

Joint Statement from KHRG and KRW:

The Construction of the Hatgyi Hydropower Plant Along the Salween River Must be Stopped

June 11, 2021

SAC Chairman Min Aung Hlaing visited Karen State and had a meeting with SAC members at Hpa An on May 31st 2021. In that meeting, he mentioned the possibility of resuming the Hatgyi Hydropower Dam project. Human Rights Group (KHRG) and the Karen Rivers Watch (KRW) stand alongside local communities in strong opposition to General Min Aung Hlaing's recent announcement that the State Administrative Council (SAC) intends to push ahead with the construction of the Hatgyi hydropower mega-dam on the Salween River. This would be catastrophic for ethnic and Indigenous communities in the Salween River Basin.

The Hatgyi dam is a planned 1,360 megawatt dam on the Salween River in Karen areas. More than 10 million people rely on the Salween River and the Hatgyi dam will have severe negative impacts on ecosystems in the area, along with people's livelihoods, wellbeing, and cultural integrity. Human rights violations have already been linked to the planned project site, including forced labor, rape, and forced displacement of over 5,000 people. Much of this displacement is due to conflict between ethnic Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and the Myanmar military around the dam area. Conflict has broken out around the proposed site several times from 2014 - 2018.

The dam has been met with strong opposition from communities, environmental organisations, and civil society. Local communities launched a powerful campaign against dams on the Salween River, which eventually led to the Hatgyi dam construction being put on hiatus, until now.

Since the recent military coup, there has been intensified conflicts in ethnic areas across the country. In Karen territories alone, military airstrikes and ground artillery attacks have killed and injured dozens of people and displaced around 70,000. The SAC regime is looking to extract economic revenue from natural resources to fund their military activities and so are pushing ahead with mega-dam investment along the Salween River. This will exacerbate the dire humanitarian crisis in Karen State caused by the ongoing SAC military offensives.

Due to the instability that followed the coup, people across the country are facing a multitude of hardships. Therefore, it is unacceptable that the SAC is trying to push for the hydropower dam project to generate more revenue to fund its military while civilians have no economic and physical security. It is more important than ever to demand the protection of the Salween River which is of great importance for ecology, indigenous culture, and livelihoods. Therefore, we make the following urgent demands:

(1) The SAC military also known as Tatmadaw must immediately withdraw from Karen territories. They are committing atrocities against civilians whilst they invade Karen territories in order to establish military bases, and push ahead with investment projects such as dams, threatening and destroying local communities and the natural environment.

(2) All planned controversial infrastructure development projects must be cancelled including the construction of mega-dams on rivers all across Myanmar, and including planned mega-dams and infrastructure projects along the Salween River. This is because rivers and lakes are an essential lifeline for our local people to live in peace.

(3) The international community must oppose and sanction any and all sources of economic revenue going to the Myanmar military regime, including hydropower projects, and other investment projects.

(4) All concerned actors, including state-owned and private companies that are commissioned to construct, or are otherwise investing in, the development and implementation of the Hatgyi hydropower dam project, must stop all plans and cooperation with regard to the construction of the dam.

Contact persons:

Saw Tha Phoe (KRW) - +95 978 263 9714

Saw Nanda Hsue (KHRG) - +66 811 297 564