

# THE *Hollywood* REPORTER®

## TOTAL DENIAL

Film by Milena Kaneva

**Bottom Line: The film makes its case convincingly and compellingly.**

By Frank Scheck

Nov 29, 2007

MK Prods. NEW YORK -- Its release being particularly timely in the wake of the recent crackdowns by the government of Myanmar, "Total Denial" is a documentary with unusually strong narrative hooks. Featuring an articulate and charismatic human-rights activist as its hero and a climactic court case that wouldn't be out of place in a Hollywood legal drama, the film is a crudely made but engrossing nonfiction effort that deserves wide exposure. Made by Belgian journalist Milena Kaneva, the film documents the horrifying human-rights violations committed by the Myanmar military junta in the course of building a massive natural gas pipeline stretching from Burma to Thailand that was funded by two major corporations: the French oil company Total and the multinational Unocal. According to the film, the local army acted for many years as a sort of brutal security force for its construction, forcing thousands of local villagers into slave labor and routinely engaging in such activities as arson, rape and murder. Leading the protests against these practices was Ka Hsaw Wa and his American wife, Katie, who helped instigate a historic lawsuit filed by 15 of the villagers against the companies, involved that eventually led to a 2004 legal victory in California. Although its scattershot execution occasionally leads to some narrative confusion, the film makes its case convincingly and compellingly, providing vivid portraits of the convoluted American legal system and the indigenous culture of the displaced villagers.