

Media release by Action for Shan State Rivers (ASSR)

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Shans angered by IFC hydropower meeting in Taunggyi amidst escalating conflict and blocked peace dialogues

Action for Shan State Rivers (ASSR) strongly opposes the hydropower stakeholder discussion being held in Taunggyi today, which is part of a series of meetings to “finalize” a countrywide strategic environmental assessment (SEA) for hydropower development organised by the International Finance Corporation (IFC) since 2016.

From the outset, ASSR has been against this strategic environmental assessment, which is just a ploy to push ahead with the building of large dams for the benefit of the Naypyidaw government and hydropower corporations, against the wishes of local communities.

On December 23, 2017, about 1,000 impacted residents and farmers from all over Shan State protested in Tangyan against proposed hydropower projects on the Salween River, including the Naung Pha dam which will export to power to China.

The Naung Pha dam, like other planned dams in Shan State, lies in a conflict zone where ethnic armed groups have been fighting for equal rights for decades. Any central government attempts to proceed unilaterally with dams in ethnic conflict areas, when control over natural resources is still being negotiated, are dangerous and provocative.

The IFC should have called off its ill-fated assessment long ago. Now, with conflict escalating in all parts of Shan State, and with the next Union Peace Conference in doubt – after preparatory consultations for the Shan National Dialogue were blocked last month by the Burma Army - the holding of the IFC’s meeting in Taunggyi is even more blameworthy.

“It is adding insult to injury for the IFC to hold a stakeholder discussion now in Taunggyi – where we have been blocked from holding our own discussions about ownership of natural resources,” said Sai Khur Hseng of the Shan Sapawa Environmental Organisation.

ASSR also regrets the amount of funding spent by the Australian government on this hydropower assessment, when AusAID, among other donors, has cut all funding for Shan refugees and IDPs along the Thai-Burma border.

Many of the displaced Shan fled from the Burma Army’s mass scorched earth campaign in central Shan State in 1996-1998, which conveniently depopulated the potential flood zone of the planned Mong Ton dam on the Salween River.

Contact

Sai Khur Hseng +95- 92- 6436- 2973

Sai Thum Ai +95- 99- 7187- 9982

Sai Hor Hseng +66- 62- 941- 9600