

## Media Advisory

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## Burma Army's actions in Karen State threaten to expand fighting, endangering peace process and refugee return

Fighting is directly linked to Hat Gyi dam, Karen leader says

**YANGON, Myanmar** (Sep 2016) --- A continued Burma military offensive into the contested Hat Gyi dam area threatens to ignite fighting with the KNLA and imperils a 4-year-old ceasefire, says Karen Rivers Watch, a network of Karen community-based organizations working to protect the Salween River.

**What:** Karen Rivers Watch press conference on fighting in Karen State

**Where:** Orchid Hotel, 10F, No. 91, Anawrahta Road, Pazundaung Township, Yangon, Myanmar. Tel: +95 9254614813

**When:** Thursday, September 29<sup>th</sup>, 2016; 10:00 am-12:00 pm

While the Burmese government and Karen leaders continue holding historic peace talks, fresh outbreaks of fighting between the Burma Army-supported Border Guard Force and a splinter group of the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army in Karen State have thrown into serious doubt hopes that victims of civil war could finally go home. In early September, over 5,000 villagers living east and south of the proposed Hat Gyi dam site were forced to flee their homes.

Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) sources say there are strong indications that the military is seeking to expand and reinforce its territorial control in Karen State in order to secure the area around the controversial Hat Gyi Dam site, which is partially controlled by the KNLA, the armed wing of the Karen National Union (KNU). The KNU is the largest Karen armed organization and a ceasefire signatory. The long-delayed Hat Gyi Dam, planned by Chinese and Thai companies primarily for electricity export to Thailand, will flood large areas and disrupt the free flowing Salween River, which millions of people depend on.

“The fighting along Mae Tha Waw road allows more Burmese troops and BGF troops to take control of the areas in Karen State,” said Gen. Baw Kyaw Heh, second in command of the KNLA. “The Mae Tha Waw road opens access to the Hat Gyi Dam site.”

Karen leaders and villagers argue that this fighting is the most recent example of the Burma Army's long policy of divide and rule, and is linked to corporate interests in natural resources. “In order to implement the plan for Hat Gyi Dam, the Burmese and BGF must have full control of the road and the surrounding areas,” added Gen. Baw Kyaw Heh.

Militarization for private infrastructure development will only worsen conflict in Karen State, jeopardizing the ongoing peace process and preventing the return of refugees, warns Karen Rivers Watch. Economic development that requires violence against ethnic people cannot be the way forward for a democratic Burma.