

THILAWA SEZ: ACCESS TO REMEDY DENIED?

For four years, the Thilawa Special Economic Zone (SEZ), Myanmar's first SEZ, has been marked by land rights abuses and disregard for affected communities. The SEZ pushed villagers off of their land, often with inadequate compensation and unjust relocation policies, forcing them into a long struggle to access remedies.

In November 2013, 81 families lost their land to Zone A of the Thilawa SEZ. Sixty-eight families were resettled under coercion and false promises, facing environmental, economic, physical, and emotional hardships. At the relocation site, families struggled to secure basic human rights like water, food, adequate housing, property, health, education, work, and livelihoods. As of the fourth anniversary of the relocation, these harms have not been adequately remedied.



A house at the Zone A relocation site in Thilawa.

The Thilawa SEZ is now expanding. Ninety-one more families have been resettled this year for Zone B, with further negotiations underway. Villagers facing relocation are worried, as those in Zone A were often met with closed doors and empty promises. The Thilawa SEZ sets an example for similar projects in Myanmar. It's vital that existing harms be remedied and that these abuses are not repeated.

THILAWA SEZ RELOCATION BY THE NUMBERS



1,123 FAMILIES MAY BE IMPACTED BY THE SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONE IN THILAWA, MYANMAR



159 HOUSEHOLDS WERE RELOCATED FOR ZONE A & ZONE B, AREA 2-2 EAST



27 HOUSEHOLDS HAVE HAD TO LEAVE AND **6 HOUSEHOLDS** HAVE PAWNED THEIR NEW HOMES **DUE TO DEBT***



18 RELOCATED PEOPLE WORK IN THE SEZ: 13 SALARIED & 5 INFORMALLY*



A LOCAL MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT HAS RECEIVED **98 COMPLAINTS** ABOUT THE SEZ SINCE 2015

*STATISTIC AVAILABLE FOR ZONE A ONLY. ALL STATISTICS CURRENT AS OF NOVEMBER 2017

PEOPLE OF THILAWA, ZONE A: IN THEIR OWN WORDS



Phyu Phyu Win

Myine Thar Yar village (3)

"I have five children. The eldest is 11 years old and the youngest is 1 year old. Before we moved to here, our livelihood was OK. We had a kitchen garden in our home. We could catch fish. My husband worked at MITT [Myanmar International Terminals Thilawa] as daily worker. He earned 8,000 kyat per day. I raised chicken and goats. We had a regular income.

We were told that we would get jobs even if we are not educated. That we were the first priority to be given jobs with good salary. But now we do not have regular jobs. My husband works about 15 days or 20 days in a month. We had to borrow money to finish our house. After I lost my house, I got some money back from the lender, we bought a small piece of land inside the 25 X 50 square foot plot of another family and built a house, so now there are 2 houses inside the 25 X 50 plot. My husband's income is not enough for our family. I am opening a small shop at my house. Sometimes I cannot feed my children regularly. I feel very stressed. Sometimes my heart feels something wrong.

[After the second resettlement group moved nearby] I am dissatisfied with the compensation differences between the two groups. Even we are the same situation, they got 40 x 50 square feet and 60 lakh for house. I want the compensation the same as the others."

U Than Tun (U Shwe Gon)

Myine Thar Yar village (3)

"Before I moved to the relocation site, my job was looking after buffalos from farmers. Every year, I received 80 to 100 buffalos to look after, from around 20 farmers. We had been living in the Japan Site [Zone A] about 15 years. We grew betel leaf too. Before we were relocated, our family livelihood was not bad. We didn't need to worry for our food. We could catch fish for our food. Moreover, we can sell the fish. Now we have to buy everything, even sauce.

Now I don't have a regular job. If the contractors call me, I have a job as a day laborer. I work 10 or 15 days in a month, mostly working in the Japan Site. My job is to carry cement bags, cement mixing, and digging the ground. I earn 7,000 kyat in a day. When I moved to here, I had a house. Now I already lost my house last year, in April. After I lost my house, I had to rent a house to live here. I had to pay 50,000 kyat for a month. I cannot pay 50,000 kyat anymore, so I asked my friend to live with them for one month. I don't know where we should live after one month.

We are four family members, with one son and one daughter. Before I moved here, I couldn't save money but I didn't have debt. Now I am facing a lot of challenges. I can't borrow money from microfinance. The people who want to borrow money from microfinance, they have to save 3,000 kyat per month. I can't save 3,000 kyat, I could provide enough food to my family. I can't join social stuff anymore even if I am invited because I am only thinking about income for my family's food."

