



Update by the Shan Human Rights Foundation

September 29, 2021

UWSA workers clear villagers' plantations to make way for polluting factories in Tachileik

Since September 6, over 60 workers from UWSA's Hong Pang company have cleared about 10 acres of local villagers' plantations to start building factories on land confiscated by the Burma Army in the eastern outskirts of Tachileik.

Loi Sam Song company, a Hong Pang subsidiary, is planning to build a manganese processing factory and rubber crumb factory on 100 acres of land beside the Ruak River, about one kilometer from the Thai border. Local villagers are strongly opposed to these plans, as they have farmed the land for generations, and fear air and water pollution from the factories.

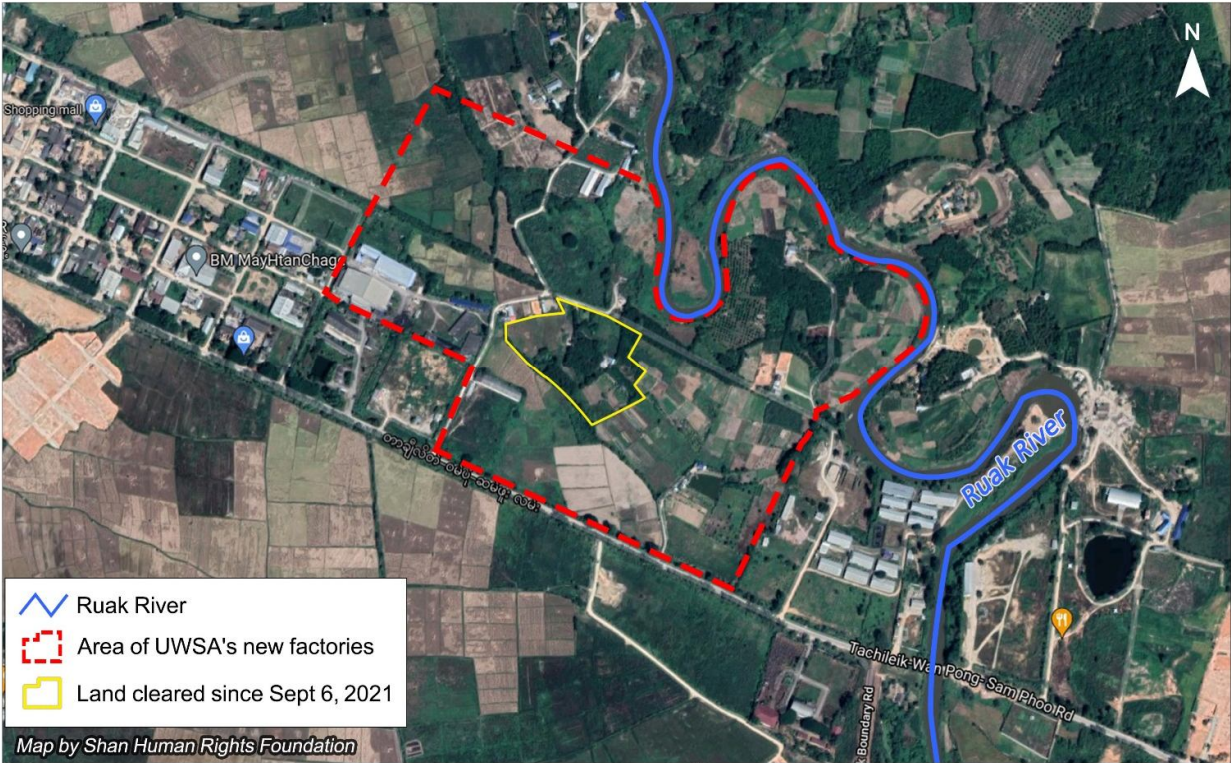
In May and June of this year, when the company tried to construct fencing around the land, the villagers managed to pull down the fencing and block construction, but this time the workers are too numerous, and have threatened the villagers with sticks and knives. The workers have used backhoes to clear the villagers' mawksili (cassia siamea) plantations and vegetable gardens.

The villagers have complained to the police, and on September 7 wrote letters to local authorities asking them to stop the company from encroaching on their land, but no action has been taken.

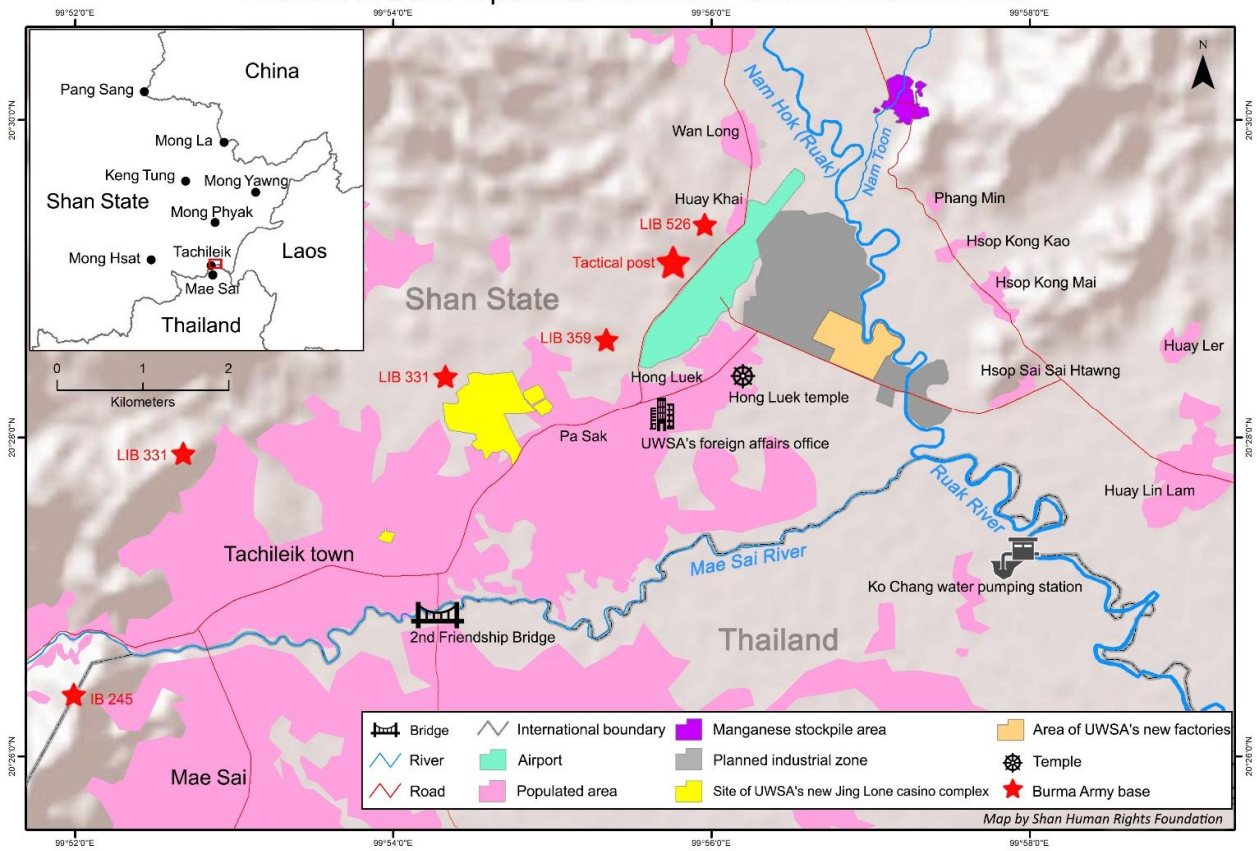
On September 11, the company called farmers' representatives to meet at the local police station, and offered to pay 300,000 baht (about 9,000 USD) per acre for the land, which is far below the market price. The farmers refused this offer, and instead asked the company to take only 50 acres of land and leave them 50 acres, but the company did not agree to this. Local administration officers attending the meeting did not give any support to the farmers.

The authorities are clearly siding with the UWSA, despite the clear violation of the local farmers' rights, and the pollution threat to the environment on both sides of the border. SHRF reiterates our calls for the project to be abandoned immediately and the lands to be returned to their rightful owners.

Land cleared by UWSA for factories near Tachileik since Sept 6, 2021



Location of UWSA's planned factories in Tachileik Industrial Zone



Detailed timeline

6 September 2021

At about 9 am, over 60 workers from Hong Pang company arrived in pick-up trucks at the farmlands of Hong Luek villagers, east of Tachileik. They used backhoes to begin clearing the farmers' mawksili (cassia siamea) tree plantations and vegetable gardens. The workers were carrying knives and wooden sticks, which they brandished threateningly when the farmers tried to stop them. The workers spoke Wa to each other, and appeared to be UWSA soldiers in civilian clothes.



Company backhoe clearing trees

When the farmers asked them who had ordered them to clear the land, they replied they were just following the orders of their boss.

At midday, a Chinese-speaking man called Ni Kang, who seemed to be the workers' boss, came to the farmlands holding a piece of paper, which he showed to the farmers, saying it was a permit from the government to carry out the project. However, when the farmers read the paper, they found it was simply an application from Hong Pang to the government to use the land, dated 1999.



Ni Kang

During this time, two policemen arrived in a police car and parked nearby, watching the company clearing the land, but did not get out of the car and drove away after about five minutes.

At about 1 pm, the farmers went to the Hong Luek police station and

made a complaint about the company. The police officer in charge said he had only recently arrived and didn't know anything about the issue. He asked them to explain the situation, but finally said he couldn't do anything as all the government offices were closed because of Covid 19.

The workers carried on clearing the plantations till 6 pm, then left.

7 September 2021

The same workers came again to clear the plantations (and have continued to clear the land every day since).



UWSA workers having their meal on local farmers' land

45 farmers sent letters to various authorities in Tachileik (including tract, township and district level GAD officers, the land records office, and local police station), complaining about Hong Pang's encroachment on their land, and asking them to take action. But they have not yet received a reply.

8 September 2021

The workers carried on clearing the plantations, and also removed the trees which they had cut down.

9 September 2021

In the afternoon, one of the Hong Pang managers called Sai Naw Kham came to the land and said to the landowners: "If all of you are the real landowners, you can bring all the documents proving you are the owners, and talk to us at the police station. You can also call the land measurement officer to come with you, on 11 September. We should meet and make an agreement between the company and landowners. Those who are not the rightful owners should not come to the meeting."

11 September 2021

From 9 to 10 am, a local village tract chairman, a Tachileik GAD officer, four farmers' representatives and three managers from Hong Pang company joined a meeting at the Hong Luek police station. Only four farmers joined the meeting because of Covid 19 restrictions. The village tract chairman said that if any more farmers joined, they would be fined, so about ten farmers waited outside the police station.

At the meeting, the Hong Pang managers offered to pay 300,000 baht per acre to the original landowners who had land documents. However, the farmers refused to sell their land. They said they had agreed amongst themselves to let Hong Pang take half of the land (50 acres) on condition that they could keep the remaining 50 acres, which they would share among the 69 original landowners, so that they could still earn a living from farming.

But the company did not agree to give any land to the farmers. They said that if the farmers did not agree to the price offered, the company would simply seize all of it without paying anything, because they had authorization from the government.

The farmers stuck with their refusal to sell the land, and demanded that the company stop all further work on the project until the government offices were open, so that the matter could be settled in court.

The meeting ended without a resolution. The officials who joined the meeting did not try and solve the dispute or support the farmers. The Tachileik official simply told the company they should not destroy the farmers' paddy fields, as they had not yet been harvested.

Until now the company has been working on the land every day from 9 am to 6 pm. The workers do not stay at the farmland, but stay at Wiang Kaew quarter in town. Every day they carry knives and sticks with them when they come to work, and the farmers dare not challenge them.

For background of this issue, see SHRF's report ["Protect the Golden Triangle's Ruak River"](#)

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