Shwe Gas Movement

Arakanese take to the streets to demand gas be used for Arakan electricity

For Immediate Release

January 17, 2012

Today over 250 Arakanese took to the streets in the state capital of Sittwe and across two townships, wearing t-shirts, pasting stickers and posters, demanding that natural gas from Arakan coastal waters be used to generate 24-hour electricity throughout the state before any is exported to China.

Activists from the campaign delivered an open letter to the Arakan state minister yesterday with the same demand.

Last week the Minister of Energy claimed, "according to the wish of local residents, our ministry could make the agreement with related firms to obtain the gas for the region." Yet, some remain skeptical, fearing it will prove to be an empty promise given the destructive impacts the project has already had on local communities.

"The military government is trying to convince Arakan people that they will benefit from this project with construction jobs or a small share of revenue," says Wong Aung of the Shwe Gas Movement. "The demand for 24-hour electricity before any export shows that the Arakan people are not going to be bought off so cheaply."

Currently, Burma's new government is set to continue with the contract signed by the previous military junta to export 9.1 trillion cubic feet of natural gas extracted from the Shwe gas fields to China.

"When it emerged that 90% of the electricity produced by the Myitsone dam would be sent to China, Burmese people rallied against the project due to severe energy shortages at home. The same anger is growing against the Shwe Gas Pipeline project."

Burma does not have enforceable democratic legal structures to ensure revenue transparency and contract accountability to ensure that its citizens receive tangible benefits from foreign investments in the extractive sector.

"At the moment there is only one way to ensure local people see real benefits and that is to allocate 100% of the Shwe gas towards meeting domestic energy needs" said Wong Aung.

Burma ranks tenth in the world in terms of natural gas reserves yet its per capita electricity consumption is less than 5% of neighbouring Thailand and China, as it exports most of its energy.

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