



LIOH Statement regarding the World Bank's 2019 conference on Land and Poverty

25 March 2019

From the 25-29 the World Bank is hosting its annual conference on “Land and Poverty Conference 2019”. This conference is pitched as a platform for experts to gather and present on solutions to the world’s land issues, including those afflicting Myanmar’s people today.

We, the Land in Our Hands, [a multi-ethnic national network in partnership with civil society and community based organizations across Myanmar], firmly believes that the World bank is the wrong institution to be leading communities out of land related poverty at a global scale, and has a major conflict of interests as the Bank has arguably exacerbated land related inequality through its investments and structural adjustment programs.

Myanmar is facing a serious land crisis that has been built on decades of successive military government’s systematic and widespread land expropriations from the country’s people. The current semi-civilian government, led by the NLD, has followed in the footsteps of previous authoritarian dictatorships in attempting to corner land as an investment opportunity while ignoring the history of land expropriations and how they continue to fan the flames of inequality, conflict and poverty.

Sadly, the NLD-led government’s land reforms are deepening the existing land tenure insecurities of millions of farmers across the country, and foreclosing opportunities for genuine federal democratic reforms and lasting peace.

The recently amended Vacant Fallow Virgin Land Management Law effectively designates 45 million acres of land in Myanmar as “untitled” or vacant land, leaving it open for investment - 82 per cent of this land lies in non-Bamar ethnic States. There is no such thing as vacant land in Myanmar, and by ignoring the diversity of existing land tenure systems practiced by local farming communities, this law will transform these farmers into landless criminals, deprive them of their livelihoods and strip them of their cultural heritage and identity. In response to this situation, 346 CSOs across Myanmar (<https://lioh.org/?p=46>); the ethnic political parties (<https://lioh.org/?p=53>) and war affected displaced community from Kachin (<https://lioh.org/?p=61>) issued statements calling on the Myanmar government to repeal the VFVL law.

Land conflicts that are now emerging throughout the country will worsen as foreign companies, supported by foreign governments and International financial institutions, rush in to profit before any meaningful or far-reaching political and economic reforms have taken root in Myanmar. The World Bank’s engagement in the Myanmar land issue will lead to an acceleration of land grabbing and compound the dispossession of local communities from their lands and resources; and further fuel conflict and rights violations including displacement in Myanmar.

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