



Tavoyan Women's Union (TWU)

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Press release by the Tavoyan Women's Union

Women activists facing harassment by proponents of Dawei Special Economic Zone

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The Tavoyan Women's Union (TWU) is gravely concerned at increasing harassment and intimidation of women who have been raising concerns about the impacts of the Dawei Special Economic Zone (DSEZ) and related projects.

While Thai, Japanese and Chinese investors have recently confirmed their intention of moving ahead with the DSEZ and other mega-projects in Dawei, local authorities and project proponents have been publicly harassing and threatening women, including from TWU, who have spoken out about the damaging impacts of the projects on their livelihoods and environment.

On February 2, 2015, five weeks after the publication of TWU's report "Our lives, not for sale: Tavoyan women speak out against the DSEZ," a public demonstration in support of the DSEZ was organized by U Phone Swe, a Deputy Minister in the Tanintharyi Regional Government. About 300 people marched to the Dawei Deep Sea Port site, bearing placards and shouting slogans, declaring that anyone opposing the project was their "enemy". On seeing members of TWU watching the event, protest leaders shouted through the microphone "TWU are destructive elements, they are our enemy!"

Very disturbingly, women in our network have also been threatened with sexual violence. Last month, a local broker for a coal-fired power plant planned by a joint Burmese-Korean company, "24 Hours," in the village of Thakyyettaw, south of Dawei, issued a threat that he would hire someone to rape one of the women leading opposition to the project.

In the same village, women teachers at the local high school, who have been raising awareness about the negative impacts of coal, have been visited three times in the past month by township and regional education authorities, who have warned them not to oppose the coal project, and not be "involved in politics". They claimed that parents had complained that the teachers were "teaching politics."

TWU strongly denounces such harassment and threats, and urges foreign investors to review their involvement in the DSEZ and related projects, or else become complicit in these abuses.

The Thai and Japanese governments confirmed their joint commitment to promoting the DSEZ on February 9, 2015, about a week after Chinese media announced that negotiations had reached an advanced stage for a Chinese company to build a US\$ 2.9 billion oil refinery south of Dawei.

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