

New Report Reveals Biofuel Fiasco in Burma

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Sharratt<info@cban.ca><p>May 1, 2008</p><p>A draconian campaign by Burma's military to grow eight million acres of the Jatropha curcas tree for biofuel production is resulting in forced labor and land confiscation throughout the country, while evidence of crop failure and mismanagement exposes the program as a fiasco. Burma's military ruler, Senior General Than Shwe, has commanded that an area the size of Belgium be planted within three years. Each state and division of Burma must grow 500,000 acres. Rangoon Division must sacrifice 20% of its total land area to the toxic jatropha tree. </p><p>Biofuel by Decree, a report by seven community development organizations working in Burma, details how farmers, civil servants, teachers, school children, nurses, and prisoners have been forced to purchase seeds, fulfill planting quotas, and establish biofuel plantations in service to the national cause. They must plant the trees along roadsides, in housing, school and hospital compounds, in cemeteries and religious grounds, and on lands formerly producing rice. </p><p>People have been fined, beaten, and arrested for not participating in the campaign. Threats of food security are emerging as lands are taken over by the biofuel plant. From Southern Shan state alone, at least eight hundred refugees have fled to Thailand as a result of the program. </p><p>Burma's farmers are scathing about the program. It will not be successful, said one farmer interviewed for the report. You see, the soldiers carry guns. They don't know anything about agriculture. </p><p>Two years into implementation, crop failures as high as 75% have been reported due to haphazard growing techniques and random seeds. Tractors filled up with jatropha biodiesel during ceremonial shows have broken down. A complete ignorance of harvest yields, price or market has left farmers and businessmen cynical of seeing any benefit from the program. </p><p>Agriculture is the backbone of Burma's economy and society, and should not be left to the whims of generals, says Sai Khur Hseng, one of the authors of the report. If the military remains in power, Burmese people will continue to suffer from senseless agricultural policies like this. </p>Burma's military will hold a referendum to endorse their new constitution entrenching military rule on May 10, 2008. </p><p>Contact: Sai Khur Hseng
Phone: (inside Thailand) 0842243748 (international) +6684224374
Email: unitedecdf@gmail.com </p><p>The full report Biofuel by Decree: Unmasking Burma's bio-energy fiasco, by the Ethnic Community Development Forum, can be viewed at
http://www.terra-per.org/key_issues_view.php?id=17 or click here</p>