

Statement on government plans to resume the Dawei special economic zone (SEZ) project

Dawei, Tanintharyi Region, Myanmar
February 20, 2018

We are deeply concerned by the Myanmar government's plans to resume the Dawei SEZ. Dawei society – from the sea to the fields to the highlands, from Dawei town to all surrounding areas, from Dawei migrants working abroad to their friends and family in Dawei – will experience profound and long-lasting changes as a result of the SEZ. Dawei society's land and livelihoods, shared histories and traditions, ecologies and cultures, and ability to build common futures are all under threat.

We call on all project proponents to urgently reconsider plans to resume the Dawei SEZ. We make the following demands to the Governments of Myanmar, Thailand, and Japan, as well as project contractors, such as Italian-Thai Development (ITD), which is currently mired in environmental scandal in Thailand.

1) *The project must not resume unless all previous problems have been fully and completely resolved.*

In the Dawei SEZ project areas, paddy lands have been destroyed. Vast areas of land have been seized according to no legal process. Rivers, streams, and fishing areas have been blocked or polluted. Some villagers face a struggle just to survive, their livelihoods having been ruined. These harms result from earlier phases of project implementation. Unless they are fully resolved according to villagers' satisfaction, the project must not resume.

2) *Conduct a site-wide environmental impact assessment (EIA), as required under Myanmar law.*

EIAs have been conducted for the 10 projects under the initial phase of the SEZ project. However, no site-wide EIA has been conducted, which is required under Myanmar law. This site-wide EIA must be conducted. That EIA, moreover, must address communities' long-standing systemic concerns over how the previous EIAs were conducted, including lack of meaningful consultation and little or no feedback opportunities. The project must not resume unless a site-wide EIA is conducted and approved.

3) *Provide accurate, timely, and accessible information about all aspects of project implementation.*

Since the beginning, project proponents have failed to provide basic information that is of the utmost importance to villagers' lives and livelihoods. On matters such as relocation, compensation, employment opportunities, and environmental impacts, proponents must provide accurate and timely information in a way that is accessible for all people, regardless of gender, income, age, and livelihood. Misleading information, such as the inflated employment estimates given by the government, create false hopes and manipulate consent. The project must not resume unless proponents commit to providing truthful information in a timely and accessible manner.

4) *Ensure meaningful community participation in all aspects of project decision-making.*

Local communities must have the opportunity to give or withhold their consent to the project overall, as well as specific elements like compensation, relocation, and surveying processes. This means changing the narrative of the project, where proponents assume that providing compensation and wage labour is the best and natural solution for local people. Instead of this narrow approach, local people must be able to develop and choose their own futures, beyond narrow options given by proponents. The project must not resume unless proponents are committed to ensuring this kind of meaningful community participation in all aspects of project decision-making.

5) *Pursue alternative development strategies without delay, such as sustainable agriculture, fisheries, and community-based tourism.*

Instead of a top-down project based on dirty industries, the Myanmar government must urgently pursue alternative development strategies based on the existing lives and livelihoods of Dawei society. The government must foster policies that protect and develop small-scale, labour-intensive practices like peasant farming, fishing, livestock rearing, and customary forest use. These practices provide livelihoods and maintain the environment for the vast majority of people in Dawei. They support social solidarity, and forms of life that question the assumption that modern industry and market capitalism are the natural end points for all societies. This is why Dawei CSOs promote alternative strategies and policies for development, such as sustainable agriculture, fisheries, and community-based tourism. We demand the government pursue these alternative strategies immediately and with serious intent.

Finally, Dawei society deserves an open and honest reckoning over who will benefit if the SEZ project resumes. Who will gain, and who will lose? We maintain grave reservations over who really benefits from dirty industries and resource extraction: a few political, economic, and military elites. For this reason and all reasons above, we call on project proponents to carefully reconsider their plans to resume the Dawei SEZ. Instead, we must all build alternative futures, not just for Dawei society but Myanmar overall.

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4. Tanintharyi River Indigenous People Network (TRIP-NET)
5. Community Sustainable Livelihoods and Development (CSLD)
6. Rays of Kamoethway Indigenous People and Nature (RKIPN)

7. Paung Ku
8. Progressive Voice
9. Community Response Group (ComReG)
10. IFI Watch Myanmar
11. Myanmar China Pipeline Watch Committee
12. Andin Youth Group, Pharlain Community
13. Capacity Building for Youth (Mon, Karen, Dawei)
14. Farmers and Landworkers Union (Myanmar)
15. Environmental Conservation and Farmer Development Organization (Shan)
16. ကမ်းခြေအားမာန် ရေလုပ်သားဖွံ့ဖြိုးတိုးတက်ရေးအဖွဲ့
17. Thanphyuzayut Mon Youth
18. Belin Network
19. Pyar Taung Social Development
20. သင်မြတ်လိုသူများ၏ ငြိမ်းချမ်းရေးလမ်းစဉ်အဖွဲ့.(POPP)
21. Action Groups for Farmers Affairs
22. ရွှေခြင်္သေ့လူမှုစောင့်ရှောက်ရေးအဖွဲ့(ရွှေဘို)
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25. Bedar
26. Shwe Maw Won
27. Thilawa Social Development Group
28. Myanmar Alliance for Transparency & Accountability (Mandalay Regional Working Group)
29. The Mekong Butterfly
30. Community Resource Center Foundation (CRC)
31. Spirit in Education Movement (SEM)
32. Extra Territorial Obligation Watch (ETO Watch)
33. EarthRights International (ERI)
34. Ecological Alert and Recovery - Thailand (EARTH)
35. Focus on the Global South
36. Land Watch Thai