

## POLITICAL MONITOR No.12

### OFFICIAL MEDIA

#### **GOVT INVITES NON-SIGNATORIES OF NCA TO JOIN POLITICAL DIALOGUE FRAMEWORK MEETING**

The government has opened the door to all stake-holders in the peace dialogue process, inviting non-signatory ethnic armed groups to participate in the upcoming political dialogue framework meeting. During the first meeting with the United Nationalities Federal Council's (UNFC) Delegation for Political Negotiation (DPN) in Chiangmai, Thailand on 3 June, the government's peace negotiator and Chairman of the Union Peace Conference (21<sup>st</sup> Century Panglong Conference) Dr Tin Myo Win, officially invited leaders from the non-signatory groups to join the political dialogue framework meeting, which is scheduled to be held next week. "For the sake of peace, we will build mutual trust and understanding. Beyond the stage of confidence building, we'll build a peaceful, affluent, democratic federal union," said Dr Tin Myo Win. The Chiangmai meeting was held to enable the indigenous armed groups that have not signed the nation-wide ceasefire agreement-NCA to participate in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Panglong Conference. "We hope to be well informed of what we'd like to know. Up to now, we've to make our reviews and analyses based on the meeting minutes and the information we have got from the news media. We also would like to know the objectives of the conference under the name of Panglong," said Major General Gun Maw from the Kachin Independence Army (KIA). During the meeting, the non-signatories to the NCA discussed matters concerning participation in the peace conference and the terms and conditions which will enable them to participate. They also said they would review the political framework. "Today, we've met UNFC members that haven't signed the NCA yet. They wanted to know whether the terms and conditions were for them to be able to participate in the peace conference. We've explained to them as much as we can. We'll meet again with the indigenous groups before the conference. They said they welcome the new civilian government's sending of our delegation to them, who haven't signed the NCA," said Hla Maung Shwe, Secretary of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Panglong Conference Preparatory Sub-Committee 2 which was formed with the aim of finding solutions with the non-signatory ethnic armed organisations in order for them to participate in the peace conference. The government delegation also separately met with the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS/SSA) during the visit.<sup>1</sup>

#### **UPDJC COMMITS TO SUCCESS OF 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY PANGLONG CONFERENCE**

The Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee (UPDJC) pledged on 28 May to hold the 21<sup>st</sup> century Panglong conference successfully, agreeing to put forward 16 representatives. The UPDJC will be reformed with 16 representatives from the government, 16 from ethnic armed groups and 10 from political parties. State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi said at the first day of the meeting on 27 May that the participation of political parties should be based on their representation in parliament, adding that parties that have at least one representative in a parliament will be allowed to attend the peace conference. The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Panglong Conference will be convened based on the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), said State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi in her capacity as chairperson of the Union-level Peace Dialogue Joint Committee (UPDJC) at a committee meeting on 28 May in Nay Pyi Taw, added that the UPDJC will thus remain active during the peace process.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A Place at the Table : Govt invites non-signatories of NCA to join political dialogue framework meeting – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-06-04-red.pdf> (GNLM) 4 June 2016 (p. 1)

<sup>2</sup> UPDJC commits to success of 21st century Panglong Conference – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-05-29-red.pdf> (GNLM) 29 May 2016 (p. 3)/ Limited Inclusion : NCA to guide 21<sup>st</sup> Century Panglong Conference – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-05-28-red.pdf> (GNLM) 28 May 2016 (p. 1 & 3)

## **COMMITTEE, SUBCOMMITTEES ESTABLISHED FOR UNION PEACE CONFERENCE (21ST CENTURY PANGLONG CONFERENCE)**

A preparatory committee and subcommittees for the holding of the Union Peace Conference (21<sup>st</sup> Century Panglong Conference) was formed on 31 May according to Notification 26/2016 dated 31-5-2016 by the President's Office. The Preparatory Committee was formed with Chief Negotiator Dr Tin Myo Win as Chairman, Union Minister for the Office of State Counsellor Kyaw Tint Swe as Vice Chairman, Myanmar Peace Centre's Special Adviser Hla Maung Shwe as Secretary and 13 members. The preparatory committee is tasked with making preparations for the involvement of all stakeholders in the Union Peace Conference (21<sup>st</sup> Century Panglong Conference) and the successful holding of the conference. Subcommittee 1 is tasked with holding talks with signatories to the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement-NCA and will be led by Lt-Gen Yar Pyae as Chairman, Padoh Saw Kwe Htoo Win as Vice-Chairman, Dr Salai Lian Hmung Sakhong as Secretary 1 and Dr Min Zaw Oo as Secretary 2. Subcommittee 2 is tasked with holding talks with NCA non-signatories was formed with Dr Tin Myo Win as Chairman, Hla Maung Shwe as Secretary with seven members.<sup>3</sup>

## **NATIONAL RECONCILIATION AND PEACE CENTRE FORMED**

A committee aimed at transforming the Myanmar Peace Centre into the National Reconciliation and Peace Centre was formed according to the President Office's Notification 25/2016 dated 31-5-2016. The committee was formed with 10 members led by Union Minister for the Office of State Counsellor Kyaw Tint Swe as chairman together with Union Minister for Border Affairs Lt-Gen Ye Aung as vice chairman and Director-General Maung Tint of Planning Department of the Ministry of Planning and Finance as secretary. The members of the committee are Lt-Gen Tun Naung, Lt-Gen Myint Soe (Retired), Deputy Attorney-General Win Myint, Director-General Khin Maung Win of Union Civil Service Board, Chief Negotiator Dr Tin Myo Win, Dr Min Zaw Oo and Moe Zaw Oo. The 10-member committee is tasked with implementing seven points that include setting up of the NRPC Office in Nay Pyi Taw as the headquarters, transforming the former Myanmar Peace Centre into a Yangon Branch of the NRPC and making sure the NRPC manages local and foreign aid, the state budget allocation and coordinates with donors in the interest of achieving its goals.<sup>4</sup>

## **US SECRETARY OF STATE KERRY MEETS AUNG SAN SUU KYI**

During a meeting with US Secretary of State John Kerry on 22 May, State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi discussed the development of democracy in Myanmar, the promotion of bilateral ties and increased US investments and cooperation in Myanmar. During the joint press briefing, Secretary Kerry said he came to Myanmar to give a message to provide assistance to the Myanmar government, which is facing many social and economic challenges. He said the new government has done big things and is overcoming challenges by joining hands with the public. The US Secretary of State said Myanmar's democratic transition is encouraged and supported by the US, that he was delighted to see former political prisoners in the parliament and that the results of bilateral relations are evident since the US government has set Myanmar's development as a priority. Speaking about rising US investments in Myanmar, Mr Kerry said he would like to provide assistance to Myanmar's democracy and foreign investments, but certain sanctions will continue to be imposed to encourage all institutions, and at the same time, civil society organisations (CSOs) to continue to support the government's reforms. Regarding the continued sanctions, Aung San Suu Kyi said they are treading on the correct path, that US sanctions are understandable and do not pose a big problem. She said her government is not afraid of sanctions, and the US is still Myanmar's partner nation. Part of their conversation touched on the

<sup>3</sup> Committee, subcommittees established for Union Peace Conference (21st Century Panglong Conference) preparation – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-06-01-red.pdf> (GNLM) 1 June 2016 (p. 2)

<sup>4</sup> Committee to transform MPC into National Reconciliation and Peace Centre formed – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-06-01-red.pdf> (GNLM) 1 June 2016 (p. 3)

persecution of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar's Rakhine State and the terminology used to refer to them. "Emotive terms make it very difficult for us to find a peaceful and sensible resolution to our problems," Aung San Suu Kyi told reporters, referring to the term 'Rohingya', which is highly controversial in Myanmar. Most Myanmar Buddhists believe the Muslim community to have emigrated from Bangladesh and refer to them as 'Bengalis'. Daw Suu also urged the international community to give her administration "enough space" to address the issue of the Rohingya in northern Rakhine State. "All we are asking is people should be aware of the difficulties we are facing and to give us enough space to solve the problem," the State Counsellor said.<sup>5</sup>

## **PRESIDENT HOLDS TALKS WITH US HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES DEMOCRACY PARTNERSHIP CHAIRMAN**

President Htin Kyaw received a delegation of the United States' House of Representatives (HoR) led by Democracy Partnership Chairman Peter Roskam in Nay Pyi Taw on 31 May. In his meeting with the Myanmar President, Peter Roskam said that he understood people had voted for the new government with high expectations, that he believed people would understand that the new government had to take time to implement matters for the benefit of the people and that it was necessary to strike a proper balance between freedom, stability, peace and security. The two also exchanged views regarding the interaction between the Hluttaw and government and the role of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). President Htin Kyaw agreed that people had placed high hopes upon the incumbent government, adding they are being faced with many challenges. He went on to say that effort will be exerted to implement the 100-day plan as well as to make both people and international community understand his government, adding that his government is in constant touch with the Hluttaws, that cooperation will be continued in cases of differences of opinion of any kind, that confidence building between and among individuals and groups is important, that freedom, stability, peace and security are intertwined and that awareness is being given to be able to allow freedom with certain limitations imposed.<sup>6</sup>

## **VP PUSHES FOR RESOLUTION OF LAND GRABBING ISSUES**

As the Chairman of the Central Review Committee on Confiscated Farmlands and Other Lands, Vice President Henry Van Thio has called for the quick resolution of farmland confiscation issues and for the speedy hand-over of abandoned farmlands to their lawful owners. The committee held its first coordination meeting in Nay Pyi Taw on 27 May. The Vice President urged officials to set up task forces to deal with the return of seized land and with the economic impact land grabbing has had on farmers. According to the Vice President, private companies and government departments were granted permission to confiscate land, including farmland, under the pretext of urbanisation and industrialisation. Land disputes resulted from lack of cooperation among land management bodies as well as from arguments between the government, landowners and investors over ownership and planning permissions. The Vice President also pledged that his government would take speedy measures to formulate comprehensible laws and procedures to return confiscated lands to their lawful owners after forming committees at different levels. "These committees must be staffed with ministerial officials, local parliamentarians, town elders and farmers," he said.<sup>7</sup>

## **OUSTED USDP MEMBERS CALL FOR EMERGENCY CONFERENCE**

Several recently ousted top members of the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) called for an emergency conference to be held in accordance with the party's basic principles at a press

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<sup>5</sup> Enough Space : Daw Suu, Kerry discuss sanctions, sectarian issues – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-05-23-red.pdf> (GNLM) 23 May 2016 (p. 1)

<sup>6</sup> President holds talks with US HoR Democracy Partnership Chairman – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-06-01-red.pdf> (GNLM) 1 June 2016 (p. 3)

<sup>7</sup> VP pushes for resolution of land grabbing issues – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-05-28-red.pdf> (GNLM) 28 May 2016 (p. 3)

conference in Nay Pyi Taw on 30 May. One of the ousted members, Zaw Myint Pe, said the call for an emergency meeting from more than half of the party's central committee (CC) members is in accordance with the party's basic principles. The expelled member, who is also a former Amyotha Hluttaw representative, stressed the need for current party leaders to adhere to the party's principles, as the USDP is a democratic party. "Under the party's principles, the party chairman must hold a conference demanded by 136 of the party's 219 Central Committee members elected in the 2012 party conference, which accounts for 62.1 per cent of the total CC members, in a letter bearing their signatures," he added. Saw Hla Tun, an incumbent CC member, said the amendments to the party's basic principles should be ratified at the party's conference. The sacked USDP members include former Union Parliament Speaker and party vice chairperson Thura Shwe Mann and several members of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Legal Affairs and Special Cases Assessment Commission. The ousted members said the purge violated party's charter, and current party leaders behaved like authoritarians. "that's why I am still a CC member," said Zaw Myint Pe. The USDP's second party conference is scheduled to be held in August, said party spokesperson Khin Yi at a meeting between Chairman Thein Sein and party members in Yangon Region recently. Although 4 press conferences calling for investigations into the legality of their ousters from the party were held, the USDP did not respond to questions about the purge against Thura Shwe Mann and his allies, said Zaw Myint Pe at the press conference.<sup>8</sup>

### **GOVT FORMS COMMITTEE TO IMPLEMENT PEACE, STABILITY, DEVELOPMENT IN RAKHINE STATE**

The Government formed a Central Committee for the Implementation of Peace and Development in Rakhine State with State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi as chairperson on 31 May. The central committee includes 20 cabinet ministers, according to an announcement from the President's Office. Meanwhile, the President's Office also announced the formation of 4 working committees to assist the central committee in order to achieve success in the implementation of peace, stability and development. The 4 working committees are Security, Peace and Stability and the Rule of Law Working Committee, Immigration and Citizenship Scrutinising Working Committee, Settlement and Socio-economic Development Working Committee and Working Committee on Cooperation with UN Agencies and International Organizations. The previous government lifted the state of emergency imposed on Rakhine State a day before the incumbent government took office on 29 March, ending an emergency state protocol that had been in place for four years.<sup>9</sup>

### **UNOFFICIAL MEDIA**

#### **RCSS MEETS UNFC TO DISCUSS FIGHTING IN NORTHERN SHAN STATE**

The United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC) and Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army (RCSS/SSA) held a meeting on 1 June in Chiang Mai, Thailand, to discuss ongoing fighting between the SSA and Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) in northern Shan State. RCSS/SSA spokesman Col. Sai La told local news media that RCSS/SSA Chairman Lt. Gen. Yawd Serk and UNFC Chairman Gen. N'Ban La met for an hour. "Infighting between ethnic nationalities is not good. So we asked them [UNFC] to find a peaceful solution to end this fighting. The UNFC Chairman accepted our demand and his attitude is the same as our Chairman," he said. Col. Sai La also said, "They (UNFC) told us that they would help as much as they can." RCSS/SSA proposed a meeting with the TNLA in April in Chiang Mai to negotiate an end to the conflict. The TNLA said that they would send their reply by the end of April but no reply was received and fresh fighting erupted again on 1 May. Apparently, the two sides could not agree on the venue of the meeting with the RCSS/SSA preferring Chiang Mai, and the

<sup>8</sup> Ousted USDP members call for emergency conference –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-05-31-red.pdf> (GNLM) 31 May 2016 (p. 1)

<sup>9</sup> Govt forms committee to implement peace, stability, development in Rakhine State –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-06-01-red.pdf> (GNLM) 1 June 2016 (p. 1)

TNLA preferring a place on the Sino-Myanmar border. Recently, the two armies fought fiercely in Mengmo in northern Shan State on 31 May and fighting was reportedly still raging on 1 June.<sup>10</sup>

### **TNLA, MNDAA AND AA URGE GOVT TO SOLVE CONFLICT POLITICALLY**

The Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) and the Arakan Army (AA) issued a joint statement on 21 May urging the NLD government to end the conflicts between the Myanmar Defence Services and ethnic armed groups through political channels. The statement appeared after the government held a press conference in Nay Pyi Taw on 14 May. During the press conference, Tatmadaw leaders said the TNLA, the MNDAA and the AA did not follow the peace rules laid down by the government and that they should disarm if they wish to resolve conflict through negotiation. The TNLA, the MNDAA and the AA are involved in military and political alliances. Clashes broke out between them and the Tatmadaw in northern Shan State and Rakhine State last year. Some of the clashes were severe and left casualties on both sides. Intermittent skirmishes between the Tatmadaw and the TNLA are still taking place in the northern Shan State. The TNLA and the MNDAA are the members of the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC), which was formed by nine ethnic armed groups, but they have proposed to resign from the council. General Secretary of the TNLA Lieutenant Colonel Tar Phone Kyaw on 16 May said that the TNLA and the MNDAA asked the UNFC to allow the TNLA to resign in order to allow the group to sign the NCA. "We cannot discuss this matter in detail now, but we will do later," said Tun Zaw, Joint General Secretary-2 of the UNFC.<sup>11</sup>

### **KIO USES PANGLONG CONFERENCE AS A BARTERING CHIP**

The Kachin Independence Organisation has vowed to boycott the cornerstone of the new government's peace plan if fighting between the Tatmadaw and the ethnic armed groups is not resolved first. State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi has said the government will hold a "21st-century Panglong Conference" styled along the lines of landmark talks held by father, Bogyoke Aung San, in 1947. Spokesperson of the KIO Colonel Naw Buu on 23 May said that the government must put an end to the ongoing clashes before holding the national peace conference and inviting all parties to the dialogue table. "The government must work to get peace between the Tatmadaw and the ethnic armed groups first. If they hold the peace conference they must have ceasefires with ethnic armed groups. If not, the conference will be meaningless," he said. Currently, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) is engaged in clashes in Hpakant and Mansi townships. The KIO questioned why the NLD government has stayed silent on the recent fighting, which included several bomb blasts in and around the jade-rich town and the murder of a local official. "We don't understand why the government doesn't say something about the fighting and why they will talk about only the conference," Col Naw Buu said. The KIA already announced that it plans to launch counter-attack against the Tatmadaw after government troops seized their battalion in Hpakant township in a joint offensive by the Tatmadaw and a Shan militia. On 22 May, an explosion was reported at the Tai-Leng Literature and Culture office in Hpakant township. The blast caused damage to a fence and the building but did not injure anyone. Nanda Hlaing, who worked as head of 100 households in Hpakant, was shot dead on May 22 in her home by two unknown assailants, according to the Hpakant township police force. "We are still doing investigation on this case. We don't know yet who committed this shooting," said a police officer. KIA

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<sup>10</sup> RCSS meets UNFC to discuss fighting in northern Shan State – <http://mizzima.com/news-domestic/rcss-meets-unfc-discuss-fighting-northern-shan-state> (Mizzima) 2 June 2016

<sup>11</sup> TNLA, MNDAA and AA urge govt to solve conflict politically – <http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/politics/tnla-mndaa-and-aa-urge-govt-solve-conflict-politically> (Eleven Myanmar) 23 May 2016

officials denied responsibility for the bombings and the gun shooting and said there are many armed groups in Hpakant township.<sup>12</sup>

### **SWEDEN LENDS WOMEN OF BURMA ITS SUPPORT**

The Swedish government says women in Burma can count on its support in furthering gender equality and protecting them from violence over the next four years. Under Sweden's recently adopted National Action Plan for 2016-20, Burma has been identified as one of 12 specially prioritized conflict or post-conflict countries struggling to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and subsequent resolutions on Women, Peace and Security. With Burma home to the world's longest-running ongoing armed conflict, Burmese women have suffered sexual violence and other forms of abuse in conflict-affected areas for decades. In the country's ongoing peace process, women have largely been excluded from participation, and women's rights advocates say the few women who are officially involved in negotiations are not accorded the same voice as their male counterparts. The action plan adopted earlier this month is mainly focused on strengthening women's participation in the country's peace process and state-building, and protecting them from harm. Efforts will be underpinned by the crux of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 : Passed in 2000, it highlights "the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peace-building, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction and stresses the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security." The structure of the action plan emphasizes approaching issues of Women, Peace and Security from a gendered perspective. "We have decided to prioritize the works in focused countries," Disa Kammars Larsson from Kvinna till Kvinna, a Swedish foundation focused on peace and gender equality that was involved in drawing up and implementing the action plan. She said that unlike Sweden's previous two National Action Plans, the 2016-20 iteration has much stronger "political ownership," with the inclusion of the Swedish Foreign Ministry in implementation of the plan allowing it the opportunity to better wield influence with Burma and the other targeted countries with respect to women's rights. "It clearly included political dialogue ; that if Swedish diplomats and ministers visit to the focus countries, he or she has a responsibility to raise this issue and the Swedish Embassy in the country has the responsibility to report back to Sweden annually on the situation." The National Action Plan would require regular consultation with women's rights defenders on the ground in Burma, she added. Thandar Oo, a women's rights and peace activist from Shan State, urged the international community to support women's advocates working at the grassroots level to enhance these activists' capacity to increase women's participation in all realms of society. Under the action plan, Burma is joined by Afghanistan in Asia ; Iraq, Palestine and Syria in the Middle East ; Colombia in Latin America ; the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Mali and Somalia in Africa ; and Bosnia-Herzegovina and Ukraine in Europe, as priority nations.<sup>13</sup>

### **KNU AND KAREN COMMUNITY GROUPS WORK TO DRAFT ETHNIC AFFAIRS POLICIES**

As part of its policy development intended to contribute to the peace process political negotiations, the Ethnic National Affairs Centre (ENAC) held a meeting with Karen political and civil organizations to discuss about the drafted ethnic affair policies. The ENAC, formed in 2013 describes itself as an independent resource, training, and education centre supporting the peace process and development of democratic institutions in Burma. The meeting held on 12 May in Mae Sot was attended by representatives from the Karen National Union and community based organizations. During the meeting, the discussion was mainly based on the nine points of ethnic affairs policies drafted to

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<sup>12</sup> KIO uses Panglong conference as a bartering chip –

<http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/20466-kio-uses-panglong-conference-as-a-bartering-chip.html>  
(Myanmar Times) 24 May 2016

<sup>13</sup> Sweden Lends Women of Burma Its Support –

<http://www.irrawaddy.com/burma/sweden-lends-women-of-burma-its-support.html> (the Irrawaddy) 30 May 2016

support the political dialogue that is hoped will eventually lead to the emerging of a federal union. Ko Yaw Hton, a program manager of ENAC told local news media that the meeting intends to gain a common position on the drafted ethnic national affair policies. He also said, "This draft is based on all inclusive policy signatories and non-signatories [of NCA] to have a common position. These policies are for ethnic nationals to use in future political dialogue and to be included in the constitution." The draft policies were developed by the ethnic armed organizations (EAOs), 12 political parties inside Burma, ethnic CBOs and CSOs in 2014 and cover topics such as education, land ownership, natural resource, agriculture, IDPs, refugees' affairs, humanitarian aid, levying tax and trade and investment. At the meeting, delegates from the Karen Women Organization, Karen Youth Organization, Committee for Internally Displaced Karen People, Karen Student Network Group, Karen Human Right Group, Back Pact Health Worker Team, Burma Medical Association, Mae Tao Clinic, Karen Department of Health and Welfare, Federation of Trade Union Kawthoolei, Karen Environment and Social Action Network, Karen Education Department and Karen Refugee Committee attended and separately discussed and added to or amended the draft policies. Padoh Saw Lar Say, Head of KED said ; "we, the KNU have had our own policies. And this meeting is held to gain a common position, if our position is included in it, it will be better. If we are more united, our talking about our desires will be more profound."<sup>14</sup>

### **NMSP MEETS WITH NEWLY ELECTED STATE GOV'T**

Leaders of the New Mon State Party (NMSP) met with the Chief Minister and officials of the Mon State Government on 19 May at state government office in Moulmein, the capital of Mon State. This is the first time the NMSP have been able to meet with the state government after the National League for Democracy (NLD) led government took the office in Mon State. The meeting was focused on introducing the new delegates, among other topics. One issue, brought up by the NMSP at the meeting was in regards to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Panglong Conference. "It was just for us to meet them and introduce ourselves since we had never met the new government. One thing that we asked them about was concerning the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Panglong Conference that the NLD planned. We asked them how the conference would be held and what the objectives for the conference were. However, the chief minister could not give us any answers as he said he hadn't met with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi yet," said NMSP Vice-chairman Nai Hongsar. Nai Hongsar added that the NMSP are in agreement if the 21<sup>st</sup> Panglong Conference is held with the objective of establishing federal union in the country. Regarding the matters of the ethnic groups, equality and the right for ethnic groups to create their own fate are at the centre. It is important that the ethnic groups' language, literature and culture is able to be developed. At the meeting, 7 representatives from NMSP including NMSP's vice-chairman Nai Hongsar and Commander in Chief. Brig. Gen. Layih Gakao of NMSP's armed wing, the Mon National Liberation Army (MNLA) were present. The representatives present from the state government side were the chief minister Min Oo, Security and Border Affairs Minister Colonel Win Naing Oo, Natural resource and environment reservation minister Dr. Min Kyi Win, State Government Secretary Zaw Linn Tun and Bamar, Karen and Pa O ethnic ministers. "It was mainly for the chance to introduce each other. One question they asked was concerning their ease of travel. Some matters are not concerned with us. Those matters need to be discussed with the union government. Although I am state chief minister, I am only a part of the state's responsibility," said Chief Minister Min Oo. Recently, the State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi stated that 21<sup>st</sup> Century Panglong Conference would be held within the next two months and the NLD-led government would work towards having the ethnic armed groups, including those yet to sign the nationwide ceasefire agreement (NCA), involved in the conference. Although the

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<sup>14</sup> KNU and Karen Community Groups Work to Draft Ethnic Affairs Policies – <http://karennews.org/2016/05/knu-and-karen-community-groups-work-to-draft-ethnic-affairs-policies.html/> (Karen News) 22 May 2016

NMSP signed a state level and union level ceasefire agreement with the Thein Sein Government, it is yet to sign the NCA.<sup>15</sup>

### **ANALYSIS**

The invitation extended to leaders from the non-signatory groups to join the political dialogue process and the 21st Century Panglong Conference to be held soon is indeed encouraging. The government's initiative should be welcomed and be seen as an olive branch but continued fighting between government forces and EAOs as well as intra-ethnic clashes in Shan and Kachin States will not give encouragement to the non-signatory groups in making their decision to participate in the Conference. The plan to hold the 21st Century Panglong Conference will indeed provide the much needed momentum and push in the right direction and serve as a platform for further talks and discussions in achieving national reconciliation and peace in the country. However, it crucial that the Conference is able to deliver concrete results but more importantly allow wider participation of stakeholders with aim of raising their concerns and interests. The government is now taking the lead in moving the peace process forward but it remains to be seen if the key stakeholders including the Tatmadaw, ethnic armed organisations (EAOs) and stakeholders are genuinely committed towards the process and willing to make compromises.

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<sup>15</sup> NMSP meets with newly elected state gov't – <http://monnews.org/2016/05/23/nmsp-meets-newly-elected-state-govt/> (IMNA) 23 May 2016