

Burmese farmers' land fight celebrated in new booklet

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(Hong Kong, January 10, 2012) A Burma-based rights group has released a new publication documenting and recounting the courageous fight against land expropriation, intimidation and false prosecution of a group of rural villagers.

The 38-page Burmese language booklet, "Forced expropriations of farmlands and partial victories", written and published by the Farmers' Rights Defenders Network, retells the story of the villagers of Sissayan, in Magway, part of the country's dry central zone, who have been struggling against the attempts of army-backed companies to take over their land for use by factories that will produce toxic substances.

The Asian Human Rights Commission issued an urgent appeal in April about an attack and false prosecution of a group of the farmers leading the fight against the army-backed companies in Sissayan: <http://www.humanrights.asia/news/urgent-appeals/AHRC-UAC-073-2011>.

Although a court convicted the farmers, the village community rallied around them, as told and illustrated through photographs in the new booklet, and on appeal their sentences were reduced to the time already served.

Wong Kai Shing, director of the AHRC, said that the new publication showed the strength of spirit and a sense of natural justice among people in Burma.

"It is a very promising sign for Burma that such a strong spirit exists among the people around the country to stand up for their rights and resist attacks on their livelihoods and even their very lives," Wong said.

"That people in Burma are themselves now documenting and publicizing their energetic struggle, with few resources and still relatively limited contact with human rights defenders from around the region also shows that they are maturing as human rights defenders and learning very fast," he added.

In its 2011 Annual Report, the Hong Kong-based regional human rights group highlighted forcible and illegal land expropriation through military-corporate links as one of the major emerging human rights issues in Burma as political and economic conditions change.

The annual report is available for downloading here: <http://www.humanrights.asia/resources/hrreport/2011/AHRC-SPR-004-2011.pdf>

The booklet on the Sissayan farmers, in Burmese, is available here: <http://www.humanrights.asia/resources/BurmeseSysayamFarmerBook.pdf>