

February 7, 2011

To: H.E. Abhisit Vejjajiva, Prime Minister of Thailand

Subject: Calling for the Hatgyi Dam to be stopped immediately

Dear Sir,

We are a coalition of organizations representing communities living along the Salween River in Burma and Thailand. We would like to take the opportunity of the public hearings at Mae Sam Laep and Sob Moei on the Thai-Burma border on February 8 and 9 to reiterate our strong opposition to the building of the Hatgyi Dam. The current renewed intensification of fighting in the area, the attendant human rights abuses and continued refugee flows make it clear that this project must be abandoned.

EGAT representatives have claimed that there has been no fighting in the area for 10 years. However, the Hatgyi dam lies in Karen heartlands that have been contested between resistance forces and troops of the Burmese military regime for many decades.

EGAT's own staff have directly suffered from the conflict. Two staff were killed in two separate incidents at the dam site in 2006 and 2007 by landmines and artillery attacks. The EGAT governor then called for increased security measures at the site, thereby condoning greater military presence and exacerbation of the conflict and abuses in the area.

In mid-2009, the Burmese regime launched a new military offensive in order to establish control of key access routes to the dam site, which led to displacement of over 3,000 refugees into Thailand.

Since the November 7, 2010 election in Burma, conflict has greatly escalated along the entire border area, as many ceasefire groups have refused to come under the regime's direct control as Border Guard Forces. Many units of the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army, headquartered adjacent to the Hatgyi dam site, are now actively fighting the regime's troops, and together with the Karen National Union, now control large swathes of territory in Karen State, including key areas in the vicinity of the dam.

Shelling of villages, forced portering and other abuses against civilians have driven tens of thousands of refugees to flee in the past few months, including hundreds from directly upstream of the dam site. Many of those whose homes are upstream of the dam on the Burmese side have already been displaced and dispossessed.

EGAT has not followed procedures necessary to properly evaluate the Hatgyi Dam. Furthermore it has inaccurately portrayed the situation regarding the project's impacts and risks. Objections by local communities at the Hatgyi dam site have not been recorded, recognized or addressed.

By proceeding with the Hatgyi Dam plans, Thailand risks being drawn deeper into a worsening conflict, fuelling tensions and becoming further complicit in the Burmese regime's abuses. For the above-mentioned reasons, we strongly urge the Thai government to immediately halt plans for the Hatgyi Dam.

Yours sincerely,

Salween Watch Coalition

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Cc R. Hon. Sathit Wongnongtoey, Minister of Prime Minister's Office