

POLITICAL MONITOR No.17

OFFICIAL MEDIA

ETHNIC ARMED ORGANISATIONS' CONFERENCE COMMENCES IN MAI JA YANG

Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) plenary meeting commenced in Mai Ja Yang, Kachin State on 26 July and concluded on 30 July. It attracted leaders representing 17 ethnic armed groups to search for common ground in working toward a federal system in Myanmar.

In his opening remarks, Chairman of the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC) N'Ban La, spoke of the importance for seeking common ground in meeting and implementation of agreements reached among the ethnic groups in the meeting, as the government is planning to hold the Union Peace Conference — 21st Century Panglong. N'Ban La recounted his discussions with State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi recently in Yangon, saying that he urged her to settle the current armed conflicts and to carry on the political commitment between General Aung San and ethnic leaders in 1947 in order to build a federal democratic system in the country. Khu Oo Reh, the secretary of the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC), spoke on the importance of the conference for the ethnic armed groups, calling the conference a "historic event for ethnic armed groups". He also urged participants of the conference to discuss and negotiate with tolerance and loving kindness towards each other. At the conference, discussion and approval of a Panglong Manual, adoption of basic principles for the constitution of a federal democratic State, basic principles for security and defence and amending the frame-work for the political dialogue were discussed. The plenary meeting was attended by Arakan Liberation Army-ALP, Arakan National Council, All Burma Students Democratic Front-ABSDF, China National Front-CNF, Democratic Karen Buddhist Army-DKBA, the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), the KNU/KNLA Peace Council, Lahu Democratic Union-LDU, New Mon State Party-NMSP, National Democratic Alliance Army-NDAA (Mongla), the Pao National Liberation Organization-PNLO, Restoration Council of Shan State-Shan State Army (RCSS/SSA), the Shan State Progress Party/Shan State Army-SSPP/SSA, UNFC, The United League of Arakan/Arakan Army-UL/AA, the Women's League of Burma O WLB, the Nationalities Brotherhood Federation - NBF, the United Nationalities Alliance - UNA and the Wa National Organization-WNO. However, the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) and the United Wa State Army (UWSA) did not attend the conference. The UN Secretary-General's Special Adviser on Myanmar Vijay Nambiar and Sun Guoxiang, from the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs attended the conference.¹

NCA GROUPS VOW TO SEEK INCLUSIVENESS AT PEACE CONFERENCE

Following a three-day meeting in Chiang Mai, Thailand, the 8 NCA Signatory Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) vowed on 20 July to seek inclusiveness of the peace process, considering the NCA is the beginning point to ending current armed conflicts and for holding dialogues to solve political dilemma. In their announcement, the 8 EAOs also said that they all will cooperate with the State Counsellor to hold the Union Peace Conference-21st Century Panglong Conference as they believe that the conference can lead to national reconciliation, internal peace and a democratic federal union. They also declared that they will all participate in the conference scheduled to take place in Maijayan, Kachin State, from 26 to 29 July. In the announcement the groups said that they

¹ Ethnic Armed Organisations' conference commences –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-07-27-red.pdf> (GNLM) 27 July 2016 (p. 1 & 3)/

Ethnic armed groups continue Mai Ja Yang meeting –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-07-28-red.pdf> (GNLM) 28 July 2016 (p. 3)/

AO conference extends to five days –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-07-29-red.pdf> (GNLM) 29 July 2016 (p. 2)

will make coordinated efforts together with other ethnic armed groups, political forces, the government and the Tatmadaw to achieve internal peace through political dialogue.²

FRAMEWORK REVIEW IMPORTANT TO MAKE THE 21ST CENTURY PANGLONG A SUCCESS

Participation in the Political Dialogue Framework Review to be held in the first week of August by the non-signatory ethnic armed organizations to the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement is the only means to enable them to participate in the Union Peace Conference—21st Century Panglong, said Khuu Oo Reh, the leader of the UNFC's Delegation for Political Negotiation (DPN) at a press briefing held at Chatrium Hotel in Yangon on 18 July. "Our UNFC represents 7 Ethnic Armed Organizations. Tomorrow, the UPC—21st Century Panglong preparatory committee will come to meet us in Chiangmai to discuss thoroughly how we can participate in the framework review. The success of 21st Century Panglong depends dramatically upon the accomplishment of the framework if I've to speak out unambiguously," added Khu Oo Reh. He went on to say that when the framework was formulated by the previous government, the NCA non-signatory ethnic armed organizations were left out, and that these non-signatory organizations were thus required to participate in the process of the framework review. "Among these seven organizations, certain groups have signed bilateral ceasefire agreement with the government at state-level whereas there are those which have not signed such kind of agreements. Besides, there are also three organizations that are engaged in clashes with the Tatmadaw. So, we've requested the representatives of the government to find a solution as to by which status we can participate— the observer status or the full-fledged member status," said Khu Oo Reh, adding that "we've to learn lesson from the past experience. We're going to do our best in Mai Ja Yang."³

TATMADAW HOLDS PRESS CONFERENCE ON SHOOTING INCIDENTS AND DEATHS IN KACHIN AND SHAN STATE AND UPCOMING ETHNIC SUMMIT

The Tatmadaw held a press conference in Yangon 20 July where Lt-Gen Mya Tun Oo from the Ministry of Defence responded to the recent shooting incident in Myitkyina, dead bodies found near Mong Yaw village in Lashio, Shan State, as well as the ethnic conference planned in Mai Ja Yang, Kachin State. He also explained about and the Tatmadaw's relief and rehabilitation works in Rakhine State. On the Myitkyina shooting incident that occurred on 20 June between an alleged group of 8 young people and two defence services personnel that resulted in the death of a victim following what the Tatmadaw claims was an attempt by the victim, a local university student, to snatch away a firearm from Private Maung, Lt-Gen Mya Tun Oo elaborated on measures being taken by Tatmadaw in accordance with rules and regulations. Regarding the issue of dead bodies found near Mong Yaw village in Lashio he claimed that two un-identified people were shot dead during a clash between a military column and an insurgent group on 25 June and the drugs were later discovered on the two people killed. He stated that, punitive action will be taken following the findings of the Tatmadaw's investigation committee and investigation is still ongoing as violations of the army rules and regulations were found. In his briefing on the Mai Jar Yan Ethnic Armed Organisations Summit, Lt-Gen Mya Tun Oo said that Khun Okkar of the PNLO and Saw Ta Mu La of the KNU informed the Tatmadaw that they were preparing for the summit during a meeting between Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and the Peace Process Steering Team led by the KNU's Saw Mu Tu Sae Po on 30 June in Nay Pyi Taw. On — 21st Century Panglong Union Peace Conference, Lt-Gen Mya Tun Oo explained the Tatmadaw's involvement in the government's peace process, how the implementation of the — 21st Century Panglong Union Peace Conference is seen as a follow-up of the previous Union Peace Conference based on the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), works of

² NCA groups vow to seek inclusiveness at Peace Conference –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-07-21-red.pdf> (GNLM) 21 July 2016 (p. 1)

³ Framework review important to make the 21st Century Panglong a success –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-07-19-red.pdf> (GNLM) 19 July 2016 (p. 2)

NRPC and UPDJC and cooperation with the government in accordance with the Tatmadaw's six peace principles. On a lighter note, Lt-Gen Mya Tun Oo explained the Tatmadaw's relief and rehabilitation works in Rakhine State where floods occurred in some townships.⁴

STATE COUNSELLOR AUNG SAN SUU KYI MEETS WITH NON-SIGNATORY ARMED GROUPS

State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi held talks with a delegation of the United Nationalities Federation Council, led by its Chairman N'Ban La, on the country's peace process at the National Reconciliation and Peace Centre in Yangon on 17 July. During the talks, the first of their type between the new government and non-signatory armed groups, they discussed matters of negotiations between both sides of the peace process to ensure inclusiveness for upcoming Union Peace Conference — 21st Century Panglong. Chairman of the Preparatory Committee for the Union Peace Conference — 21st Century Panglong Dr Tin Myo Win, Minister for the State Counsellor's Office Kyaw Tint Swe and Moe Zaw Oo of the State Counsellor's Office also attended the meeting. The UNFC's delegation members included Naing Htaw Mon, from the New Mon State Party (NMSP), Hso Hten of the Shan State Progressive Party (SSPP) and Khu Oo Reh, the leader of the UNFC's Delegation for Political Negotiation. According to the Secretary of Preparatory Committee Hla Maung Shwe the two sides were able to build more trust, adding that the talks felt more like "a family-type discussion," At the meeting, the UNFC questioned matters which were unclear to them over their participation in the upcoming Union Peace Conference and exchanged their views with the State Counsellor, he added. "At the meeting, the UNFC delegation proposed some suggestions which can pave the way for the signing of the new Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement," said Hla Maung Shwe.⁵

AUNG SAN SUU KYI ATTENDS ASEAN-DIALOGUE PARTNER MEETINGS IN LAOS

Myanmar Foreign Minister Aung San Suu Kyi attended meetings between ASEAN and dialogue partners at the National Convention Center in Vientiane, Laos on 25 July. During the ASEAN-China Ministerial Meeting, cooperation in ASEAN-China trade and investment sector, China's continued support to the establishment of the ASEAN community, implementation of the 2+7 Cooperation Framework for ASEAN-China relations and matters related to ASEAN Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and holding ASEAN-China Commemorative Summit on 7 September in Vientiane were discussed. Discussions on ASEAN-China youth exchange visits and launching a Visit ASEAN-China Year in 2017. Aung San Suu Kyi was also present at the ASEAN-Canada, ASEAN-Japan, ASEAN-Australia and ASEAN-US Ministerial Meetings.

During the ASEAN-Canada ministerial meeting, the foreign ministers discussed a wide range of matters including cooperation in transboundary crimes and capacity-building programs and the upcoming 40th ASEAN-Canada Dialogue Relations set to be held in 2017.

The ASEAN-Japan meeting focused on narrowing the development gap in ASEAN and matters related to health and industry sector and disaster rehabilitation works.

Minister Suu Kyi co-chaired the ASEAN-Australia Ministerial Meeting in which further cooperation between the two sides and regional and international issues were discussed. In her address at the meeting, the Myanmar leaders highlighted the importance of people-to-people connectivity and an exchange program allowing students to gain cultural and social experience on their studies to connect the two regions.

⁴ Covering all Bases : Tatmadaw holds press conference on Myitkyina shooting incident, dead bodies in Lashio, Mai Ja Yang ethnic conference, relief and rehabilitation works for Rakhine flood victims – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-07-21-red.pdf> (GNLM) 21 July 2016 (p. 1&2)

⁵ Major Step to Peace : Daw Aung San Suu Kyi talks with non-signatory armed groups – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-07-18-red.pdf> (GNLM) 18 July 2016 (p. 1)

During the ASEAN-US meeting, talks on further programmes to boost cooperation between ASEAN and the US and regional and international matters.

The Myanmar Foreign Minister also attended the 9th Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI) Ministerial Meeting that focused on sustainable infrastructure partnership and the Master Plan of Action to Implement Lower Mekong initiative 2016-2020, the 9th Mekong-Japan Ministerial Meeting and ASEAN-New Zealand Ministerial Meeting.

Foreign Minister Aung San Suu Kyi also attended related meetings of the 49th ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Vientiane, Laos on 26 July. The 17th ASEAN plus Three Foreign Ministers' Meetings discussed the realisation of the Chiang Mai Initiative, the Multilateralisation (CMIM), ASEAN Plus Three Macroeconomic Research Office (AMRO), the Asian Bond Market Initiative (ABMI) and the Credit Guarantee and Investment Facility (CGIF) to ensure regional economic and financial stability. The ASEAN Foreign Ministers also reiterated the importance of the role of the ASEAN Plus Three in the area of boosting regional peace, stability and development and encouraged implementation of the ASEAN Plus Three Emergency Rice Reserve (APTERR) to ensure regional food sufficiency at the meeting. The group called for the continued implementation of the 2013-2017 Work Plan and the recommendations of the East Asia Vision Group II (EAVGII) report for further cooperation between ASEAN and three dialogue partners.

Minister Suu Kyi also attended the 6th East Asia Foreign Ministers' Meeting, where those present pledged to further consolidate the East Asia Summit with the implementation of the 6 priority areas, namely Finance, Education, Environment and Energy, Global Health Issues and Pandemic Diseases, Disaster Management and ASEAN Connectivity as well as the Kuala Lumpur Declaration, adopted with a view to further strengthening the East Asia Summit as a Leaders-led forum for Dialogue on broad strategic, political and economic issues of common interest and concern aimed at promoting peace, stability and economic prosperity in East Asia.⁶

RELIGIOUS DATA FROM 2014 CENSUS RELEASED

Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population published figures on religion in Nay Pyi Taw on 21 July, one year after releasing the main census results in May 2015. According to the data on religion, 78.9 per cent of the national population of approximately 51,486,253 people including an estimated 1,206,353 people who missed out on the census in parts of Kachin, Kayin and Rakhine States are Buddhist. Christians make up 6.2 per cent of the total population while Muslims constitute 4.9 per cent, Hindus 0.5 per cent, animists 0.8 per cent, others 0.2 per cent and people with no religion 0.1 per cent. According to the ministry the numbers for each religion released covered population in the Regions and States only and religious populations at the district and township level are not included in the current data set. Figures at the district/township level were not released in order to keep the confidentiality of personal data in accordance with the 2013 Population and Housing Census Law, said Minister Thein Swe. Compared to the 1983 religious census data, the Buddhist population in Yangon has decreased by approximately 1 per cent while Christian and Muslim populations are projected to rise by 2 per cent and 1 per cent respectively based on the recent data, a surprising revelation for public groups that have put forward inaccurate predictions on religious denominational growth in the region in the past. The release identified that 46,600 people in Kachin State, 69,753 in Kayin State and

⁶ Daw Aung San Suu Kyi attends ASEAN-Dialogue Partner meetings in Laos – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-07-26-red.pdf> (GNLM) 26 July 2016 (p. 1)/ Union Foreign Affairs Minister attends 49th AMM's related meetings in Laos – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-07-27-red.pdf> (GNLM) 27 July 2016 (p. 3)

1,090,000 in Rakhine State were not included in the census. The Minister assured the media after the ceremony that the figures released are accurate and reliable.⁷

UNOFFICIAL MEDIA

NLD WILL NOT RELEASE LIST OF CABINET MEMBERS' ASSETS

The government will not release a list of ministers' assets, according to senior officials, despite the National League for Democracy having pressed former President Thein Sein's administration to do the same back in 2012. The Deputy Director General of the President's Office Zaw Htay, said that all members of the NLD had sent lists of their personal assets to the president in May, as required by section 101 of the Union Government Law. State and region government members have also sent their assets, he said. However, the government does not plan to make the details public. "The president has kept the list in accord with the law," he said, noting that there was no requirement in the law to do so. Previously, the NLD had pressured President Thein Sein's government to release a list of the moveable and immovable assets of its cabinet, as well as the state and region administrations. Win Myint, who is now speaker of the Pyithu Hluttaw, submitted the proposal in July 2012, arguing it was necessary for "good governance and clean government" – both values that the NLD claims to embody. His proposal was seconded by seven other MPs from the NLD. At the time, Attorney General Dr Tun Shin said that if parliament believed the asset lists should be released it should amend the constitution to require the government to do so. However, he also noted that checks and balances should be "reciprocal", and suggested that if government ministers have to reveal their assets then so should members of the judiciary and legislature. The proposal was then voted down 271 to 68. The Chair of the Lower House Bill Committee Tun Hein, said the legislature would not press the government to release the asset lists. "We're not considering it at all," he said. Prior to last year's election, Aung San Suu Kyi directed all NLD candidates to declare their assets to party headquarters. Tun Hein, a party central executive committee member, said this would not be made public either. The constitution has only minimal requirements for asset disclosure. Section 68 states that the president and two vice presidents must send a list of "family assets under his direction, namely land, houses, buildings, businesses, savings and other valuables together with their values to the Head of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw". In an interview last year, senior NLD official Win Htein said the party was committed to ensuring clean government. "We are offering change. We have promised a government that will be corruption free, because for many years in government, the higher up they are, the more corrupt they become," he said in October.⁸

POLITICAL PRISONERS GROUP PUSHES NLD TO DO MORE

The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) has blamed the government for the continued arrest and detention of activists under undemocratic legislation that threatens freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. About 82 political prisoners remain behind bars, according to the AAPP. An estimated 203 individuals have been charged for politically motivated actions and are awaiting trial, the association added. Joint Secretary of the Association, Bo Kyi, said that political prisoners' advocates feel the new government is not handling the issue effectively and believe the Ministry of Home Affairs should not be directly involved in freeing remaining prisoners of conscience. "Although the government is making a lot of changes, the political prisoners issue has not changed yet," he said. The Ministry of Home Affairs, under whose jurisdiction both the nation's police force and prisons system fall, is controlled by the military. Though the new National League for Democracy government offered several amnesties during its first month in office – by AAPP's count, 235 political prisoners

⁷ Religious data from 2014 Census released –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-07-22-red.pdf> (GNLM) 22 July 2016 (p. 3)

⁸ NLD will not release list of cabinet members' assets –

<http://frontiermyanmar.net/en/news/nld-will-not-release-list-cabinet-ministers-assets> (Frontier Myanmar) 29 July 2016

were released – arrests on politically motivated charges have continued. According to the AAPP's monthly report released in June, 112 civilians were arrested by military and ethnic armed groups, 48 of whom were subsequently released while 18 were sentenced. Former political prisoners are also demanding new policies related to political prisoners, including that the NLD government move to define the term. Last year, a group of former political prisoners drafted a definition for "political prisoner", based on discussions with legal experts, activists, other former political prisoners and members of political parties. However, in June, during a regular session of the Pyithu Hluttaw, the militarily appointed Deputy Home Affairs Minister, Major General Aung Soe, claimed that trying to define the term would violate the constitution. Tun Kyi, a member of the Former Political Prisoners Society (FPPS), said that the Ministry of Home Affairs has consistently opposed defining the term. "We would like to see a definition of political prisoners within the context of the NLD government because the government was born out of opposition and political prisoners," he said. "Most of the cabinet members are former political prisoners, including the state counsellor [Daw Aung San Suu Kyi]." According to the definition proposed last year, a political prisoner would include anyone arrested, detained or imprisoned for direct or indirect involvement in activities aimed at promoting freedom, equality, human rights or the rights of citizens, including ethnic minorities. Peaceful anti-government protests are expressly included as among these activities under the definition.⁹

SHAN STATE PARLIAMENT URGES GOVERNMENT TO INTERVENE IN CONFLICT

The Shan State parliament has approved an urgent proposal imploring government intervention to bring an end to simmering conflict between the national army and ethnic armed groups in the state's north, which has displaced thousands of civilians. Shan Nationalities League for Democracy MP Nang San Aye representing Thibaw/Hsipaw Township, put forward the urgent proposal citing the suffering faced by affected populations. "Villagers have had to abandon their homes and businesses. Children have lost their right to study because of conflict. Some have been detained [and forced] to porter. This conflict needs to stop for the benefit of all ethnic people in Shan State," said Nang San Aye on 15 July, during the 4th Session of the Regional legislature since it returned from recess. "Mostly the [motions to put on] record are not implemented. That is why I wanted the proposal approved by the hluttaw. We were able to approve the proposal with 76 votes," said Nang San Aye. The urgent proposal was submitted on 14 July. The Shan State Border and Security Affairs Minister on 15 July advised Shan State lawmakers to put the proposal on record, a less forceful parliamentary motion, but MPs voted instead on an up-down ballot on the matter. The legislature's militarily appointed MPs voted unanimously against the urgent proposal. During the parliamentary session, Ta'ang National Party MP Aye Maung, representing Namkham Township, also urged the government to find a way to end the conflict. On 16 July, thousands of ethnic Kachin, Shan and Ta'ang youths staged a protest march in Lashio town to demand respect for the human rights of local people and peace in the region. The young activists stressed the need for a unified ethnic front in the face of a conflict that has negatively impacted populations without regard for ethnic affiliation. The fighting, which began in November just weeks after the signing of a so-called Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement and has flared intermittently since, has pitted the Ta'ang National Liberation Army against the Tatmadaw, and at times has seen the Shan State Army-South – a ceasefire signatory – clash with the TNLA, a non-signatory.¹⁰

⁹ Political prisoners group pushes NLD to do more –

<http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/21451-political-prisoners-group-pushes-nld-to-do-more.html>
(Myanmar Times) 19 July 2016

¹⁰ Shan State parliament urges government to intervene in conflict –

<http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/21425-shan-state-parliament-urges-government-to-intervene-in-conflict.html> (Myanmar Times) 18 July 2016

KAREN STATE GOVT BLOCKS KNU LAND POLICY WORKSHOP

The Karen State Government has denied the Karen National Union (KNU) permission to hold a workshop outlining their land policy to residents of the state capital of Hpa-an, according to local sources. Zaw Lwin Oo, a Director from the Karen State government, said that his administration has their own land policy, so they did not grant the ethnic Karen political entity license to hold a workshop on the same topic. Declining to comment further, he referred to a statement issued by the state government on 15 July. The statement affirmed that, “only the government can have a land policy and procedure...therefore our state government cannot give permission to hold workshop [on the issue] when asked by the KNU.” The KNU had planned to hold a workshop on 17 July 17 Hpa-an at a Buddhist monastery for the purpose of raising awareness on their approach to land rights. Links to descriptions of the KNU’s land policy can be found on the news section of The Border Consortium’s website. On behalf of the KNU, the Karen Unity and Peace Committee (KUPC) sent a letter to the Karen State Government on July 8 requesting permission to hold the workshop. KUPC reportedly pointed out that a variety of ethnic Karen civil society groups were to be in attendance. Saw Kyaw Zwa, a KUPC senior member, speculated whether the rejection was based on the way in which the government was approached for permission. “The KNU did not ask [the state government] themselves, but instead, let the KUPC do it. I think this was a mistake,” he explained. “If KNU had said in the letter that the workshop will give awareness to the people about the land policy of [both] the KNU and the government, this might have helped to get permission,” Saw Kyaw Zwa added. Land tenure rights have been described as a top priority of the civilian-led National League for Democracy government, which took office earlier this year. Seizures of land—by the former military regime, as well as private and military-backed business enterprises—has long been a pressing concern throughout Myanmar. In the decades of conflict that followed, tens of thousands of Karen were displaced and forced to abandon their ancestral lands, making the return of their farms a major concern in the country’s ongoing peace process.¹¹

PARTY BOSS DEMANDS SWEEPING REFORM

Khin Maung Swe, Chair of the National Democratic Force (NDF), has called on the government to establish a federal union by ending the civil wars. He also told the party’s 7th Annual Meeting in Yangon that the authorities should return confiscated land to farmers, pass laws to guarantee citizens’ rights and suspend all hydropower projects that failed to meet international standards. The party was formed by former members of the National League for Democracy who chose to contest the 2010 general election. The NDF put forward 275 candidates in last November’s general election but failed to win a seat. Khin Maung Swe was critical of high food and other commodity prices and said wages were not keeping pace with economic growth, sparking social problems and crime. He called on the new government to tackle the rising prices of commodities. The lives of farmers and workers remained unchanged under the new government, Khin Maung Swe said, adding this his party would set up a legal support network to address people’s socioeconomic problems.¹²

FORTY BORDER BASED CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS SEND OPEN LETTER TO AUNG SAN SUU KYI

40 border based civil society organisations (CSOs) have sent an open letter to State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi calling for the restoration of their original Myanmar citizenship and to let them participate in the transition to a federal democratic country. The Thai-Myanmar border based CSOs sent the letter to Aung San Suu Kyi on 25 July. Spokesperson for the CSOs, Saw Alex, said that they made a primary

¹¹ State Govt Blocks KNU Land Policy Workshop –

<http://www.irrawaddy.com/burma/state-govt-blocks-knu-land-policy-workshop.html> (the Irrawaddy) 18 July 2016

¹² Party boss demands sweeping reform –

<http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/local/5439> (Eleven Myanmar) 17 July 2016

demand in the letter asking for them to be allowed to operate in Myanmar and delisting those who are working for human rights and social work from a blacklist made by the former government and to officially release the names of delisted persons who were formerly blacklisted. “These border based CSOs were engaged in anti-junta work. We don’t know to what extent our people are on the blacklist. As we don’t know about the blacklist we face a lack of security and obstacles if we work in Myanmar. So we made this demand and want the new government to do something for us in this regard,” he said. Under the rule of previous Thein Sein government, CSOs working in Myanmar faced a ban on issuing statements, holding meetings, and also faced harassment. These continue even after the first 100 days of the new government taking office, he added. “Some of our people hold foreign passports. When they applied for Myanmar visas they were told their applications were rejected because of the blacklist. The embassy said to them we cannot grant a visa as you have criticised the government on human rights violations and your name was on the blacklist. Some were given visas the first time but were rejected on subsequent visa applications. Some have never been given visas. So we see the NLD to abolish this system and they should create an environment which is more open for us,” he added. He said they sent the open letter because they wanted the new government to do something to allow them to participate in the promotion of human rights, the peace process, national reconciliation and building a federal state.¹³

ANALYSIS

The Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) recently held in Mai Ja Yang, Kachin State was regarded as a precursor for the EAOs and other key stakeholders to prepare for the upcoming 21st Century Panglong Peace Conference later this month. Discussions on basic principles for the constitution of a future federal democratic union ; basic principles for security and defence ; and the amendment, fine-tuning of Framework for Political Dialogue (FPD). However, a common position of the EAOs and stakeholders still remains an issue which will need to be ironed out prior to the Panglong Conference. Currently, one of the key issues will be centered on the integration on the different positions being held by the 8 NCA signatories and the Non-Signatories of the NCA. If and how an understanding or compromise will be reached before the Panglong Conference will be in the hands of the leaders of the different Ethnic Armed Organisations. While time is of the essence, the EAOs will sooner or later need to produce a stand which represents and promotes the interests of the majority if not all. The government and military will no doubt be monitoring the outcome not only of the Mai Ja Yang Summit but also other meetings in the run up to the Panglong Conference while at the same time preparing its own position. The Panglong Conference is the first and most important initiative to be undertaken by the NLD government and that it could prove to be a crucial milestone in Myanmar’s efforts towards achieving national reconciliation and genuine peace.

¹³ 40 Border based civil society organisations send open letter to Aung San Suu Kyi – <http://mizzima.com/news-domestic/40-border-based-civil-society-organisations-send-open-letter-aung-san-suu-kyi> (Mizzima) 28 July 2016