

PETROLEUM IN MALAYSIA 2003

1. VIOLENT SUPPRESSION AGAINST THAI-MALAYSIAN GAS PIPELINE PROTESTORS

December 21, 2002

Dear Friends,

The Thai Government 's firm decision to go ahead with the Thai-Malaysia gas pipeline and separation plants project stir up new round of fierce confrontation with local opponents. Last night about 20.30, police used force to purge Thai-Malaysian pipeline protestors who were peacefully gathering in front of a hotel in Hadyai District, Songkhla province, Southern Thailand. About 2,000 of them came there to submit a letter of petition to the Thai Prime Minister, Mr.Thaksin Shinwatra who along with his cabinet members are slated to have a first joint-meeting with the Malaysian cabinet at the hotel the following day. While being prepared to perform their evening prayer, the largely Muslim protestors were beaten with police batons, dragged from their vehicles and then detained. Women including NGO activists and students were also forcefully dragged away and beaten. Their clothes were partly ripped as a result of the clash.

En route to the town of Had Yai, they were stopped and searched. Upon arriving at the JB Hotel, they gathered peacefully in the area marked with police fencing. The clash and forceful eviction were not expected by the protestors as they had attempted to seek permission to rally peacefully and an agreement was reached with a deputy to the Prime Minister's secretary, Mr. Watcharapan Chankachorn, to use the area. Six vehicles and sound equipment belonging to the protestors have been damaged. The Police Chief, Pol. General Sant Sarutanond also lied to public that the police were forced to use violence against the protestors as they "got to close to the hotel". In fact, a space near the parking lot of the hotel, which is more than 300 metres away, has been agreed upon by the Prime Minister's representative for the villagers to use for staging peaceful demonstration. And they were brutally beaten right at the spot while praying.

At present, about 11 NGO activists, students and villagers, have been charged for obstructing and injuring officers and possessing weapons and detained at police station. Their bails are denied.

It is disheartening that such a harsh attack against a religious and peaceful group of villagers took place in this so-called democratic country. It is even more

deplorable that the government is so obsessed with its desire to industrialize the South of Thailand, the particular area of which has enabled fishing communities to live abundantly for centuries. They do not want the gas pipeline project and the affiliated petrochemical and other industrial estates at the expense of their peaceful livelihood. There are studies whose findings are against the touted economic benefits of the project. The energy glut does not seem to make the government heed to counter argument from the protesters.

In choosing Had Yai as the venue for the joint cabinet meeting, the Thai government simply wants to show to the Malaysian government that everything is under control, and that any hurdles against the commencement of this gas pipeline construction have been removed. It is not so, as the Thai government fails to give reasonable answers to many questions by the villagers and many concerned academics. More than 1,000 academics from leading institutions countrywide have recently asked the government to review the project to no avail. The Senate Committee on environment and the National Human Rights Commission have recommended that this project and the industrialization be halted until more information can be gathered and public inquiry is sufficiently completed.

We, the representatives of development organizations, submit the following demands to the Prime Minister, Mr. Thaksin Shinawatra, and the cabinet:

1. All protesters who have been arrested be released unconditionally and that their injuries be cared of and their damage be compensated for.
2. Compensations are made to damage done to vehicles, sound equipment and other belongings of the protestors.
3. The gas pipeline project and the separation plants project be shelved to avoid further conflicts.

With Solidarity

Alternative Energy Project for Sustainability
Assembly of the Poor
Campaign for Alternative Industry Network
Campaign for Popular Democracy
Environmental Conservation Club, Rajchapat Institute, Kanchanaburi
Green World Foundation
Kanchanaburi Conservation Group
Project of Ecological Recovery
Yadana Pipeline Affected Communities Alliance
Sustainable Energy Network Thailand
Thai Development Support Committee
Thai Volunteer Service
Thai-Karenni People Group
Union for Civil Liberty
Water Resource Network
Wildlife Fund Thailand under the Royal Patronage of H.M. the Queen

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