August 9, 2010

Statement by the Karenni Development Research Group (KDRG)

Karenni people oppose new Salween dam plans by SPDC and Chinese investors

On the occasion of the 62nd anniversary of the Karenni national resistance movement, the KDRG strongly denounces the new plans by the Burmese military regime and Chinese investors to build a giant hydropower dam on the Salween River in Karenni State.

The SPDC regime and Datang (Yunnan) United Hydropower Developing Co. signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on January 7, 2010 to build a 600 megawatt dam on the Salween River at Ywa Thit village. Since then two surveys have been carried out at Kyauk Kyin near Ywa Thit, hundreds of workers from central Burma have been sent to construct roads and construction materials have begun to be transported to the dam site.

There has been no transparency and no consultation with the local Karenni people about this project, which will submerge large tracts of land along the Salween, the original homelands of thousands of Karenni refugees sheltering in Thailand who have fled the regime's scorched earth campaigns in this area.

Under the same MOU the SPDC and Datang have also agreed to dam the Thabet and Pawn rivers in Karenni State to produce 110 megawatts and 130 megawatts respectively.

The Karenni people already have bitter experience of the damaging impacts of giant dams, since Burma's first major hydropower project was built at Lawpita in Karenni State 50 years ago, forcibly relocating over 12,000 villagers. 95% of the electricity produced from Lawpita has been exported to other parts of Burma, and 18,000 landmines laid around the project for security remain a bane for local people.

These new dam plans are a further violation of the rights of the Karenni people, who have been suffering systematic human rights abuses by the Burma Army for decades, including mass forced relocation, burning of villages, killing, torture, and rape of innocent villagers. The lack of basic rights was what led the Karenni people to start their national resistance movement 62 years ago, on August 9, 1948.

KDRG therefore strongly denounces these new dam plans, and urges the SPDC and Datang Company to immediately suspend all their dam plans in Karenni State.

For further details of the impacts of the Lawpita Hydropower Project, please see KDRG's 2006 report "Dammed by Burma’s Generals" at www.burmariversnetwork.org

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