

IS THE PEACE PROCESS IN MYANMAR DEAD?

Fighting in Kokang and Kachin State

Citing the recent heavy fighting in Kokang, northern Shan State, and continued clashes in Kachin State, some analysts/observers have concluded that the peace process in Myanmar is dead. How valid is this conclusion and what are the prospects for peace in Myanmar?



Tatmadaw representatives and Minister Aung Min, and NMSP Vice-Chair Nai Hantha at UPWC-NCCT negotiations

Tension is currently high in Myanmar given the recent crackdown on student demonstrators in Yangon and the heavy fighting in Kokang. Many fear a return to the old days. But while the crackdown and the fighting in Kokang are to be deplored, it is rare for a transition, such as the one taking place in Myanmar, to occur smoothly without any setbacks or challenges. That said, it should be noted that:

- The Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA a.k.a. Kokang), which launched an attack on 9 Feb 2015, is not directly engaged in cease-fire talks with the Government of Myanmar. It has a seat in the NCCT¹. It had a ceasefire agreement with the previous regime. In 2009, the Tatmadaw² ousted the MNDAA leadership.
- Much of the continuing conflict last year has been in Kachin State and northern Shan State where the 4th Brigade of the Kachin Independence Organization and the Ta-ang National Liberation Army operate. The KIO had a ceasefire with the previous regime but, after it refused to become a Border Guard Force under the Tatmadaw, it was attacked in June 2011. The TNLA is a reincarnation of the Palaung National Liberation Organization, which became a militia under the Tatmadaw's supervision in 2005. The KIO and TNLA have been engaged in preliminary ceasefire negotiations.
- While clashes have been reported with Shan State Army – North (SSPP) and Shan State Army – South (RCSS), there have been no clashes with United Wa State Army and Myanmar National Alliance Army (Mong La), nor with the Pa-O National Liberation Organization, all of which operate in Shan State. The ceasefires with the All Burma Students Democratic Front, Arakan Liberation Party, Chin National Front, Democratic Karen Benevolent Army, Karenni National Progress Party, Karen National Union, KNU/KNLA Peace Council, National Socialist Council of Nagaland – Kaplan, and the New Mon State Party, have in general held. Overall, the fourteen bilateral ceasefires are working. Twenty-nine liaison offices of seven EAOs help to keep the peace.

¹ NCCT = Nationwide Ceasefire Coordinating Team representing 16 Ethnic Armed Organizations.

² Tatmadaw = Myanmar Army or military.

- o Peace in the north, however, continues to be elusive and a ceasefire with those who have not yet signed bilateral agreements is still being pursued through the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement. The government's Union Peacemaking Working Committee and the ethnic armed organizations' Nationwide Ceasefire Coordinating Team have agreed to meet again from 16-20 March. They will decide when the NCA can be signed.

Well-meaning observers have urged the ethnic nationalities to be united without realizing that the groups have almost nothing in common except being oppressed minorities. The chart below shows the complex relationships and how difficult it is to get agreement:

	Ethnic Armed Organization (EAO)	Ceasefire in 1990s	Bilateral Ceasefire	Represented by NCCT	Membership in UNFC ³
1	All Burma Students Democratic Front	No	Yes	No (?)	No (?)
2	Arakan Army	No	No	Yes	ANC member
3	Arakan Liberation Party	No	Yes	Yes	ANC member
4	Arakan National Council	No	No	Yes	Yes
5	Chin National Front	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
6	Democratic Karen Benevolent Army ⁴	No	Yes	Yes	No
7	Kachin Independence Organization	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
8	KNU/KNLA Peace Council	No	Yes	Yes	No
9	Karen National Union	No	Yes	Yes	No
10	Karenni National Progress Party	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
11	Kuki National Organization	No	No	No	No
12	Lahu Democratic Union	No	No	Yes	Yes
13	Myanmar National Democratic A Army	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
14	National Democratic Alliance Army	Yes	Yes	No	No
15	National Socialist Council of Nagaland	Yes	Yes	No	No
16	New Mon State Party	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
17	Pa-O National Liberation Organization	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
18	Restoration Council for Shan State	No	Yes	No	No
19	Shan State Progress Party	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
20	Ta-ang National Liberation Army	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
21	United Wa State Army	Yes	Yes	No	No
22	Wa National Organization	No	No	Yes	Yes

The fact that nineteen EAOs met as early as February 2012 to coordinate their ceasefire negotiations is often overlooked. The significance is that, unlike the 1990 negotiations, the groups are committed to working together. They produced an Ethnic Peace Plan which led to the formation of the Working Group for Ethnic Coordination. The WGEC in turn produced a plan including a *Framework for a Political Dialogue*, to carry the negotiations beyond ceasefires towards a political dialogue. In Oct 2013, the WGEC was replaced by the NCCT which is negotiating an NCA to include all those that have not yet signed bilateral ceasefires. In spite of an internal dispute amongst the EAOs as to who would lead the movement, all are still committed to the concept of a political dialogue. In spite of the increased fighting in northern Shan State, no group has as yet declared that it will break off negotiations.

The next step, whether or not an NCA is signed, is to negotiate a *Framework for a Political Dialogue* with all stakeholders. The NCCT, Myanmar Peace Center, National League for

³ United Nationalities Federal Council.

⁴ DKBA, K/KPC, KNU & RCSS signed the Deed of Commitment for Peace and Reconciliation

Democracy, United Nationalities Alliance and a coalition of 56 political parties, have already drafted their own frameworks. If these groups were to share their concepts with others who have not yet thought about it, the process of negotiating a framework might be facilitated. Should this happen in the next three months, it is conceivable that an inaugural conference could be convened according to the negotiated *Framework* to mark the beginning of a political dialogue, before the general elections. Serious negotiations would then take place with the next government after the elections and could take several years.

As can be seen from the realities on the ground and as witnessed by the 12 February signing of the Deed of Commitment for Peace and Reconciliation, all stakeholders including the government, are still committed to finding a peaceful solution. Even the groups that did not sign supported the Deed of Commitment. The peace process in Myanmar is fragile given the many stakeholders, the reform process and the threat of violence, but it is not dead.

SOME EXAMPLES OF DIFFERENCES AMONGST THE EAOs

The Karen resistance started in 1949 (66 years). The current CNF started in 1988 (27 years).

The ceasefires agreed to by the UWSA and NDAA have held for 26 years. The KIO ceasefire broke down after 17 years. The KNU signed its first ceasefire in 2012.

The UWSA controls its own territory, has its own government and army, and develops its region independently from the central government. The ALP controls no territory and operates more on the Thai border than in its native Rakhine State bordering Bangladesh.

The ceasefire negotiated by the KNPP gives it the right to open liaison offices but little else. But CNF's ceasefire allows it to develop Chin State jointly with the Chin State government.

The CNF, KNPP, KIO, and KNU are known as *Christians*. The ALP, NMSP, PNLO, RCSS, SSPP, and TNLA are known to be *Buddhists*. The UWSA and NDAA are *ex-Communists*. Many are animists.

Almost none of the EAOs speak the same language. They have to communicate in Burmese for all to understand. Karen, Shan and Chinese are some of the common languages.

The Mon, Rakhine and Shan were ruled by kings going back to the beginning of the Common Era. The Chin and Kachin had clan systems. Many of the smaller groups lived a nomadic life.



State/Regional Ethnic Affairs Ministers



President Thein Sein & ethnic leaders



Ethnic political parties - NBF



KIO Chair Zhuang Hkra



RCSS Chair Yawd Serk & SNLD Chair Hkun Htun Oo



Daw Aung San Suu Kyi & Sr-Gen Min Aung Hlaing

LIST OF EAO LIAISON OFFICES (FUNDED BY EBO)

No	State	Organization	Location	2012	2013	2014
1		All Burma Students Democratic Front		0	0	0
2	Arakan	Arakan Liberation Party (ALP)	Kyauk Taw	1	1	1
3	Chin	Chin National Front (CNF)	Matupi	1	1	1
			Thanlang	1	1	1
			Tidim	0	1	1
4	Karen	Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA)	Myawaddy	0	0	0
5		Karen National Union (KNU)	Kyauk Kyi	1	1	1
			Myawaddy	0	1	1
			Hpa-an	0	1	1
			Tavoy	1	1	1
			Thaton	0	1	1
			Three Pagoda	1	1	1
6		KNU/KNLA Peace Council (KPC)	Myawaddy	0	0	0
7	Karenni	Karenni National Progressive Party KNPP	Loikaw	1	1	1
			Pasaung	1	1	1
			Shadaw	1	1	1
8	Mon	New Mon State Party (NMSP)	Kyaik Mayaw	0	1	1
			Mawlaymyine	1	1	1
			Mudon	0	1	1
			Thanpyu Zayat	1	1	1
			Three Pagoda	0	1	1
			Ye	1	1	1
			Ye Bu	0	1	1
			Zin Kyaik	0	1	1
9	Shan	Pa-O National Liberation Organization (PNLO)	Hsi Seng	0	0	1
			Mawk Mai	0	1	1
			Taunggyi	0	1	1
10		Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS)	Kengtung	1	1	1
			Ko Lum	0	1	1
			Mong Pan	0	1	1
			Mong Ton	0	1	1
			Tachilek	1	1	1
			Taunggyi	1	1	1
11		Shan State Progress Party (SSPP)	Kolum	0	0	0
			Lashio	0	0	0
			Muse	0	0	0
			Taunggyi	0	0	0
12	Sagaing	National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN)	Khamti	0	0	0
				15	29	29