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## Thailand: one year of struggle against Yadana gas pipeline

In late 1995 the Petroleum Authority of Thailand (PTT) started a survey of the route for a gas pipeline between the western province of Kanchanaburi and Myanmar (ancient Burma). It was only after eight months that they admitted that the pipeline would be built. Since its very beginning this project was strongly resisted by villagers living near the route of the pipeline, who feared an explosion since the required security standards have not been reached. Now resistance has reached a national level and many civil society organizations have joined to object its economic feasibility and to protest against the environmental impact expected because of the works.

A seminar was held on March 7th in Bangkok to discuss on the polemic pipeline. More than 300 people --among them members of various environmental and grassroots organizations, representatives of ethnic minority groups and student groups-- attended the event. The PTT and the government were accused for the lack of transparency of the project, for the agreement reached with a cruel dictatorship like that ruling Myanmar, and for their non fulfilment of the promises made regarding environmental restoration of the affected territory. Vast areas of forests were felled to give place to the pipeline and the authorities had promised that a reforestation plan was to be undertaken.

Among the speakers was Sulak Sivaraksa, the social critic who launched a solo sit-in protest at the pipeline site when it was being constructed. He was sent to jail and charged with trespassing, and his case is still pending in court. Mr Sulak said that the peaceful struggle against the pipeline project had not ended, and that the PTT must be forced to reveal fully what he called its "shameful contract" to buy gas from the Yadana field in Burma. However, he said the "real enemy" was not the PTT or the Thai government but transnational corporations which intend to exploit the region's natural resources, regardless of the peoples' interests.

Speaking on behalf of the anti-pipeline coalition --that is formed by more than 500 different organizations-- leading opponent Pibhop Dhongchai said that the problem arose due to lack of public participation in the planning and implementation of the country's energy policy and demanded that the public takes that role. The coalition also demanded that the PTT and the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand postpone all their projects, including the Thai-Malaysian joint development project in the Gulf of Thailand, because it had become clear that there was an oversupply of gas and electricity in the country. It also demanded the cancellation of the three power plant projects in Prachuap Khiri Khan.

Sources: Oilwatch Secretariat 19/3/99, based on: Bangkok Post, March 8, 1999; "Yadana pipeline: PTT is telling us lies", Watershed Vol 3 Nr 1 July - October 1997.