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## **Forced Displacement Leaves Burmese Families Living in Substandard Conditions, with Higher Rates of Hunger and Sickness**

New Report Shows Burmese Government Violated International Guidelines

Human Rights Laws Must be Followed Before Additional 846 Families in Thilawa are Evicted

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NEW YORK – The Burmese government violated international standards when forcibly displacing families from the Thilawa Special Economic Zone (SEZ) by threatening many residents with court appearances and imprisonment, giving them inadequate compensation for land lost, and failing to provide training or other means of income to those who lost their jobs, according to a new report by Physicians for Human Rights (PHR).

“A Foreseeable Disaster in Burma: Forced Displacement in the Thilawa Special Economic Zone” shows that displacement also affected families’ food security and health conditions, as families reported higher levels of hunger, child malnutrition, and sickness, as well as reduced access to medical treatment.

“The Thilawa project exemplifies how devastating forced displacement can be on local communities when governments completely disregard human rights laws for the sake of a business development,” said Widney Brown, PHR’s director of programs. “The Burmese and Japanese governments should work to improve the living conditions for those displaced by this misguided venture, and ensure that this disaster is not repeated when hundreds of other families are relocated for future development projects.”

The Thilawa SEZ is located near the Thilawa port, located some 15 miles south of Rangoon, Burma’s largest city. It comprises 2,400 hectares of farmland that will be developed into factory sites. The Japanese government and three Japanese companies partnered with the Burmese government and a group of Burmese businesses to develop the site. The project is expected to yield more than \$53 million in profits by 2018.

In addition to interviewing 22 key informants, PHR surveyed 29 of the 68 households displaced during phase one of the project, which began in 2013. When phase two begins, an additional 846 households, comprising 3,869 people, will be displaced. Key findings from PHR's report include:

- The displacement process did not follow international guidelines, most notably because the Burmese government threatened residents with imprisonment if they did not move.
- The Burmese government did not provide opportunities for residents to seek legal or technical advice, nor to challenge their displacement in court.
- Some humanitarian conditions at the relocation site, such as those related to water sources and latrines, are below international standards for refugee situations.
- The average household income for the displaced dropped by 78 percent after relocation, with nearly 90 percent of households reporting not having enough money to meet their needs.
- Farmers who lost their land were not provided with other means to earn a living; and people who worked in nearby industries had to leave their jobs because their new commute was prohibitively expensive.
- Loss of livelihoods also affected families' food security and health, with eight households reporting higher levels of household hunger; 13.6 percent of children suffering from mild malnutrition; and the number of households reporting being unable to get treatment for sickness doubling, from 7 to 16.

PHR has issued a number of recommendations to the Burmese, Japanese, and U.S. governments, and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). These include immediately implementing transparent procedures for any evictions; improving humanitarian conditions at the relocation site; and ensuring that the U.S. government raises the issue of forced displacement in bilateral communications with the Burmese government.

Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) is a New York-based advocacy organization that uses medicine and science to stop mass atrocities and severe human rights violations. To learn more: [www.phr.org](http://www.phr.org).