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Statement by SWAN urging EU to impose stronger sanctions against the Burmese military regime

The Shan Women's Action Network has consistently called for economic sanctions against the Burmese military regime, and at this crucial time urges the European Union to impose strong new economic sanctions on the regime.

The Shan State is the largest state of Burma, and one of the richest in natural resources. Since the opening up of the economy to foreign investment in 1988, foreign companies have rushed in to invest in our forests, minerals and rivers. Yet the vast majority of our people have seen no benefits from this investment whatsoever. On the contrary, we have seen a massive increase of Burma Army troops to protect these investments, which include vast logging concessions, gem mines, and mega-dams, including on the Salween River. This has led to increased forced relocation, land confiscation, forced labour, extrajudicial killing, torture and systematic rape. Our environment has been ravaged, and food security has plummeted, as have standards of health and education, resulting in an influx of hundreds of thousands of refugees into Thailand.

The international community has recently witnessed the regime's brutal crackdown on the peaceful demonstrations led by Buddhist monks in Rangoon. In fact, such brutality has been commonplace over the past decades in Shan State, in areas inaccessible to the international media. Countless civilians, including Buddhist monks, have suffered extrajudicial killing and torture at the hands of the regime's troops. Since the publication of our report "Licence to Rape" in 2002, detailing the rape of 625 women and girls in Shan State, SWAN has been exposing the ongoing use of rape as a weapon of war by the regime. With the continual build-up of Burma Army battalions in Shan State, civilians face the constant threat of violence, and women and girls live in perpetual fear of sexual assault.

It is very clear that foreign investment in Burma at this time means complicity in the military regime's oppression of our people and exploitation of our resources. We therefore urge the EU to impose strong new economic sanctions on Burma's military regime. In particular, we call for an international arms embargo.

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