



## ALL-INCLUSIVENESS IN AN ETHNIC CONTEXT

After what had been recognised as successful talks in July that brought the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) closer to fruition only three points remained to be addressed before a binding agreement could be signed. Perhaps crucially the most important for all concerned parties were which groups are to be included in the signing of the NCA. This has become a particularly difficult point to address as the Government and the armed ethnic group leaders have differing views as to the validity of those groups that can be a part of the process at the initial ceasefire stage.

There are six groups that are a major concern during these talks, each group has a different background, a different goal, and different claims as to why they deserve to participate in what is

ostensibly an agreement not to militarily engage the government's armed forces.

While two of the three main points, signatories and witnesses to the agreement, were satisfactorily settled at a meeting between the Union Peace-making Work Committee (UPWC) and Ethnic Armed Organizations-Senior Delegation (SD), from 6 to 7 August 2015, at the Myanmar Peace Centre, the main one, all-inclusiveness, or more correctly who gets to sign the ceasefire agreement, continues to be unresolved and without compromise could see the peace process delayed until well after May 2016, as the 8 November election and the installation of a new government is finalised. Consequently, there remains little time left for an agreement to be made.

## THE ROOTS OF ALL-INCLUSIVENESS

The ethnic perception of all-inclusiveness is rooted in the armed ethnic alliances of the late sixties, early seventies and the eighties. These alliances were created to militarily aid armed ethnic group as the Burma Army launched numerous large scale offensives against them by putting forward a united front that allowed smaller armed groups to benefit from association with much larger, better

equipped and well trained ethnic forces. It was a fairly simple premise, with Burma army forces engaged on numerous fronts they would not be able to pool their resources on a single offensive against any one particular group.

The first such alliance was the Karen National Union-initiated Democratic Nationalities United



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Front (DNUF) which in April 1956, brought together a number of ethnic groups including the Mon, Karenni, and Pa-oh.<sup>1</sup> Three years later, on 16 May 1959, the National Democratic United Front (NDUF) was created and included the Karen National Union Party (KNUP)<sup>2</sup>, the New Mon State Party (NMSP) and, much to the right leaning KNU leaders' consternation, who refused to have any part in it, the Communist Party of Burma. The inclusion of the CPB would later lead to an east-west split in the KNU, resulting in an anti-socialist putsch and in 1970 the formation of the National United Liberation Front (NULF) comprising U Nu's People Democratic Party (PDP) and its armed wing the PLA<sup>3</sup>, the KNU, and the New Mon State Party (NMSP)<sup>4</sup>.

The inclusion of a pre-dominantly Burman armed group, the PDP caused friction with the ethnic groups as did the NULF demand for a 'Federal Union Republic.' Many Karen saw this as counter to Saw Ba U Gyi's principles which included the recognition of a separate Karen state. In 1972, after Karen and Mon requests to have the right of secession were agreed to, U Nu resigned and went into retirement, leaving the PLA to fend for itself.<sup>5</sup>

With the NULF gone, the next attempt at a non-Burma ethnic alliance was the Revolutionary National Alliance (RNA) formed by the KNU, SSPP, KNLP and KNPP at the KNU base at

Kawmoora in May 1973. Its aim was 'to establish a genuine federal union of independent national states based on the principles of equality and national self-determination.'

It also included the Arakanese resistance movement, the Arakan Liberation Party (ALP) which had based representatives in Karen areas. The KNU began training the new forces at Kawmoora where they would join another joint nationalities organisation, the Federal Nationalities Democratic Front (FNDF). This superseded the RNA in 1975 and was an organisation which specifically promoted separate nationality states and refused any 'Burman membership.'<sup>6</sup>

However, perhaps the most successful all-inclusive ethnic only alliance was the National Democratic Front (NDF). It was formed on 10 May 1976 at Manerplaw, the KNU's new headquarters on the Moei River. The front initially consisted of the KNU, NMSP, KNPP, ALP, Kachin Independence Organisation, Shan United Revolutionary Army (SURA) and a number of other smaller organisations. The main objective of the NDF was 'to establish a Federal Union based on the right of determination for all nationalities.'<sup>7</sup>

While a number of joint patrols were organised involving various NDF members perhaps the NDF's



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biggest success was arbitrating a territorial dispute between the KNU and NMSP over the lucrative trading gate at Three Pagodas Pass. In late July KNU forces clashed with Mon troops in Waithali village, Kya-in-seikkyi Township and a number of skirmishes continued throughout the following month both in Karen and Mon states. The NDF were able to find a mutually beneficial solution.

After the 1988 uprising a number of students fled the cities and found their way to armed ethnic group camps on the border. As a result a new alliance was formed. The Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB), was formed on the 18 October 1988 as an ethnic and Burman front incorporating all the members of the NDF and 12 underground Burman groups. Not long after a new front was formed composed of representatives of armed groups and exiled political organizations. The National Council Union of Burma (NCUB) the organisation was formed on September 22, 1992 and aimed to achieve a democratic federal system in Burma.

It must be noted that the NDF, the NCUB, the DAB existed concurrently usually consisting of the same leaders but in different positions, although for the main part they were normally led by the KNU with many of them having offices at the KNU HQ at Manerplaw. The fact that ethnic leaders were involved in differing positions on alliances that varied their objectives but had only one distinct goal – the overthrow of the military, or in

ethnic parlance the Bamar dominated military – was to emerge throughout later alliances.

The greatest shock to the veneer of ethnic inclusiveness occurred in 1994 when the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO), a leading member of the DAB and led by Brang Seng, decided to open negotiations with the then military Government, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). The negotiations would result in the KIO walking away from their ethnic allies to sign a ceasefire with the military government.

General Bo Mya, Chairman of the DAB, failed to hide his indignation with the KIO in an interview in the Bangkok Post he stated:

*“Brang Seng’s move [w]as an act of betrayal not only to the Alliance but to the Kachin people as well.”<sup>8</sup>*

According to the interview Gen Bo Mya had said that he had been informed that the rank and file of the KIO were unhappy with Brang Seng’s decision to cut a deal with the Rangoon government and,

*“That is the reason why I will continue to organise all the Kachin people and those in the rank and file of the KIO who desire genuine peace... It was the Kachin leadership alone that is to be blamed.”<sup>9</sup>*



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As has often been the case, the cracks in ethnic unanimity have been characterised as a plot by the Burmese Army to divide ethnic unity but such reasoning totally ignores the fact that the main motives for splits within individual groups, and therefore alliances as a whole, are actually of an ethnic making. Either due to inequality and a class system, power grabbing factionalism, or incompatible objectives.

Not long after the KIO signed a ceasefire deal with the SLORC, the New Mon State Party did the same although for very different reasons including pressure from Thailand. Various factions that had split from other groups and had signed up with the government, either through its SLORC or State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) incarnation, frequently fought alongside the Tatmadaw against their ethnic brethren.

While a number of these groups still remain on paper, periodically issuing statements, they have been subsumed by other groups including the Ethnic Nationalities Council (ENC, formerly ENSCC), the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC), the Working Group for Ethnic Coordination (WGEC), the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordinating

Committee (NCCT), and the NCCT's off-shoot the Senior Delegation (SD) all of whom have at varying, often simultaneous times, held the ethnic façade of inclusiveness. The fact there have been so many groups is in itself evidence that ethnic unity, is not unified.

These groups have consistently been formed through numerous meetings, conferences and summits resulting in new objectives, and more frequently old ones, and numerous point-punctuated statements being agreed to and issued while members also issue contradictory statements as to what has been agreed to further adding to the difficulties of portraying a unified front.

## THE UNFC DEFINITION OF ALL-INCLUSIVENESS

The current issue around the term 'all-inclusiveness' revolves around the interpretation that the UNFC leadership, and, it must be stressed, not all ethnic leaders, applies to it.

The origins of the UNFC began in November 2010 shortly after the general elections in Myanmar. Three ceasefire groups, the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO), the New Mon State Party



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(NMSP), the Shan State Progress Party (SSPP) together with three non-ceasefire groups, the Karen National Union (KNU), the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) and the Chin National Front (CNF), formally announced the creation of an organising committee, the Committee for the Emergence of a Federal Union (CEFU).<sup>10</sup> The committee's purpose was to consolidate a united front at a time when the ceasefire groups faced perceived imminent attacks by the Myanmar Army and to try to negotiate collectively with the government. Consequently, at a conference held from the 12-16 February 2011, CEFU declared its dissolution and the formation of the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC). The UNFC, which was at that time comprised of 12 ethnic organisations<sup>11</sup>, stated that:

*"The goal of the UNFC is to establish the future Federal Union (of Burma) and the Federal Union Army is formed for giving protection to the people of the country."<sup>12</sup>*

Shortly after, wide-scale conflict occurred throughout areas controlled by the SSPP and a number of their bases were lost to the Myanmar Army. Then, in June, the KIO ceasefire broke down resulting in the current conflict in Kachin State. The formation of the UNFC had occurred at a time of increasing uncertainty in relation to how the new Burmese Government would settle the ceasefire group issue. Consequently, the creation of a broad-based alliance consisting of both ceasefire

and non-ceasefire groups was a reasonable move.

The political leadership of the alliance originally fell on the KNU with KNLA Commander-in-Chief General Mutu announced as Chairman and KIA commander, Lt. Gen. Gauri Zau Seng as Vice Chairman No.1, the KNPP's Khun Abel Tweed took the position of Vice Chairman No.2 and the NMSP's Nai Hongsa, General Secretary. As has been noted previously, the creation of the UNFC occurred while a number of other ethnic alliances still remained. The NDF still contained members of armed ethnic groups, the NCUB was still active, as was a five-party military alliance (consisting of the Karen National Union, the Shan State Army – South, the Karenni National Progressive Party, the Chin National Front, and the Arakan Liberation Party), and existence of the military alliance was the reason given by the SSA-South for not joining the UNFC.

Despite the fact that Gen. Mutu was ostensibly chairman, the UNFC's policies were mainly driven by the KIO and the NMSP. The Central Executive Committee was reformed in May and it was announced that Lt. Gen. N'Ban La of the KIA would take over as Chairman and Gen. Mutu would be commander of the Federal Union Army (FUA). Leadership changes were made once more at a meeting in November 2011, Gen. Mutu was replaced by Maj. Gen. Bee Htoo of the KNPP as Commander-in-Chief and Brig Gen Gun Maw of the KIO was appointed as Deputy#1. There still



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remain a number of differences within the UNFC’s member organisations in regard to an integrated strategy especially with the KNU. As one leading UNFC leader noted, however, there is a need within the UNFC membership to recognise the differences in what would be the core member group, and that of smaller groups with less political leverage. According to Col. Hkun Okker, from the

UNFC speaking in 2012:

*“[The strategy we adopt] may be right or wrong. What is important is that we are just one voice. If the strategy is wrong we can adjust it later.”<sup>13</sup>*

Three years and numerous summits, conferences, and statements later the strategy remains in place and seems inviolable in relation to a ensuring a nationwide peace.

## SIGNATORIES TO THE NATIONWIDE CEASEFIRE AGREEMENT

While the opportunity has been given for some groups to be included later, the SD is insistent that all UNFC members, seventeen in total, be included in the nationwide ceasefire while the government, through the Union Peace-making

Work Committee, has proposed that only fifteen groups sign the initial agreement, with those excluded able to negotiate their inclusion later, during the political dialogue phase (see table below).

Nationwide Ceasefire Coordinating Team - SD	Union Peace-making Working Committee
	United Wa State Army
	National Democratic Alliance Army (also known as Mongla)
	Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland – Khaplang (anti-Indian Government group classed as a terrorist organisation by India)
	Restoration Council of Shan State (formerly SSA-S)*
Karen National Union*	Karen National Union*
New Mon State Party	New Mon State Party
Kachin Independence Organisation	Kachin Independence Organisation
Karenni National Progressive Party	Karenni National Progressive Party
Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (KKO)*	Democratic Karen Benevolent Army(KKO)*
Shan State Progress Party (formerly SSA-N)	Shan State Progress Party
Arakan Liberation Party	Arakan Liberation Party
The Karen Peace Council (KNU/KNLA-PC)*	The Karen Peace Council (KNU/KNLA-PC)*
Chin National Front	Chin National Front
Pa-O National Liberation Organisation	Pa-O National Liberation Organisation
All Burma Student Democratic Front (non-ethnic group, but UNFC alliance member)*	All Burma Student Democratic Front*
Arakan National Council (alliance of Rakhine groups including Arakan Army – Karen)	
Lahu Democratic Union (non-armed actor)	
Wa National Organisation (has not fought in over a decade)	
Arakan Army (Provisionally based in Kachin State)	
Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (Kokang)	
Ta’ang National Liberation Army (armed wing of the Palaung State Liberation Front)	

\*Have issued statements declaring their intention to sign the agreement.



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The reasons given by the Government for not involving certain groups largely focuses on those groups that have not as yet signed an individual ceasefire agreement, those groups that are too small, and groups that do not have an armed wing. There are six groups that the Government has concerns about, and on which the SD are not prepared to compromise. Of these six groups three that have been fighting have already agreed to de-escalate the conflict or have declared a unilateral ceasefire. Shortly before the latest round of talks which failed to find an accommodation on the all-inclusiveness issue, these three groups, the TNLA, MNDAA and the AA-Kachin, issued a joint-statement:

*“The Ethnic Armed Organizations’ (EAOs) Senior Delegation (SD) and the Union Peace-making Work Committee (UPWC) begins the 9th Meeting this week to continue negotiation for a nationwide ceasefire. This meeting is important for ending the nearly 70-year civil war in Myanmar.*

*The Government gives the reason that it cannot include some EAOs in the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) that those EAOs have not made bilateral ceasefire agreements with the Government, while the SD calls for an all-inclusive NCA in which all EAOs sign NCA together.*

*For this reason, we three EAOs, the Arakan Army (AA), Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), and Palaung State Liberation Front (PSLF/ TNLA), offer to make a ceasefire together with the Myanmar Government in order to achieve a genuine peace in Myanmar, enable the NCA to be signed as early as possible, and to begin political dialogue as early as possible.<sup>14</sup>*

While it is likely that the Government would entertain further talks with the TNLA, and also possibly the AA, the Tatmadaw is unlikely to agree to a compromise with the MNDAA which it has already once defeated and the fact that the government recognises the current Kokang leadership as legitimate.

## THE 6 EXCLUDED ORGANISATIONS

### 1. THE TA'ANG NATIONAL LIBERATION ARMY

The armed wing of the Palaung State Liberation Front. The TNLA started military activity in Palaung areas in 2011 with the training and support of the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), which it

now supports in their conflict with the Myanmar Army. The PSLF Chairman is Tar Aik Bong and the TNLA's Commander-in-Chief is Tar Hul Plang.



It is currently active in northern Shan State and claims to be able to field more than 4,000 troops. There were originally five battalions but this has been expanded to twenty-one operating in Brigade areas 1, 2, and 3 and it also has two tactical operation commands.

According to its founder and Chairman, Tar Aik Bong, the group originally wanted a nationwide ceasefire, political dialogue, and self-rule of Ta'ang areas as part of a greater Shan State. He also has noted that:

*"The main aims of PSLF/TNLA are to attain national equality and self-autonomy, but, due to the current increase in opium plantations and drugs smuggling and drug addiction issues in the region, the TNLA has to operate these two objectives jointly: a war on drug eradication and, at the same time, national liberation."*<sup>15</sup>

The TNLA supported the MNDAA in attacks against Myanmar Army units in Kokang. Although the MNDAA has a long history of involvement in the drugs trade, Tar Aik Bong insists that the MNDAA are not currently involved in narcotics and therefore there is no obstacle to being allied

with them.<sup>16</sup>

The TNLA's support for the MNDAA has caused major problems throughout the peace process and prior to supporting the MNDAA, the TNLA had had low level contact with the Government. The TNLA had an unofficial meeting with U Aung Min, on 9 November 2012, on the side-lines of a UNFC meeting, and also met with Union Peace-making Work Committee (UWPC) in July 2013, in Muse and both sides agreed to meet again to sign a genuine cease-fire agreement and to reduce the armed conflict. However, clashes in Ta'ang areas increased and no further attempts were made by the Government to contact them.

At the end of August and in September 2014, the group's leaders sent two official letters to President U Thein Sein and Min Aung Hlaing, commander-in-chief, asking for a second round of negotiations and received no reply.

At the moment it has vowed to deescalate the conflict in its areas of operation, although low-scale firefights continue. It has been suggested that the government would entertain further talks with the TNLA.

## 2. THE MYANMAR NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC ALLIANCE ARMY

The MNDAA led by Peng Kya-shin, was created out of the remnants of the CPB. In 1989, it was the first group to sign a ceasefire with the then military Government. Heavily reliant on the drugs

trade the MNDAA, in 2002, announced that it had banned opium throughout its territories and had embarked on an opium eradication program.



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Tension began to flare within the group when the Government announced that all ceasefire groups would be forced to become Border Guard Force units. At a meeting on 4 June 2009, Pheung Kya-shin met with Lt. Gen Ye Myint and told him that the MNDAA had no desire to change its current status, and that no decision would be made until after the 2010 elections and the appointment of a new government.

One month later, in July, Pheung Kya-shin expelled six Kokang executive committee members including his deputy Bai Sou Qian (Bai Souqian), Chief Administrative Officer Mi Xiaoting, Liu Guo Shi, Li Erh, and Wei Xiaoyang. Sources suggest that they had clashed over Pheung Kya-shin's unfair distribution of power with most of the important positions in the organization being held by Pheung's sons. In addition, the six were reportedly also in favour of transforming the Kokang troops into a Border Guard Force.

On 25 August a silent coup occurred in Laogai, led by Bai Sou Qian, Mi Xiaoting, Liu Guo Shi and Li Erh. The coup was later supported by other Kokang militias from Kunlong and Hopang and the Myanmar Army.

### 3. THE ARAKAN ARMY – KACHIN

The Arakan Army (AA) was founded on 10 April 2009 in what it describes as its temporary

On 31 August the SPDC-run New Light of Myanmar issued a statement saying that the region was now stable. After the MNDAA's defeat a number of its troops were forced to flee either to China or to areas under UWSA control.

Pheung Kya Shin remained off the radar until 2012 when he resurfaced at the Kachin Independence Organisation Headquarters at Laiza. After being supplied with weapons and training the MNDAA launched an offensive against the Kokang capital Laogai in February 2015 resulting in large scale retaliatory attacks from the Myanmar army and the displacement of tens of thousands of civilians.

On the 11 June 2015, the group announced a unilateral ceasefire stating that it was influenced by:

*“The Chinese government's strong calls for restoring peace in the China-Myanmar border region.”<sup>17</sup>*

The group also said Myanmar's coming election, scheduled for November, and the country's democratization process were reasons to try to bring an end to the fighting, but added that the group maintains its “right to protect ourselves”.

headquarters in Kachin State. It is estimated to have approximately 2,500 troops and claims to

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have 10,000 supporters. It is led by Commander-in-chief General Twan Mrat Naing and Second-in-Command Col. Dr. Nyo Twan Awng, its Chief of Staff is Brigadier Tun Myat Naing. Its main aims are:

- 1/ *Self-determination for the people of Arakan.*
- 2/ *Safeguard national identity and cultural heritage.*
- 3/ *Promote national dignity and Arakanese national interests.*

The group, after training, had originally planned to return to Arakan State and fight for self-determination; however, with the outbreak of fighting in Kachin State in June 2011, they were unable to return. As a result, they took up arms against the Myanmar Army in support of the KIA.

The Arakan Army in Kachin State is not affiliated

with the Arakan Liberation Party/Arakan Army actually in Rakhine State and along the Thai-Myanmar Border. The Kachin based AA is much stronger and more battle conditioned. It currently has no political leadership as Dr. Nyo Twan Aung notes:

*“Arakan Army is only an armed group, not a political party, fighting against the government for freedom of Arakanese people.”*

In addition, the MNDAA, AA, and TNLA, there are three other, non-combatant, groups that the SD insists are included in the signing of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement.

#### 4. THE LAHU DEMOCRATIC UNION/LAHU DEMOCRATIC FRONT

Originally, the Lahu National Organization/Army (LNO/A) was based in Mong Na, west of Thailand's Chiang Dao town. The LNO/A was formed by Char Ui in 1985, but never built a significant military capacity. It morphed into the Lahu Democratic Union its current Chairman is U Khun Sar. While the LDF in the past has been in conflict with the Myanmar Army it has remained largely dormant over the last decade. In April 2007, it signed a deed of commitment with Switzerland based Geneva Call banning the LDF's use of landmines, in a statement after the signing, it noted that:

*“The LDF, had few soldiers. We did not want to use landmines, but we felt we had to use them to protect our people from the SPDC so that they would not come and disturb us. We always tried to let our people know not to go to the dangerous areas. Still, some animals and young children were injured by the mines we laid. In 2006 alone, 12 children and some animals were injured by landmines, while two Lahu from other areas visiting our villages were killed by these mines.*

*Following discussions with Geneva Call*



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*in November 2006, the LDF decided to ban anti-personnel mines. Up to this time, the LDF actively laid mines to protect the villages and our own camps. We planted around 200 landmines, and have a stockpile of 300-400 anti-personnel landmines, which we now plan to destroy. We will also start clearing*

*immediately the mines that we've planted."*

Since that time there have been no reported incidents of armed conflict and it is believed that the LDF as an armed group no longer exists.

## 5. THE WA NATIONAL ORGANISATION

The Wa National Organization/Army (WNO/A), was formed under the command of Maha San, the son of the Wa prince of Vingngun, and operated out of a small area adjacent to Chiang Mai's Fang District. A NDF member it was allegedly involved in the narcotics trade.<sup>18</sup> A signatory to the 1997 Mae Tha

Raw Hta Agreement the group which maintains a presence in Chiang Mai, Thailand, is headquartered north of Loi Mountain at Loiwalanho, and has had little armed involvement since the late nineties it has primarily subsumed itself to the UWSA.

## 6. THE ARAKAN NATIONAL COUNCIL

The Arakan National Council (ANC) is a political front created in 2004 during pre-convention discussions prior to the Government's National Convention. The ANC was established in New Delhi, India but most of its member parties are based along the Thailand-Myanmar border. It includes exiled groups the Arakan League for Democracy (ALD-Exiled), National United Party of Arakan (NUPA), the Arakan Army (AA), the All Arakan Students' and Youths' Congress (AASYC), the Rakhaing Sangha Union (RSU) and a number of Rakhine academics, advisers and intellectuals. It

stated goals are:

- 1. Solidarity of the entire people of Arakan.*
- 2. Elimination of military dictatorship in Burma.*
- 3. Establishment of political equality and self-determination of Arakan on true federal principles among the different states in Burma.*
- 4. Peaceful co-existence and establishment of strong and indivisible Arakan<sup>19</sup>*

The ANC has an armed wing led by Col. Mong



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Htwam aka Marm Zan Wai. The Arakan Army, formed in 2010 and based in Karen State is estimated to be able to field more than a hundred troops.<sup>20</sup> From 2008 onwards, the AA had been operating as a shadow army and fighting alongside KNLA troops. After the DKBA split and the BGF was created following the 2010 election, it officially declared its existence, sided with DKBA/KKO, and established its base in Karen State. That said however, the Government is unlikely to accept it as a legitimate signatory to the NCA.

Twan Zaw, ANC General-Secretary, has said that he believes that the USDP government is

discriminating against certain groups throughout the ceasefire and NCA negotiations and he doubts their commitment to peace in the country.<sup>21</sup> He notes that:

*“We [ANC] would like to see equal representation for [all] the EAOs at the Political Dialogue. At the same time, there must be total amnesty and all 21 EAOs must be removed from the illegal association act.”*

## THE WAY FORWARD

There is little doubt that all groups have genuine grievances and deserve to be given an equal place at the table regarding their future. That said, however, it must be noted that the Ceasefire Agreement is just as it says, an agreement to prevent further conflict, conflict between two or more parties who are actually fighting each other.

Since talks began, there has been a blurring of the line between what a ceasefire agreement is and what a political accommodation is. It is that failure to clearly differentiate the two that has led to the long drawn out process of negotiation after negotiation, and perhaps more importantly, further loss of life on all sides. Armed ethnic groups

have never been closer to signing an agreement and for genuine peace to exist in the country all parties must seek a compromise to allow all groups to move further – however, this should not be tied to all groups signing a ceasefire agreement at the first stage.

From August 14 to 15, the Karen National Union Central Standing Committee (KNU-CSC) held its fifth emergency meeting at Lay Wah, the KNU Headquarters, Karen State. The emergency meeting was held to discuss the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), the current political situation, and to review KNU activities. A statement from the meeting made it quite clear that the KNU

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had decided to sign the agreement regardless of whether it would be an all-inclusive signing. It quoted Padoh Saw Kwe Htoo Win, KNU General Secretary, as saying:

*“First, we discussed and analysed the meeting results from the 9th round of negotiation talks between Ethnic’s Senior Delegation and government’s UPWC. We accepted and approved the result from that meeting after thoroughly discussing the matter. The KNU decided to sign the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement together with other ethnic armed organisations. Currently, this is the only way that will bring us to the political dialogue (...) This NCA is not only related to the ceasefire and military matters but also includes political dialogue. Through the political dialogue, we hope to resolve our political conflicts, amend the current constitution, and build a federal democratic union.”*

In relation to all-inclusiveness he continued:

*“Even we want every organisation to sign the NCA, I understand that some organisations, for some reasons, cannot sign right now. We will seek ways for them to gain some recommendation politically and militarily so that they participate at the political dialogue, and they receive humanitarian assistance for their civilians. The KNU will find solutions to include them along the peace process journey.”<sup>22</sup>*

As was to be expected, supporters of the hard-line faction within the Karen leadership were quick to denounce the decision to sign even

suggesting that it was treasonous act. However it must be noted that by the KNU’s own laws it was a democratic decision and complied with one of the most fundamental tenets of KNU ideology, Saw Ba U Gyi’s fourth principle:

*“We shall decide our own political destiny”*

Had the CSC decision insisted that all groups be allowed to sign the agreement first, it would in effect have given the KNU’s destiny over to numerous other groups. There is no doubt that all groups have the right to be treated equally and should be given such rights, however, the signing of what is ostensibly an agreement to stop fighting should be seen in the context of its effects on the population represented by each group not some ambiguous political alliance.

There are three main groups for whom a ceasefire is necessary and these groups have to be given the opportunity to sign an agreement, as they have offered to do. Again it must be noted that these groups have different political objectives and it would be naïve for such considerations not to be taken into account. The TNLA, the AA, and the MNDAA have all offered to sign an agreement with the government – and this should be facilitated as soon as possible, but not at the cost of all other ethnic peoples’ peace.

The LDU, the ANC and, to a degree, the WNO all have legitimate concerns that need to be addressed, but these can be done during the



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political dialogue stage and therefore should not be allowed to further delay the process.

It is imperative that ethnic leaders ensure that the people they represent are the priority of talks

and while the nature of an all-inclusive alliance may seem particularly appealing it should not be allowed to interfere with each groups own political goals and that of a political dialogue which is the only way to resolve legitimate grievances.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> 'A Just Country - The Karen of Burma: Nationalism and Conflict', Paul Keenan, unpublished manuscript, 2003-2015
- <sup>2</sup> Karen National United Party (KNUP) was inaugurated at the first National Karen Congress in Papun in November 1953 and was a socialist vanguard party primarily made up of delta Karen.
- <sup>3</sup> The PDP, is said to have given the KNU four million baht to purchase weapons and ammunition to be used in the planned overthrow of the Ne Win government while the Patriotic Liberation Army (PLA), the armed wing of the PDP, immediately beginning training on both sides of the border.
- <sup>4</sup> 'A Just Country - The Karen of Burma: Nationalism and Conflict', Paul Keenan, unpublished manuscript, 2003-2015
- <sup>5</sup> What remnants remained were finally wiped out after Bo Mya sent KNLA units against them in a move that resulted in the death of Bo Let Ya who was accidentally hit in a firefight.
- <sup>6</sup> 'A Just Country - The Karen of Burma: Nationalism and Conflict', Paul Keenan, unpublished manuscript, 2003-2015
- <sup>7</sup> 'National Democratic Movement of Ethnic Nationalities', Khaing Soe Naing Aung,
- <sup>8</sup> 'Interview with Gen Bo Mya', Sunday Perspective, Bangkok Post, January 1994
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>10</sup> 'We must speak in one voice', Mizzima, 25 January 2011
- <sup>11</sup> Chin National Front, Kachin Independence Organisation, Kachin National Organisation, Karen National Union, Karenni National Progressive Party, Lahu Democratic Union, National Unity Party of Arakan, New Mon State Party, Palaung State Liberation Front, Pa-O National Liberation Organisation, Shan State Progress Party/Shan State Army, Wa National Organisation. There are currently 11 members due to the fact that the KNO was absorbed into the KIO.
- <sup>12</sup> 'Statement of Expanded Meeting of the Political Leading Board and Central Executive Committee of UNFC', 14 May 2011
- <sup>13</sup> Personal Interview with Col. Hkun Okker, UNFC Joint-General Secretary 2, 22 March 2012
- <sup>14</sup> Statement by the AA (Arakan Army), PSLF (Palaung State Liberation Front), and MNDAA (Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army), 5 August, 2015
- <sup>15</sup> <http://www.burmalink.org/taang-palaung-leader-tar-aik-bong-without-proper-political-solutions-will-lasting-peace/>
- <sup>16</sup> Email correspondence with Tar Aik Bong, 23 April 2015
- <sup>17</sup> 'Under pressure from China, Kokang rebels declare Myanmar ceasefire', Timothy McLaughlin and Hnin Yadana Zaw, Reuters, 11 June 2015
- <sup>18</sup> 'Rangoon Cries Foul as a Thousand Poppies Bloom', Aung Zaw, The Nation, 21 March 1997
- <sup>19</sup> [https://www.facebook.com/pages/Arakan-National-Council-ANC/853939267975394?sk=info&tab=page\\_info](https://www.facebook.com/pages/Arakan-National-Council-ANC/853939267975394?sk=info&tab=page_info)
- <sup>20</sup> Other sources suggest there could be 150
- <sup>21</sup> Email correspondence with Twan Zaw, General Secretary, ANC, on 11 August 2015
- <sup>22</sup> <http://www.knuhq.org/knu-calls-central-standing-committee-emergency-meeting/>