

Date: May 26, 2016

## **Open letter to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi regarding plans by Norway's SN Power to build the Middle Yeywa Dam on the Namtu River**

To: Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, State Counsellor and Foreign Minister, Naypyidaw

On March 30, 2016, we published a report "Save the Namtu River" raising concerns about four planned dams on the Namtu/Myitnge River, including the 700 MW Middle Yeywa dam, planned by Norway's state-owned SN Power in Nawng Khio township of northern Shan State.

Since publishing our report, we have obtained a promotional document summarizing SN Power's pre-feasibility study for the Middle Yeywa dam, completed in June 2015 (see attached). SN Power is currently undertaking a feasibility study for the dam under an agreement with the former Ministry of Electric Power.

We have serious concerns about the findings of their pre-feasibility study, which identified no significant obstacles ("red flags") to the project. Our concerns are as follows:

1. The study makes no mention at all of the ongoing conflict in Shan State, and how the project may impact or be impacted by this conflict. As stated in our report, the issue of natural resources is a key driver of the ethnic conflict, with ethnic forces fighting to resist unitary government control over resources in their areas, and with increased Burma Army militarization around resource extraction projects. Fighting was raging in northern Shan State even while the pre-feasibility study was being conducted, but no mention was made of this. Particularly given the recent escalation of fighting in Kyaukme township (directly east of Nawng Khio), where the Burma Army has launched a large scale offensive, with airstrikes, against Shan State Progress Party/Shan State Army positions just north of the Upper Yeywa dam site, we regard this as an inexcusable omission.

The lack of conflict sensitivity is of particular concern since SN Power is a Norwegian state-owned company, and the Norway government is a leading donor of the "peace process" in Burma.

2. The Initial Environmental and Social Impact Assessment only focused on the section of the river where the Middle Yeywa dam and its reservoir are planned. There is no consideration of the cumulative impacts of the cascade of five dams on the river, which is going to drastically alter the ecology of the river, and all those living along it. It is thus very misleading that the study states that a baseline for "**all key environmental aspects**" has been established," and that the "**River and inundated not a major source of food or resource.**"
3. We dispute the findings in the study: "Initial consultations with local communities and socio-economic survey complete. Good atmosphere, **locals are generally positive.**"

According to our own interviews with local villagers living near the dam site, there has been no meaningful consultation with them about the dam. They have simply been told that the dam is being planned, and have been asked to answer questions for livelihood surveys. They have not

been informed about any potential negative impacts of the dam (let alone any cumulative impacts of the cascade of dams along the river), and have not been asked their opinion about the dam. To conclude that locals are “generally positive” about the dam is therefore seriously misleading.

4. The study states that the proposed project site has “no geological/geotechnical restrictions.” There is no mention at all of the potential earthquake risk, although the planned dam will lie directly over or very close to the Kyaukkyan fault line, along which the largest earthquake in Burma’s history took place, in 1912.

It is extremely worrying that even at this early stage, facts are being ignored or misrepresented by SN Power for its own purposes. We do not want the fate of our beloved river and the tens of thousands relying on it to be in the hands of such an entity.

We therefore urgently reiterate the demands made in our report, as follows:

- To immediately halt all current dam-building plans on the Namtu, including the Upper Yeywa Dam
- Only when there is a negotiated federal settlement to the ethnic conflict, bringing genuine nationwide peace and decentralized natural resource management, should options for future hydropower development along the Namtu river be considered
- Any future plans for hydropower development on the Namtu River must involve a transparent strategic impact assessment along the entire river
- There must be Free Prior and Informed Consent of affected indigenous communities for any future hydropower projects along the Namtu River

Yours sincerely,

Thum Ai,	Shan State Farmers’ Network	Phone: +99 (0) 94-5313-2755
Khur Hseng,	Shan Sapawa Environmental Organisation	Phone: +66 (0) 81-672-2031
Kheun Mai,	Shan Human Rights Foundation	Phone: +66 (0) 94-638-6759

Copies to

- U Pyae Myint Htun, Minister of Electric Power and Energy, Naypidaw
- Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD) headquarters