



Media Release from Karen Peace Support Network

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New Report: Japan - Burma Plan Could Fuel Conflict in Ethnic Areas

Japan's new development plans for Southeast Burma could fuel conflict rather than promote peace, warns the largest network of ethnic Karen organizations in the country in a report it will release today in Yangon.

The Karen Peace Support Network (KPSN) launches its report today - *Critique of Japan International Cooperation Agency's Blueprint for Development in South-Eastern Burma/Myanmar* – at the Myanmar Journalist Network (MJN) office in Yangon. The report by the network of nearly 30 organizations calls for a moratorium on large-scale development projects until there is peace and political stability in the country. The KPSN is also calling on Japan's development arm, JICA, to engage with civil society organizations at all levels of project planning, design, and implementation in order to avoid the risk of conflict.

The full report is available here ([Myanmar](#) / [English](#))

A brief summary and recommendations is available here ([Myanmar](#) / [English](#))

JICA has recently issued a blueprint titled *Preparatory Survey for the Integrated Regional Development for Ethnic Minorities in the South-East Myanmar*. This blueprint proposes industrial development in Karen and Mon States, focusing on upgrading and expanding road networks, establishing industrial estates, creating urban infrastructure, and promoting industrial agriculture such as rubber plantations. This project is purportedly to aid in the return and settlement of refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Karen and Mon States. However, KPSN warns JICA that its blueprint is premature and flawed, potentially exacerbating conflict in the region. By working primarily with the central government and its appointed state governments in planning major development projects, JICA's approach legitimizes and reinforces existing centralized government structures while ignoring the voices of local people, including the refugees it supposedly aims to help.

JICA's blueprint assumes that refugees and IDPs will voluntarily return when more development occurs, and it assumes that large-scale industry and infrastructure developments are appropriate for the area and will be implemented in parallel with the peace process. KPSN challenges these assumptions. The current peace process has not yet led to a meaningful decentralization of constitutional powers, whereby local ethnic peoples have a voice in government development policies. The failure of the central government to grant equal rights to ethnic peoples and respect their land rights while it exploits local natural resources remain key causes of the more than 60 years of conflict in ethnic areas. It is indeed dangerous to ignore the underlying causes of conflict in the region, and to invest money or technical support without consulting communities or paying heed to their concerns.

"JICA is ignoring the people it is claiming it wants to help and could end up actually hurting them rather than helping them," said Saw Paul Sein Twa, one of the coordinators of the Karen Peace

Support Network. “We are concerned that JICA’s blueprint neither sufficiently recognizes the uncertain political context nor proposes people-centred development alternatives. We hope that JICA will talk to us about our people’s concerns for the sustainable development of our country.”

There is no doubt that our communities need the right kinds of international aid and technical assistance, and we welcome the goodwill of the Japanese people. The problem is that 1) this blueprint does NOT represent the goodwill of the Japanese people and 2) does NOT serve the best interests of the Karen people. If JICA can change its ways and commit to working for real people-centered, sustainable development, KPSN is willing to collaborate with the agency.

The report makes the following key recommendations:

1. JICA’s engagement with the southeast must be informed by a deep, comprehensive, and independent analysis of the causes of conflict in the region;
2. JICA must make explicit guarantees that the process and implementation of development in the Southeast will at the very least honor international humanitarian development principles;
3. JICA must ensure that a meaningful Strategic Environmental Assessment be conducted, integrating environmental considerations into its policies, plans and programs;
4. JICA must reform its consultation process to be consistent with its own stated principles of seeking consensus, by engaging the full partnership of civil society organizations in all levels of project planning, design, and implementation;
5. JICA should work together with KPSN on the creation of a representative team to lead the consultation, planning and implementation processes;
6. JICA should develop a system of full information disclosure of all JICA studies, agreements and recommendations;
7. JICA must explicitly ensure that any development projects connected with its blueprint establish meaningful partnerships with local civil society organizations in order to strengthen local capacity and ensure sustainability;
8. JICA should engage with Karen civil society organizations, including KPSN, women, refugees and internally displaced persons to explore practical options for pilot projects.

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Karen Peace Support Network consists of the following organizations:

1. Burma Issues
2. Back Pack Health Worker Team
3. Burma Medical Association
4. Committee for Internally Displaced Karen People
5. Federation of Trade Unions Kawthoolei
6. Karen Affairs Committee
7. Karen Baptist Convention
8. Karen Development Committee
9. Karen Development Network
10. Karen Education Department
11. Karen Environmental and Social Action Network
12. Karen Human Rights Group
13. Karen Office for Relief and Development
14. Karen Refugee Committee
15. Karen Refugee Committee Education Entity

16. Karen Rivers Watch
17. Karen Student Network Group
18. Karen Teacher Working Group
19. Karen Women Empowerment Group
20. Karen Women Organization
21. Karen Youth Organization
22. Mae Tao Clinic
23. Hsar Mu Htaw
24. Hku Po Ka Paw
25. Karen Environment Network
26. Youth Circle
27. Mutraw Community Development Committee
28. Taw Oo District Humanitarian and Development Committee