



(This is a translation - The original release was written in Japanese.)

Press Release

July 7, 2014

JICA's Examiner Starts Detailed Investigation on a Complaint Lodged by Burma/Myanmar Villagers who Demand Restoration from Impact Caused by the Thilawa SEZ Project (Funded by Japan's ODA)

On July 4th 2014, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)'s Examiner of the objection procedures established under JICA's Guidelines for Environmental and Social Considerations (the Guidelines) posted "Results of Preliminary on JICA's website, and announced the eligibility of three villagers, who had earlier lodged an official complaint with the Examiner, claiming that their living standards became deteriorated due to the JICA-funded Thilawa Special Economic Zone (SEZ) Development Project, and the commencement of detailed investigation on the case.

See "Results of Examination" on JICA's website:

http://www.jica.go.jp/english/our_work/social_environmental/objection/objection_status.html

The Examiner will investigate in detail JICA's compliance/non-compliance with its Guidelines and facilitate dialogues among relevant stakeholders before submitting a final report to JICA's President. This will take approximately two months. This is the first case in JICA's history that the Examiner conducts detailed investigation on a filed complaint since JICA (then the yen-loan arm under Japan Bank for International Cooperation) established the objection procedures in October 2003.

On June 2nd, three representatives of Myanmar villagers who are affected by the Thilawa SEZ project travelled to Japan and handed a complaint directly to JICA's Examiner at JICA's headquarters in Tokyo. According to the complaint, villagers who used to live in the 400 ha area of the project's Phase I have been negatively impacted during relocation processes from their original home, while residents in the 2,000 ha area at the project's subsequent phases are likely to experience similar damages. The complainers pointed out that JICA's non-compliance with its own Guidelines has led to the deterioration of their living conditions, and requested that the Examiner investigate the case and solve the problems.

See the June 2nd, 2014 press release issued by the three village representatives: "Displaced Villagers File Complaint Regarding Japan's Investment in Myanmar's Thilawa Special Economic Zone":

<http://mekongwatch.wordpress.com/2014/06/04/thilawa-villagers-file-official-complaint-with-jica/>

Construction work at the project's Phase 1 area already began in November 2013, when 68 families (approximately 300 people) were involuntarily resettled to a relocation site. After eight months, some resettled villagers are facing great difficulties. They have not been given alternative farmland. They have lost their job. Alternative means of livelihood have not been secured yet. Some families have used up compensation cash and are now in debt. Others have sold home and left the relocation site. Living conditions at the relocation site pose another set of problems. The rainy season has just started and some houses have been flooded by spillover water from a poor drainage system after a heavy rain. Additional 1,000 families (approximately 4,000 people) will soon be relocated out of the remaining 2,000 ha area and are extremely concerned if they may face a similar fate.

While Mekong Watch welcomes JICA's decision on the commencement of detailed investigation on the case, we will closely monitor how succeeding processes will proceed. JICA's Examiner should directly visit the project-affected area, especially the relocation site, carefully observe the ground situation, and listen to a wide spectrum of local villagers to understand the complexity of each of the issues raised in the complaint. The Examiner should also ensure to propose measures to immediately stop deterioration of the living standards of affected villagers, address outstanding issues, and avoid further impacts caused by the project.

For further information

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***Thilawa Special Economic Zone (SEZ) Development Project**

The Thilawa SEZ Development Project is initiated under the Japanese public-private-partnership as a packaged infrastructure project. The project plans to develop manufacturing industry and commercial business zones in 2,400 ha of the Thilawa area, located some 23 km southeast of Yangon's downtown. Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has decided to invest in Phase 1 of the project (400 ha) through private sector investment financing under its ODA (Official Development Assistance), while Mitsubishi Co., Sumitomo Co., and Marubeni Co. are also investing in it. JICA is conducting a preparatory survey for the remaining 2,000 ha of the project, supporting to make the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and the Resettlement Action Plan (RAP), too.

For more information, visit <http://mekongwatch.wordpress.com/>