



PRESS RELEASE

## Activists to urge ADB to stop indirect assistance to Burma's Junta for Salween River Dam and Asia Highway Project

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At the Asian Development Bank's 40<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Board of Governors (AGM) in Kyoto, Japan May 4-7 activists are set to call on the Asia Development Bank (ADB) to cease providing technical assistance to Burma via the Greater Mekong Subregion program. They will urge the ADB to seriously address concerns regarding the ADB's involvement with the military junta in Burma and improve accountability, transparency, and protection of the most marginalized citizens of the ADB Developing Member Countries.

The meeting will be attended by government officials - including Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors - as well as business leaders, investment bankers, academics, journalists, and representatives of international organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from around the world.

Although the ADB has not given any new loans to Burma since 1986, the ADB supports a range of regional projects which involve large-scale development projects in Burma. Two controversial projects include the Asian Highway component of the East-West Economic Corridor initiative, and the *Ta Sang* Dam on the Salween River of the proposed Mekong Power Grid. These projects will cause enormous human and environmental consequences and adversely affect areas of Burma valued for their biodiversity, such as the Salween River Basin and the Kayah-Karen Montane Rainforests.

In 2002, an ADB funded grant specifically identified the *Ta Sang* Dam project to be a part of the Mekong Power Grid. The *Ta Sang* Dam is slated to be built on the longest remaining free-flowing river in all of Southeast Asia in an area in Burma already suffering the atrocities of civil war.

Last month, Burmese military authorities forced over 400 villagers to attend the official "celebration" ceremony to launch construction of the *Ta Sang* Dam. In Southern Shan State, Burma, over 300,000 people have already been forcibly relocated from the *Ta Sang* dam area. Chana Maung, Asia Director of human rights group EarthRights International explained, "if built, the *Ta Sang* dam will drive thousands more from their homes and will involve more forced relocations by the Burmese military. Increased militarization has already led to an increase in reports of torture, extrajudicial killing, and other human rights abuses in the *Ta Sang* area."

The Asia Highway project of the East-West Economic Corridor will create a transportation corridor running the entire width of mainland Southeast Asia. The Thai government has already allocated 600-million-baht for construction of the highway in Burma. The PSV Consultant Co is now asking the Burmese junta to provide security for the Thai survey team working in Burma.

Naing Htoo, Burma Project Field Coordinator of EarthRights International stated, "It has been well documented that when Burma's military acts as a security force for development projects, the result is systematic human rights abuses, as was the case with the Yadana-Yetagun Pipeline."

According to a recent report published by the Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG), construction of the Asia Highway in Burma has already resulted in land confiscation, forced labor, and new roads used to deploy troops to further encroach into areas previously outside of the SPDC's control.