

STOP the Dam Offensive against the Karenni



The Karenni, one of Burma's main ethnic groups, have been suffering for over half a century from military aggression and abuses by successive ruling juntas. Now they are facing a new threat: the damming of rivers across their state by Chinese investors.

In January 2010, the state-owned Datang Corporation of China signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Burma's regime to build three dams in Karenni State, including a 600 Megawatt dam on the mainstream Salween, and two others on its tributaries, the Pawn and Thabet rivers.

Plans by Chinese and Thai companies to build dams on the Salween in Burma have been highly controversial for years for their human costs and potential environmental impact. The seven planned dams are all sited in conflict zones; dam workers have been killed by land mines and artillery. Military offensives in the area of the southernmost planned dam have recently caused thousands of refugees to flee to Thailand.

In Karenni State, engineers guarded by armed soldiers are currently surveying for both the Ywathit Dam on the Salween and the Pawn River Dam. The Pawn Dam is likely to be built first to power construction at Ywathit and will be devastating for the Yintale people who live along the Pawn River and now number just 1,000.

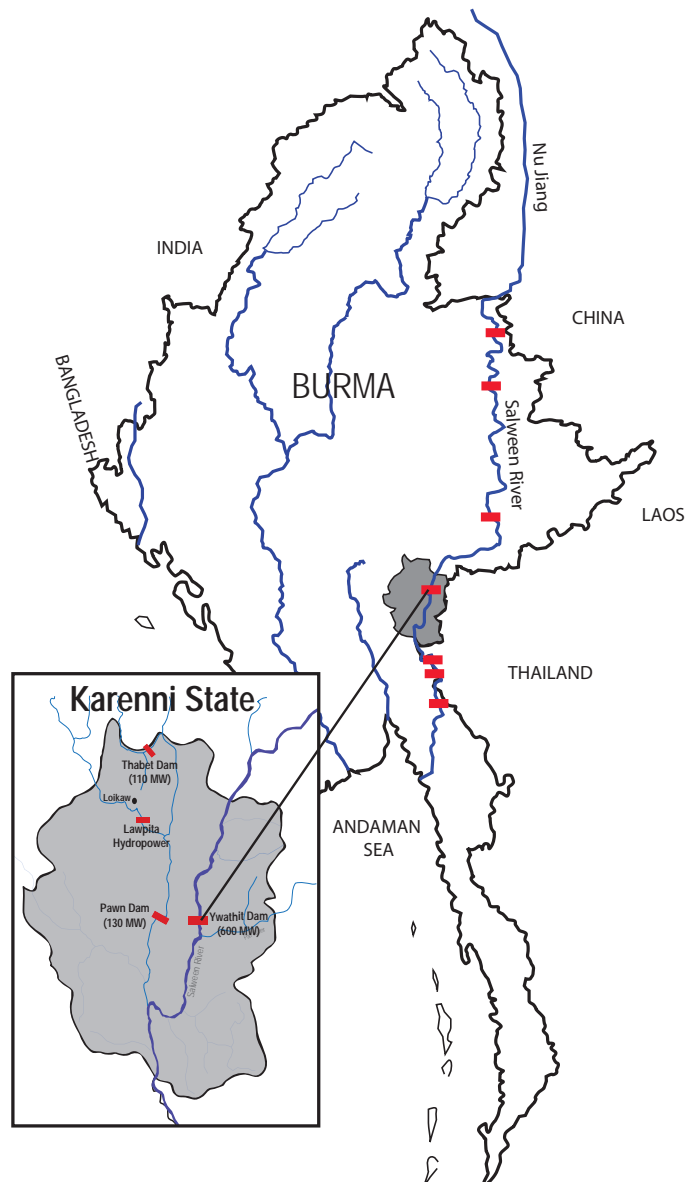
Planned Dams in Karenni State

Ywathit Dam: 600 MW

(Locally known as Kyauk Kyin or "Red Stone")

Pawn Dam: 130 MW

Thabet Dam: 110 MW



6 concerns about dams in Karenni State



1

Fueling conflict and instability

The dams will further fuel conflict as more troops are being brought in to guard the projects and staff. The area remains unstable: armed resistance groups continue to operate, and divisions exist among ethnic "Border Guard Forces" (BGF) that have recently been brought under the Burma Army.

Amid this situation and given the Karenni experience with hydropower to date, the dams will increase resentment and animosity against Burma's regime and dam investors. In December 2010 a convoy of Burma Army soldiers escorting engineers to the dam site was attacked and three people were reportedly killed.

Civil War and Forced Relocation

Burma's ethnic peoples have been struggling for equal rights for decades and their call for a genuine federal system of government has been denied until today. Fighting between Karenni resistance forces and successive Burmese military rulers has been continuing for decades.

The Burma Army has employed anti-insurgency programs against civilians in Karenni State which have caused widespread internal displacement, including a large-scale forced relocation in the Salween valley in 1996. A total of 212 villages, at least 37,000 people, were displaced, largely from the potential flood zones of the newly planned dams. Driven into overcrowded relocation sites, many hid in the jungle, or fled to Thailand as refugees.



2

Forging ahead in secret

Although engineers are currently surveying the dam sites, the local populations have not been informed of the dam projects and no one is allowed to go near the sites. No environmental, social, or health impact assessments have been disclosed for the Ywathit or Pawn dams and no baseline data about the Salween in Burma has been established due to the ongoing conflict.

Lawpita: first bitter experience of hydropower development

Lawpita, the first large-scale hydropower project built in Burma, forced over 12,000 people from their homes. Thousands of Burma Army soldiers came in to secure the project, resulting in abuses against the local population including forced labor, sexual violence, and extrajudicial killings. Today there are an estimated 18,000 landmines surrounding the power plants and pylons. Water use was prioritized for the power plants, causing water shortages and destructive floods that destroyed crops. Despite these costs, still today eighty percent of the local population has no access to electricity, as most is sent to central Burma.

It is unknown where the electricity from new dams in Karenni State will be sent. Given the trend of other dam projects in Burma, it is feared that most will be sold to Thailand or China, or prioritized for Burma's military and its cronies.

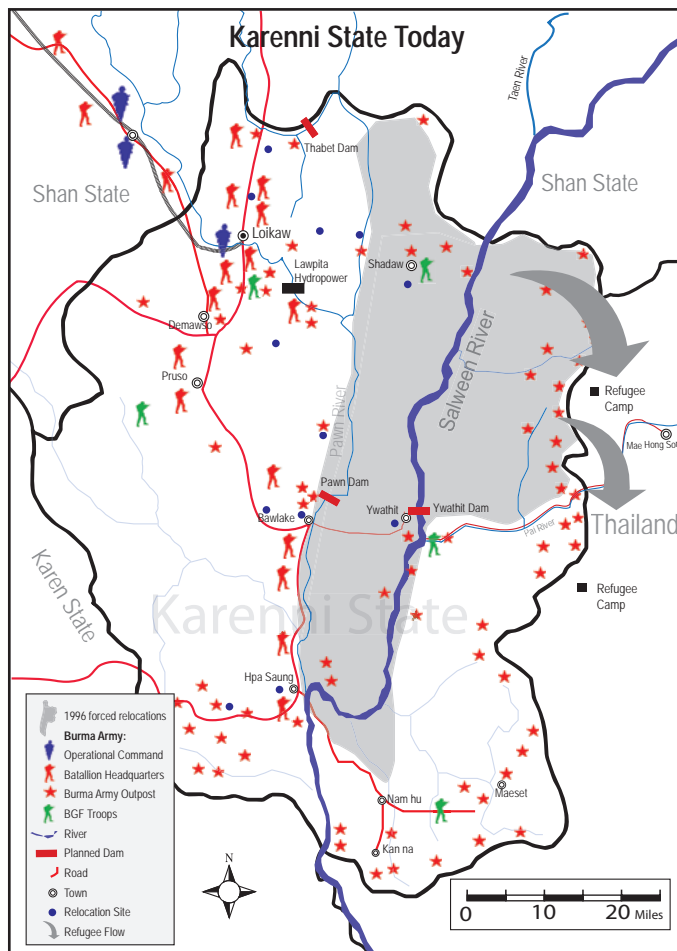


Destroying forests and biodiversity

Logging has recently been increasing in the area of the Ywathit dam; there are logging camps and saw mills along the Salween all the way to the Shan State border. These forests are in the bio-diverse ecoregion of the Kayah-Karen Montane Rainforests. Both dams will also negatively impact fisheries; the Salween is home to at least 47 species that can be found nowhere else in the world.



Logging near Bawlake



Reducing agricultural production

The Salween is a sediment-rich river, providing vital nutrients to gardens and farms along its banks for hundreds of kilometers downstream and helping to sustain the nearly ½ million people living in the Salween's delta area of Mon State, an important rice-producing region. The dam will block these sediments from reaching the farms that need them, decreasing productivity and impacting food security.



Karenni villagers prepare offerings for a traditional ceremony

Threatening indigenous peoples

Thousands of indigenous peoples who were pushed off their lands during forced relocation campaigns have yet to return due to the ongoing conflict; the dams will make such a return even more difficult.

The dams are particularly threatening the Yintale, a sub-group of the Karenni that now number just 1,000. The Yintale rely on lowland farms near the banks of the Salween and Prawn rivers for their livelihood, traditionally planting millet and sesame as main crops. Their ancient capital, Bawlake, is just downstream of the Prawn Dam.



Yintale people at the Salween River

6

Water surges and shortages

Water will be stored and released from behind the dams according to electricity demands, not the safety of downstream residents or agricultural needs. Sudden surges and drops in water levels can be fatal. Water shortages and potential salt-water intrusion at the delta would be disastrous for farmers. Finally, the dam is located near fault lines; an earthquake could cause a dam break, leading to devastating floods.

This sign was posted to warn residents about unexpected and dangerous changes in water flows at the Shweli 1 Dam in northern Burma. Women, who use the river more than men for domestic tasks, are especially vulnerable to unpredictable water surges.

Datang Corporation: A Stain on the Global Compact

Datang Corporation is a member of the United Nations Global Compact, a policy initiative for businesses that are committed to aligning their operations and strategies with ten universally accepted principles in the areas of human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption. In its Guidance on Responsible Business in Conflict-Affected and High-Risk Areas, the Global Compact specifically encourages businesses to make sure that they are not complicit in human rights abuses, institute grievance mechanisms, and identify how their business operations interact with conflict dynamics so that they do no harm.



Call

Dam projects should not be considered without carrying out full environmental and social impact assessments along the entire length of rivers. There can be no such assessments and no sustainable development without genuine peace. We therefore call for an immediate moratorium on all dams in Karenni State and on the Salween.



www.burmariversnetwork.org
www.salweenwatch.org