

A Briefing on the TOTAL Oil Campaign by the Burma Campaign UK

TOTALitarian OIL:



TOTAL Oil and Burma

Burma is ruled by a military dictatorship renowned for both oppressing and impoverishing its people, while enriching itself and the foreign businesses that work with it. TOTAL Oil, the fourth largest oil company in the world, is in a joint venture with Burma's dictatorship in the Yadana gas project in Southern Burma. TOTAL will not state how much their project generates for the Burmese regime annually but reports suggest it is US\$ 972 million annually. TOTAL has operated in Burma since 1992 against the wishes of Burma's elected leaders, many of whom are being detained by the Junta. Aung San Suu Kyi, Burma's prodemocracy leader, has said that "Total has become the main supporter of the Burmese military regime." She told the French weekly *Le Nouvel Observateur* that "TOTAL knew what it was doing when it invested massively in Burma while others withdrew from the market for ethical reason

TOTAL's brutal business partner

TOTAL's business partner, Burma's ruling military, has an appalling record:

- Rules through fear. The regime uses rape as a weapon of war against its own people.
- Prioritises guns over human development. Whilst the regime spends over half its budget on the military whilst only 1.4% of GDP on health and education.
- Has no respect for human rights. The regime has broken every single article of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- Lost an election by a landslide and ignored the result. After seeing Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy win 82% of the seats in the 1990 election, the regime simply disregarded the vote and strengthened its grip on power.
- Arrests and tortures its critics. Today there are nearly 1,800 political prisoners in Burma. Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi is amongst them. Many prisoners are routinely tortured.
- Systematically uses forced labour. Men, women and children are routinely forced to work for the army and in construction projects – often imposed with the threat of physical abuse, beatings, torture, rape and murder.

What Burmas democrats say:

The National League for Democracy (NLD), led by Aung San Suu Kyi called on foreign companies not to invest in Burma because of the role investment plays in perpetuating dictatorship in that country. All the major ethnic leaderships from Burma have wholeheartedly supported this position too. Therefore, the mandate from which companies are asked not to invest in Burma comes from within the country.

TOTAL's destructive engagement:

TOTAL's presence in Burma has consequences far beyond its 63-kilometre pipeline across Burmese territory. Its destructive influence goes to the heart of international policy towards one of the world's most brutal regimes. For that reason, it is essential for all those who want change in Burma to deal with the problem of TOTAL Oil. Here are some of the destructive consequences of TOTAL's 'engagement' in Burma:

French foreign policy:

One of the most significant consequences of TOTAL's presence in Burma is its influence on French foreign policy. In order to protect TOTAL's interests, the French government has in the past defended TOTAL's investment in Burma and repeatedly ensured that proposed new sanctions against Burma would not affect the regime's most lucrative sector – oil and gas. France, by protecting TOTAL's interest in Burma, is protecting the dictatorship itself.

During the September 2007 uprising Nicolas Sarkozy publicly urged TOTAL not to support the regime further by investing in the country. This is a significant step forward. However, it is not enough. The French Government should publicly condemn TOTAL's presence in Burma and order the company to pull out immediately.

Financing dictatorship:

It is estimated that gas exports to Thailand, supply the junta with an estimated \$2.7 billion annually. Natural gas is now Burma's largest single source of export revenue; investment in Burma has helped the regime to build its military capacity. Jane's Defence Weekly reported in July 2001 that Rangoon was buying 10 MiG-29 jet fighters from the Russian Aircraft-building Corporation for US\$130 million and that the money was coming from Thai gas purchases. The down-payment for the MIGs (30 percent of the total) came in the same week that the state-owned Petroleum Authority of Thailand paid Burma US\$100 million in royalties, for gas due to be piped ashore from fields in the Gulf of Martaban. Before the Thais made this payment under the terms of its 1995 contract, Burma had almost depleted its foreign exchange reserves. According to Robert Karniol, Asia editor of Jane's Defence Weekly, the Russians had been unwilling to sell aircraft to Burma until revenue began to flow from the gas field.

Human rights abuses:

In response to reports of forced labour being used on their project, TOTAL stated : "Certain incidents may have escaped TOTAL's attention in the very early phases of the project". While Michel Viallard, head of TOTAL Myanmar has said, "In the very first months, we learnt about the use of forced labour by the army... and we decided voluntarily to pay the people who had been conscripted." Jean-Pierre Cordier, head of TOTAL's Ethics Committee has hinted at the company's responsibility for those who suffered by saying: "When a case of forced labour is brought to our attention, we make every effort to offer compensation".

TOTAL was fully aware of the dangers inherent in deploying Burmese Army troops in an area where civilian families were living. The company's website says: "TOTAL was well aware that the Army's presence in the region could have negative consequences for villages in the area". Despite this, the company opted to employ, through MOGE (Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise), the services of an Army internationally renowned for its extreme and unrelenting brutality. In doing so it unleashed a terrible and lasting devastation on the communities of the region and for this, TOTAL must bear responsibility.

Legal challenges:

The decision by TOTAL's original partner on its operations in Burma, Unocal (now owned by the US Company Chevron) to settle out of court rather than to go before a jury to defend itself against allegations of human rights abuses should worry TOTAL. A similar case was accepted for investigation by a French court for allegations against TOTAL, however TOTAL settled out of court.

Failure of constructive engagement:

The 'constructive engagement' that TOTAL claims to have been carrying out in Burma over the last decade has not resulted in a single democratic reform by the regime.

The International Coalition against TOTAL Oil

The campaign calling for TOTAL's withdrawal from Burma currently comprises an international coalition of over 50 organisations across 18 countries. In the UK the coalition includes: Friends of the Earth, Unison, the World Development Movement and the Burma Campaign UK. The plan is to build the coalition in numbers, strength and profile.

The international campaign against TOTAL Oil aims to:

1. Force the company to withdraw from Burma, in order to end the company's support for the regime
2. Deter future foreign investment in Burma thereby cutting revenue to the regime
3. Open the way to a French foreign policy that no longer undermines Burma's pro-democracy movement

These three aims are linked. The political fallout from the withdrawal of Burma's largest European investor would be greater than any company withdrawal so far. It would represent the greatest deterrent to potential investors in Burma to date. In the long term, it would reduce investment and therefore revenue to the regime. It would also end TOTAL's influence on French government policy, which weakens the EU position on Burma.

TOTAL's withdrawal could open the way to a tougher French position and therefore a tougher EU policy against Burma.

Take action!

Join the TOTAL campaign

Civil society organisations concerned with making corporations accountable for their actions can contact us about joining the International Coalition against TOTAL. To take action on TOTAL, please visit www.burmacampaign.org.uk/total.html or email info@burmacampaign.org.uk for TOTAL campaign postcards and materials.

Join the Burma Campaign UK

Name: _____

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Please circle: Family £25 Single £15 Concessions £8 Outside UK £20

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Cheques are payable to **'The Burma Campaign UK'**

Please note that we are unable to accept CAF or other charity cheques.

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