

Finnwatch: Pöyry got off scot-free

Today the Finnish ministry of employment and the economy, as well as the committee on corporate social responsibility (YHVA), a multi-stakeholder body acting under the ministry, announced that the consulting firm Pöyry has not violated international corporate responsibility guidelines in the contested Xayabur dam project in Laos.

Finnwatch's representative delivered a dissenting opinion to the committee's statement.

– Factors that were of central importance to the conclusions of the complaint process should have been investigated and assessed more thoroughly. The information available to the committee does not justify relieving Pöyry of its responsibility, Ms Sonja Vartiala, Finnwatch's executive director and a member of the committee, says.

The committee's opinion is based on statements submitted by Pöyry, the organisations that filed the complaint, and government ministries.

No analysis of the existence or adequacy of Pöyry's human rights risk assessment mechanisms is included in the committee's statement. Potential conflicts of interest arising from the company's double role as feasibility evaluator and executing engineer are also ignored.

– The fact that the most important document in the entire process, Pöyry's response to the complaint, was classified as strictly confidential, made it very difficult to assess the complaint, Vartiala notes.

The committee also lacked access to some of the materials submitted by the organisations filing the complaint. Pöyry rejected all efforts to engage in constructive dialogue during the assessment process.

It is cold comfort that the committee states that Pöyry should have acted more responsibly in the dam project, especially as it fails to suggest any concrete measures the company should take to improve its responsibility.

– The statement itself is symptomatic of Finland's toothless and underresourced corporate responsibility policy.

One of the Finnish government's stated goals is that Finnish company's should serve as examples in corporate responsibility. The OECD guidelines are the most important international corporate responsibility norms to the promotion of which Finland is committed.

However, a report submitted by the ministry of employment and the economy to the OECD in June makes it clear that Finland has not allocated financial or human resources to the implementation of the guidelines or proactively promoted their use.

– At the very least our decision makers should honour official commitments they've already made in the past, Vartiala says.

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