



Press release from Arakan Oil Watch

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New briefer: Time for international corporations to stop fuelling conflict in western Burma

In a briefer released today, Arakan Oil Watch is calling on the Burma government, the global oil industry and other corporations to stop plundering the rich natural wealth of Arakan State, as this directly fuelling the war and driving the local population further into destitution.

While the armed conflict between the Burma Army and the Arakan Army in Western Burma is escalating to unprecedented levels amidst the Covid-19 crisis, international corporations continue initiating new natural gas extraction and infrastructure development projects. China, India and South Korea have been key actors in pushing through unpopular multi-billion dollar projects in Arakan State, including the Shwe gas extraction, oil and gas pipelines, deep sea ports in Sittwe and Kyauk Phyu, the Kyauk Phyu Special Economic Zone and linked trade corridors.

Western oil corporations are also joining in the plunder. Since 2014, thirteen foreign oil companies have invested in gas exploration off the Arakan coast, and Australian Woodside Energy and French Total are moving ahead with development plans and billion-dollar deals to export gas to Thailand and China from newly found deposits at offshore block A6 and AD7, the most recent deal signed in December 2019.

“These centralized projects in Arakan have brought no benefits to local people, only loss of lands and livelihoods,” said Jockai Khaing, Director of Arakan Oil Watch. “Revenue from the sale of the Arakan Shwe gas and other natural resources have enabled the Union government to buy weapons used against the people of Arakan and other ethnic states.”

The NLD government and Burma military’s campaign against the Arakan Army has since 2019 resulted in at least 257 civilian deaths and 560 civilian injuries, with large-scale shelling from jets, helicopters and navy ships. During this same period, at least ten villages have been burned down and over 200 villages affected, causing displacement of over 250,000 Arakanese and Chin ethnic villagers, of which approx. 156,000 live in IDP camps.

As it becomes increasingly clear that the Burma government and military’s strategy to “crush” the Arakan Army is failing outright, it is time for foreign governments, corporations and multilateral institutions to review their seemingly unconditional engagement policies, and start heeding the grievances of the Arakan people.

“The Burma government must immediately end its military offensives and include western Burma in a nationwide ceasefire in order to begin inclusive political dialogue addressing the root causes of ethnic conflict,” said Jockai. “Widespread calls for the ownership, control and management of land and natural resources by Arakan and other ethnic groups must not be ignored as these are key to end decades-long ethnic conflict.”

“It is time for international governments and investors to suspend current and new large-scale investment projects until peace is restored in Arakan State and new constitutions and relevant legislations are adopted, in accordance with a future Union Peace Accord,” urged Jockai.

Contact: Jockai Khaing,

Director of Arakan Oil Watch

+95 (0) 9 250 734 821 / infoarakanoilwatch@gmail.com / www.Oilwatcharakan.org