

Fueling Abuse:

Unocal, Premier, and TotalFinaElf's Gas Pipelines in Burma

UPDATE: SEPTEMBER 16, 2002
Premier Oil Announces
Pullout from Operations
in Burma

In partnership with the Burmese military regime, three Western oil companies have built natural gas pipelines in southern Burma (Myanmar), leading to countless human rights abuses against the local population. Unocal (U.S.), Premier Oil (U.K.), and TotalFinaElf (France/Belgium) have used the brutal Burmese military as a security force for their pipeline projects, ignoring the evidence that the soldiers would commit severe abuses in the course of their security duties. Burmese soldiers have conscripted thousands of civilians to perform forced labor for the benefit of the pipelines, and have killed, raped, tortured, and forcibly relocated innocent villagers for the crime of living near the pipeline routes. Despite denials from the companies, soldiers guarding the pipeline continue to conscript slave laborers.

These pipeline projects provide the largest single source of income to the Burmese military, funding a corrupt and repressive regime that has massacred nonviolent protestors and allowed the drug trade to flourish. The pipeline routes also cut through one of the last intact rainforests in Southeast Asia, home to dozens of endangered species. The pipelines are among the most destructive investment projects in the world.

"I think that if there was not a pipeline, there would not be more soldiers, and so we would not need to work for the soldiers. Because of the pipeline, there were villagers who had to die and the villagers had to do the work for the soldiers and some had to flee away from the village."

—Refugee from Burma's pipeline region

the facts

what

The Yadana and Yetagun pipelines are natural gas pipeline projects that are expected to generate over three billion dollars for the Burmese military regime.

where

The pipelines transport gas from offshore fields in the Andaman Sea, across southern Burma's Tenasserim Division, and into Thailand. The Tenasserim region is home to many villages that previously had little contact with the Burmese army, as well as the largest intact rainforest in Southeast Asia.

who

The Yadana consortium is operated by TotalFinaElf (France/Belgium), along with Unocal (U.S.), the Burmese military's oil company MOGE, and the Thai state oil company PTTEP. The Yetagun consortium is operated by Premier Oil (U.K.), along with Petronas (Malaysia), Nippon Oil (Japan), MOGE, and PTTEP. Several other multinational corporations have provided services to the projects, including the U.S. oilfield services giant Halliburton, the Dutch company IHC Caland, and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries of Japan.

when

The corporations' deals with the Burmese military began in the early 1990s. Starting in 1991, the pipeline region was militarized to provide security for the pipeline projects. Construction on the Yadana project began in 1996, and it became operational in 1998; the Yetagun pipeline started construction in 1998 and became operational in 2000.

why

The pipelines supply a gas power plant in Thailand; currently none of the gas goes to domestic Burmese uses. Although Thailand now has an energy surplus and cannot use all of the power, under its contracts it must still pay for the gas at a price substantially above current market value.

Ignoring Democracy, Funding Dictatorship

"[Premier Oil] should be ashamed of itself."

—Aung San Suu Kyi, Nobel Peace Prize winner and leader of Burma's democratic opposition

The Yadana and Yetagun pipelines are the largest foreign investment projects in Burma. Over the life of the projects, they are estimated to provide over three billion dollars in hard currency to the brutal Burmese military regime. This is the military regime that since 1988 has massacred nonviolent protestors, ignored the results of democratic elections, and faces sanctions for its human rights abuses and for allowing the drug trade to flourish. Aung San Suu Kyi, the Nobel Peace laureate who leads the pro-democracy opposition in Burma and has asked companies not to invest in Burma, has specifically criticized the pipeline projects as "doing a great disservice to the cause of democracy." The U.S. government has enacted sanctions that prohibit new investments, and the U.K.



Forced labor is epidemic in Burma.

government has asked Premier to withdraw. Defying global opinion, the companies have continued the projects that are closely associated with forced labor, forced relocation, rape, torture, and extrajudicial executions.

Hiring the Army

"He stated forthrightly that the companies have hired the Burmese military to provide security for the project and pay for this through the Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE)."

—U.S. Embassy Cable relating statements by Unocal's Joel Robinson

"All indirect aid to the army will have to go through MOGE."

—Yadana project security assessment

"[An] immediate issue for the project is the fact that military security will ... have to be increased or relocated to enable the pipeline to be built."

—Yetagun project impact assessment

From the beginning of the project, the oil companies knew that they would need major assistance from the Burmese military. The military has provided three key services to the oil companies. First, the military secured the region before work on the pipelines began. As part of this effort, the military forcibly relocated several villages and

"My view about the pipeline [is that] the average people who get the profits from the gas pipeline are

committed countless human rights abuses. Second, as onshore work was commencing, the military directed the construction of service roads and helipads, as well as their own camps and barracks, through the use of forced labor. Finally, the military continues to provide ongoing security for the pipelines. Although the companies do not pay the military directly, they pay for its services through their partnership with MOGE.

The Companies' Knowledge

"I know that in the early days of the execution of this project, military units in the area of the project were using forced labor."

—John Imle, former President of Unocal

"What I know is that in the very early stages of the project, in the very first months, we learnt about the use of forced labor by the army."

—Michel Viillard, head of Total Myanmar

"Military housing and local infrastructure is provided by underpaid or unpaid labour. The harsh conditions of those carrying out such labour—including young children—and the testimony of local people who will go to extremes to avoid it, belie the government claim that such work is voluntary."

—Yetagun project impact assessment

Although they profess ignorance of human rights abuses associated with their pipelines, the oil companies have long been aware of the dangers of working with the Burmese military. Unocal's own consultants have told them that the military commits human rights abuses in the pipeline region, and all the companies are aware that the army units providing security to the pipeline conscript civilians for forced labor, to build infrastructure and serve as porters. A document from TotalFinaElf describes villagers "Hired by the Army"—a euphemism for conscription, regardless of whether the villagers were subsequently paid.

Environmental Devastation



In addition to the staggering human costs of the pipelines, the impacts on forests and endangered species are significant. The pipeline region is home to dozens of endangered species, including critically endangered Asian rhinoceroses. No adequate studies have been done of how to minimize impacts on these species; to the contrary, villagers from the region have witnessed soldiers shooting a rhinoceros.

According to the World Wildlife Fund, the pipeline passes through "the largest block of moist forest in Indochina," with "one of the richest forest floras of Indochina." Instead of safeguarding the biodiversity of the region, the companies and the Burmese army are liquidating it, engaging in road-building, logging, and killing wildlife in this environmentally sensitive area.

soldiers and the villagers don't benefit. . . . The the foreigners and the leaders in [the military]."
—Burmese soldier who provided pipeline security

the worst abuses

In addition to rampant forced labor, soldiers providing security to the gas pipelines have committed some of the worst human rights abuses imaginable: rape, torture, murder, and even using villagers as human minesweepers. The testimony of villagers who have encountered pipeline security forces speaks for itself.

"When he came [home], he had lost his left eye, and his arms and legs were wounded and swollen. His back was bruised and swollen severely. I saw the scar from the rope on both of his arms and legs."

"[O]n the way back from the video shop, four men wearing uniforms grabbed [a woman] and took her to the side of the road. And these four men covered her face with clothes and stripped her and rapidly raped her one by one."

"Before our village was relocated, the soldiers killed many villagers in my village. Even though they were civilians, the soldiers did not trust them, so they were killed."

"One person from every house had to go to clear mines. The villagers had to go all over the place to find out whether the land mines were set up or not.... We were very frightened of the land mines."

"They killed my brother.... He had seven children. He was 28 years old. He also owned land and was a farmer. He was not rich or poor, just average.... [The military] ordered him to come, but he did not know why. They told him to come with the village headman, and two others. At that time, my husband and I were on the farm. And we heard the sound of automatic gunfire.... He was a normal villager, just working very hard for his family."

Forced Labor Continues

"In 2001, I had to go porter about ten times. Most of the portering we did was for battalion 282 and battalion 273. They are patrolling for pipeline security, and we had to carry their food and supplies whenever they needed us." —Recent refugee from the pipeline region

Although the pipelines are now completed, civilians continue to be conscripted for forced labor by pipeline security forces. Interviews conducted within the past year confirm that army battalions guarding the pipeline continue to force villagers to serve as porters, and that the villagers are sometimes beaten or left to die. But the companies continue to deny the abuses and refuse to accept responsibility.

Holding the Companies Accountable

None of the oil companies involved in human rights abuses in Burma has accepted responsibility for its actions, let alone tried to compensate the victims. Refugees from the

"I wish the foreign companies would go back to their country and do their business in their land, so the troops will go back to Rangoon."

—Villager in the pipeline region

pipeline region have, however, sought to use the legal system, suing Unocal in American courts with assistance from EarthRights International. In 2000 a U.S. federal judge found that there was

evidence demonstrating that before joining the Project, Unocal knew that the military had a record of committing human rights abuses; that the Project hired the military to provide security for the Project, a military that forced villagers to work and entire villages to relocate for the benefit of the Project; that the military, while forcing villagers to work and relocate, committed numerous acts of violence; and that Unocal knew or should have known that the military did commit, was committing, and would continue to commit these [abuses].

Despite this finding, the plaintiffs have not yet won a judgment against Unocal, but the legal case continues; for up-to-date information, visit our website (www.earthrights.org).

UPDATE:
Unocal scheduled to face trial in U.S. court in 2003

Join the Campaign Against Investment in Brutality!

Dozens of companies—including oil companies—have withdrawn from Burma due to pressure from consumers, shareholders, and human rights activists. Help put the pressure on Unocal and TotalFinaElf by:

- Boycotting Total, Fina, and Elf stations
- Urging your school, city, state or retirement fund to use shareholder pressure on these companies or to divest from them
visit www.earthrights.org or www.freeburmacoalition.org for more information
- Joining a campaign against oil companies in Burma
email zquante@igc.org to join the campaign against Unocal
email burmaoil-subscribe@onelist.com to join a mailing list on oil companies in Burma, which includes ways to take action
- Joining a campaign against all investment in Burma
visit www.freeburmacoalition.org or www.burmacampaign.org.uk for more information

For more information on the Yadana and Yetagun pipelines, including our full-length reports, *Total Denial* and *Total Denial Continues*, visit our website at www.earthrights.org.



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EarthRights International (ERI) combines the power of law and the power of people to protect human rights and the environment.

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