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**Dam-induced floods spur calls to suspend new Chinese dams
in Burma's Karenni State**

Unprecedented releases of water from Burma's first major hydropower dam at Moebye due to heavy rainfall have caused severe flooding around the Karenni capital, Loikaw, spurring calls by community groups to suspend construction of three large hydropower dams planned by Chinese investors in Karenni state.

Unusually heavy rains during September caused dam operators to repeatedly release large quantities of water from the Moebye dam, leading to widespread flooding around Loikaw. In three villages alone, over 500 houses were submerged up to the roof, and 500 acres of paddy fields inundated under several meters of water. Thousands of residents who were evacuated remain homeless as the floodwaters have yet to recede.

"We have never experienced floods like this in our lifetime," said a 50-year-old man from Paya Pyu near Loikaw. "The government has done nothing to help us, even though it was their decision to release the water from the dam."

The latest floods have stoked fears among Karenni communities of the impacts of three new mega dams planned by the China Datang Corporation under an MOU signed with the Burmese regime in early 2010. The dams include the 600 MW Ywathit dam on the Salween River, a 130 MW dam on the Pon River, a Salween tributary, and a 110 MW dam on the Thabet River, north of Loikaw.

"Releases from the Moebye dam have turned natural heavy rainfall into a disastrous man-made flood," said Khu Thaw Reh, coordinator of the Karenni Development Research Group (KDRG). "We fear worse disasters if new dams are built."

Karenni communities have long suffered from increased militarization around the Moebye dam, including the laying of thousands of land-mines near the dam site and power-plant. 12,000 villagers were displaced by the dam reservoir, while electricity from the dam was never made available locally but sent to Burma's former capital Rangoon.

Encouraged by President Thein Sein's recent announcement of the suspension of the Myitsone Dam, KDRG is now calling for a suspension of the planned Chinese dams in Karenni State, and a careful re-investigation of their social and environmental impacts.

"No dams should be built in Karenni State without the agreement of local communities," said Khu Thaw Reh. "We are joining our voices with peoples throughout Burma against destructive Chinese dams."

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