

Intervention Statement of Karenni Development Research Group
on the Environmental Sustainability and Human Rights

The 12th Session of UN Working Group on Minorities, Geneva

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Mr. Chair, Thank you for giving me opportunity to take the floor. I am representing the Karenni Development Research Group, and will speak on behalf of Karenni people, one of the ethnic minority in eastern Myanmar. Karenni State is located in the far East of Myanmar (Burma) and northwest of Thailand.

Mr. Chair, I would like to raise our concern regarding the development projects of the military government in Myanmar (Burma).

In the United Nations Declaration on Minority article **(1.1) said that the state shall protect the existence and the national or ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identity of minorities** but the government has failed to ensure the rights of ethnic minority to preserve their identity, characteristic, and tradition. For many years, instead of protecting their rights, the government has been creating large scale of internally displacement in eastern Myanmar, as well as refugees crossing into neighbouring countries. They are constantly facing forced relocation, forced labor, torture, and all kinds of human rights violations by the military.

Here we are much more concerned by the government's plan to build three hydroelectric dams along Salween River in the absence of local minority people's consent. The Asian Development Bank, EGAT (Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand) and MDX Public Companies Limited of Thailand, and Synohydro Corporation Limited of China are going to invest in this project with Burma's generals. The government plans to sell electricity to neighboring Thailand, leaving as many as twenty-eight Karenni villages drowned, and 30,000 people will be affected by project.

In addition, the dam will bring an irreversible damage to the environment. Forests will have to be destroyed in order to build roads. Animals that dwell and rely on the forest will extinct, and species that grow along the river will disappear forever when the lake rises.

In the UNDM, article (2.3) said that Persons belonging to minorities have the right to participate effectively in decisions affecting the community which they belong to. However, the local minority people have not been allowed to participate in this economic progress and development project. The Karenni people have learnt well from the experience of Lawpita Hydro electric Dam. Many have lost their farmland, without getting any compensation from the government; many have been forced to leave their homes, and underwent forced labor. However, the power that is generated near their homes is not for them.

If the proposed dam is built, the whole area of Pasaung and Bawlakeh, where Yintalai tribe, one of the indigenous groups in Karenni State, has inhabited since prehistoric time, will be

completely submerged. The result will leave a great loss for the Yintalai tribe such as losing their traditional livelihood, homeland and historical sites permanently. There are only about one thousand Yintalai people today and if the government does not try to preserve their identity, they might disappear over the years.

Mr Chair my recommendations are

1. To the UN, to use their mandate to stop the extinction of the Yintalai tribe in Myanmar. I appeal to them to use their influence with the Myanmar government, the royal Thai government, and the Chinese government to ensure that the homeland, tradition, and identity of these proud peoples are not drown.
2. To the Military Government of Myanmar: To stop all plans to build dams on the Salween River, to immediately stop military operations, and end all human rights abuses in the ethnic minority areas. To review their regional development policies and to implement the policies that include the local minority's participation in the decision making process.
3. To the Thai and China government: Immediately stop all plans to jointly develop hydropower with the military government of Myanmar, including the building of dams along the Salween River.
4. To the Asia Financial institutes, Such as Asian Development Bank to stop their technical support, and other business sectors to stop their financial assistance to the governments that invest in the Salween dam project with the military government of Myanmar.
5. We would also like to urge the members of the WGM to encourage the UN Security Council to put the situation in Myanmar on its agenda particularly highlighting the government's action on ethnic minorities.

Thank you for your attention Mr. Chair

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Visit: www.salweenwatch.org , there is a report called "Dammed by Burma's Generals"