



## **Statement from Karen Rivers Watch for International Day of Action for Rivers and Against Dams**

**March 14, 2023**

Today, on the International Day of Action for Rivers and Against Dams, we celebrate the healthy rivers that play a vital role in our lives, and call on governments, social organizations, and people around the world to stand united in protecting our rivers.

Rivers provide water for agriculture, drinking, and food production and they provide essential ecosystem services for humanity. They are also important for the protection of biodiversity and survival of countless trees, flora, and fauna species. However, living rivers are facing threats due to the building of dams and extraction of water and natural resources. In particular, large-scale hydropower projects built on rivers in Myanmar are having negative effects on the environment and people in river basins.

Large-scale development projects in Myanmar are ignoring the rights of Indigenous and local peoples; their participation rights and rights to their lands. Their rights are not recognised by the centralized system of governance in Myanmar. During the two years since the military coup, environmental damage has increased in Myanmar's ethnic areas, while civic spaces and mechanisms for taking urgent action have broken down.

After the coup, the State Administration Council (SAC) leader announced the resumption of the Hatgyi dam project on the Salween river in Karen state. Military conflicts have occurred at the proposed Hatgyi Dam site since 2014. Gold mining in rivers, and river sand extraction activities have poisoned the waters and impacted local communities and the environment along the river. Along with militarized development, local people are also losing their livelihoods, homes, and lives due to the military's air and ground attacks and many are hiding in forests. Humanitarian aid is urgently needed.

We, Karen Rivers Watch, Karen indigenous people, and Karen civil society partner organizations call upon international governments, UN agencies, investors, and individuals to preserve our healthy rivers and their ecosystems, and halt all large-scale hydropower projects on Myanmar's rivers, which have significant social and environmental impacts. This is especially important at a time when climate change already contributes greatly to environmental degradation.

Today, on the International Day of Action for Rivers and Against Dams, we celebrate the beauty and power of living rivers and renew our commitments to protect them for all people and the planet. We make the following demands:

Karen Nation Union must:

- Oppose all large-scale development and resource extraction projects that confiscate lands, destroy forests and threaten local livelihoods.

- Implement their existing environmental policies and protect rivers, forests resources, endangered species and valuable resources.
- Take action to prevent large business interests profiteering from Kawthoolei's natural resources.
- Resist the military dictatorship, which is perpetuating the centralized system which exploits the resources of ethnic groups, and instead encourage and support local management systems.

National Unity Consultative Council must:

- Begin implementing policies to develop a federal resource management system that respects the rights of indigenous peoples and ethnic nationalities.
- Blacklist companies and entrepreneurs who invest in or implement natural resources extraction projects which financially support the military.
- Cooperate with civil society organizations to advocate to the international community.

International organizations, donors, and UN agencies must:

- Terminate all loan programs to companies attempting to build Mega-dam projects that will damage people's livelihoods and the environment.
- Provide cross-border humanitarian aid to those affected by the ongoing conflicts in Burma through ethnics existing infrastructures.

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