

Press release by Action for Shan State Rivers

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New film: Shan State’s unique “Thousand Islands” under threat from Salween dam plans

A new documentary film launched today reveals the unique natural beauty of the “Thousand Island” area along the Pang River tributary of the Salween, currently threatened by plans to build the giant Mong Ton dam in southern Shan State.

The film, “Drowning a Thousand Islands,” takes viewers into the remote Kunhing area of central Shan State, out of bounds for decades due to the ongoing conflict. Drone footage provides bird’s eye panoramas of hitherto unseen waterfalls, rapids and ancient temples nestled among the countless islands in the Pang river.

Local farmers and fisherfolk recount the area’s rich cultural history, and the devastating impacts of the Burma Army’s scorched earth campaigns over a decade ago, evidence of which is shown in rare archival footage. Refugees who fled to Thailand at that time, and still dare not return, are also interviewed.

Opposition to the planned Mong Ton dam is heard from an array of voices across Shan State. The massive reservoir of the dam, planned to export power to Thailand and China, would submerge the entire Thousand Island area.

“Our Thousand Islands should be protected as a world heritage site,” said Shan environmentalist Sai Khur Hseng. “If the Mong Ton dam goes ahead, our priceless heritage will be lost for ever.”

Last month, Burma’s new NLD-led government announced they would proceed with hydropower dams on the Salween river. Shan political parties and armed groups have declared their opposition to these plans.

The film is being launched at public screenings in Yangon, Taunggyi and Chiang Mai, as well as on Thai Public Broadcasting Service TV.

The film can be viewed on Shan State Rivers Facebook on September 29.

Contact persons:

Nang Noon Voe	+95 9250 485 182	
Nang Kham Naung	+95 9791 634 239	
Sai Khur Hseng	+95 92 6436 2973	+66 81 6722 031
Nang Charm Tong	+66 81 630 6655	
Ying Nong Awn	+66 94 606 2856	
Sai Hor Hseng	+66 62 941 9600	