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A Positive Step In Burma

Work on a controversial and costly dam in Northern Burma has been suspended .



Photo: ASSOCIATED PRESS

A woman works on the bank of the Irrawaddy river in Kachin State, northern Burma.

Work on a controversial and costly dam in Northern Burma has been suspended after the Burmese government announced last week that the project was against the will and interests of the Burmese people. The United States welcomes the step by Burmese President Thein Sein to respond to the public concerns and to promote national reconciliation.

In a project begun five years ago, a consortium of Chinese companies has been working to stem the Irrawaddy River in Burma's Kachin State to control the river flow and generate electric power. The Myitsone dam is opposed by political activists and environmental groups on the grounds that it would displace thousands of villagers in the region and cause significant environmental damage. The dam would submerge a culturally important site in the heartland of the Kachin people, covering an area the size of Singapore. Fueling the controversy further, most of the power to be generated by the dam would be transmitted to China, not Burma, where the vast majority of the people do not have access to electricity.

The Myitsone dam project is only suspended, however, and its ultimate fate at this point is unclear. Nevertheless, it is a hopeful sign that greater political dialogue is developing in the once tightly controlled Southeast Asian nation. We encourage the Burmese government to continue taking steps to respect and consider the interests of its people, including all ethnic groups, the prodemocracy opposition and civil society.

<http://www.voanews.com/policy/editorials/A-Positive-Step-In-Burma-131339798.html>