

Press release by Action for Shan State Rivers

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Local Shans welcome Engie's withdrawal from Upper Yeywa dam, urge other companies to follow suit

Local communities in northern Shan State are greatly encouraged that French company Engie has pulled out of the Upper Yeywa dam project, and are urging all other foreign companies involved in dams on the Namtu/Myitnge river to follow suit.

The news was broken by Burma Campaign UK, who had received a letter from Engie on January 21, 2019, stating that their subsidiary, the German company Lahmeyer, was no longer involved in the Upper Yeywa dam project, and asking to be removed from the BCUK's "Dirty List" of companies linked to human rights violations in Burma.

Engie did not give a reason for the pullout, but were likely worried for the risk to their reputation. There has been frequent news about local protests against the Upper Yeywa dam, and armed conflict around the area. There have also been several land collapses at the dam site, raising concerns about the dam's stability.

"This is a great victory for us," said Nang Lao Kham, whose village Ta Long will be submerged if the Upper Yeywa dam is built. "We urge other companies to follow Engie's lead and pull out of all the dams on the Namtu river."

On December 5, 2018, after holding a press conference in Yangon, impacted villagers delivered a written appeal to several foreign embassies in Yangon – including China, Japan, Germany, Switzerland, and Norway - asking them to stop involvement in all four planned dams on the Namtu river. All the embassies accepted the letter except the Chinese.

"We welcome this pullout by Engie," said Sai Than Zin, Shan Nationalities League for Democracy MP for Hsipaw. "Dams are violating the rights of ethnic peoples and fuelling conflict."

Sai Than Zin had argued against a budget allocation for the Upper Yeywa dam in the Naypyidaw Lower House in September 2018, but the budget passed by 501 votes to 28. During the debate, Deputy Energy Minister U Htun Naing had listed the names of European companies involved in the project, apparently to inspire confidence in its stability – but failed to mention Lahmeyer's links to Engie/Tractabel, the consulting engineer for the Xe-Pian Xe-Namnoy dam which collapsed in Laos in July 2018, killing hundreds and displacing thousands.

Foreign companies still involved in the Upper Yeywa dam project include: Switzerland's Stucky SA; France's IPGRB; China's Yunnan Machinery Import and Export Co. Ltd., and Zhejiang Orient Engineering; and Japan's Toshiba, and High Tech Concrete Technology Co Ltd.

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