs to oppose the dam have been voted down in the Naypyidaw parliament.

A new report “From scorched earth to parched earth,” by local Shan researchers, is being launched at the conference, and provides a conflict analysis of dams on the Nam Teng river in Mong Nai, southern Shan State. It describes how the regime’s mass forced relocation campaign in southern Shan State in 1996-1998, involving widespread rape and killing, depopulated areas along the Nam Teng, and paved the way for large-scale Burma Army expansion and dam-building.

The first Kengtawng hydropower project, completed at gunpoint in 2009 above the famous Kengtawng waterfalls, marred forever the beauty of this cherished landmark, and devastated fisheries. Yet, due to engineering faults, it produces only a fraction of the power intended. The Upper Kengtawng dam is poised to have much greater impacts, threatening the health and livelihoods of thousands of villagers downstream in eastern Mong Nai and Larngkhur.

The Nam Teng and Namtu rivers both have rich historical and cultural significance for Shan. Ancient stupas line their banks, and Kengtawng is the birthplace of the hero of the beloved folk-tale “Khun Sarm Law and Nang Oo Peim,” known as the Shan Romeo and Juliet.

“Our rivers have been the lifeblood of our communities for centuries, but are now being dammed and sold off by the government. This is directly fuelling the conflict,” said Sai Khur Hseng of the Shan Sapawa Environmental Organisation. “We are calling for a moratorium on all dam-building in Shan State, including immediate cancellation of the Upper Yeywa and Upper Kengtawng dams.”

Shan communities are also appealing to foreign governments and investors not to support dam construction in Shan State. Companies from Switzerland, Germany, Norway, Japan and China are involved in dam-building on the Namtu and Nam Teng rivers.

The report “[From scorched earth to parched earth](http://www.shanhumanrights.org)” can be viewed on: www.shanhumanrights.org

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