

## Media release by Ke See villagers

October 22, 2018

### **Ke See villagers send letters opposing transfer of 5,459 acres of land to Pinpet iron mine and steel factory**

Today, residents of Mong Nim and Mong Gao tracts of Ke See township are sending letters to township and state authorities opposing the transfer of 5,459 acres of land to the No. 2 Pang Pak (Pinpet) iron mine and steel factory in Ho Pong, southern Shan State, for coal excavation under the Ministry of Industry.

On October 11, 2018, Mong Nim and Mong Gao villagers received a notification letter from the General Administration Department of Ke See township about the transfer of land, and that any objections should be sent within fifteen days.

The land to be transferred includes farmlands, pastures, lakes, forests, watersheds, temples, a cemetery, school and clinic.

“We have been living here and relying on this land for generations. The civilian government should not be taking it from us,” said Sai Aung Htun, one of the community leaders.

The disputed land was seized by the Burma Army back in 1996, during a large-scale forced relocation campaign in central and southern Shan State, which displaced over 300,000 villagers. Three battalions set up garrisons around Ke See town, including Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) 131.

In 2009, LIB 131 was granted a coal mining permit by the military regime for 5,459 acres of land in Mong Gao tract. The coal deposits are located directly under a 6-kilometer stretch of the Nam Hen stream, which irrigates farmlands of over 50 villages in Ke See township, and is the main water source for over 18,000 people.

In 2010, 55 villagers who farmed land in the concession area were forced to accept 24,000 kyat (approx. 15 USD) per acre of land as compensation.

In 2015, the Burma Army-owned Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited (UMEHL) sold licences to various companies for mining blocks within the Mong Gao concession area. The permits were sold for 100 million kyat (approx. 63,099 USD) each, with UMEHL to receive 17 % of the profits from the mines when they started operating.

Companies planning to dig coal in Mong Gao include: Kanbawza Development Co. Ltd.; Soe Lwin Aung Co. Ltd.; Sein Naga Co. Ltd.; Yu Wai Yan Co. Ltd. and Ngwe Yi Pale Co. Ltd.

Villagers were told 1,500 tons of coal would be transported each day to the Pinpet iron mine and steel factory in southern Shan State.

Fearing pollution of the Nam Hen stream, and also air pollution from the coal mining and transport, on July 22, 2016, 1,648 local people from 33 villages, including 7 abbots and 23 monks from 22 temples, organized a meeting, and voted unanimously to oppose the coal mining in Mong Gao.

