
POLITICAL MONITOR No. 20

OFFICIAL MEDIA

PRESIDENT GRANTS AMNESTY

The government released almost 7,000 prisoners in an amnesty on 30 July including more than 200 foreigners and former military-intelligence officers. The amnesty granted pardons on humanitarian grounds to 6,966 prisoners who had served part of their sentences and had shown good behavior in prisons. It is aimed at furthering stability and the peace process, and allowing the pardoned prisoners to participate in national reconciliation and political processes, it said. Presidential pardons with repatriation were also granted to 210 foreign prisoners in view of maintaining bilateral relations, the announcement said. Among those released were 153 Chinese loggers who had been sentenced to life imprisonment last week, according to an official of the prison in Myitkyina where the men were being held on charges of illegal logging. 3 journalists and 2 publishers from the Bi Moon Te Nay (Bi-Midday), were also freed under the amnesty from Insein prison in Yangon.¹

GOV'T, ETHNIC ARMED GROUPS LATEST CEASEFIRE TALKS END IN IMPASSE

The government's Union Peace-Making Work Committee and the Senior Delegation of Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAO's) opened the latest round of peace negotiations on 22 July to finalize the draft national ceasefire agreement. During the first two days of the talks both sides reached agreement on 10 of 13 amendments to the draft accord including the stipulation that women should comprise around 30 percent of participants in political dialogue after the ceasefire deal. The latest round of talks were adjourned on 24 July after the two sides decided to take a recess until the first week of August in order to seek approval from their respective leaderships on unresolved issues in the negotiations, including the number of ethnic armed group to sign the ceasefire.

Deputy leader of the ethnic senior delegation Pu Zing Cung, said the ethnic side insisted that the signing of the truce deal must include 17 groups—the 16 members of the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT) plus the All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF). "The government side responded to us that it prefers not to sign with 6 NCCT member groups, but the inclusion of the 6 groups in a political dialogue after the ceasefire deal will be taken into consideration," he said.

According to Pu Zing Cung, the ethnic side also proposed the inclusion of international organizations such as the United Nations, ASEAN and the European Union as well as the United States, the United Kingdom, Norway, Japan, China, India and Thailand officially witness the signing of the NCA. "We also proposed all leaders from the two sides including vice-presidents, parliament speakers, top leaders in the Tatmadaw, Union Peace-Making Work Committee leaders and the attorney-general should be signatories to the ceasefire deal," he added. The ethnic Deputy leader also added that the August talks are expected to smooth the path to the prospective treaty. But the divergent views between the two sides on how many groups should sign the ceasefire deal could be an obstacle to whether the NCA is signed before the 8 November election, remains to be seen.

Senior Adviser of the Myanmar Peace Centre (MPC) Hla Maung Shwe, emphasized the importance of strict adherence to the deal, which has seen very lengthy negotiations, after its signing. The government keeps reiterating its opinion that ways and means are to be sought for the inclusion of other groups in the peace process and stressed the need to compromise on the issue.²

¹ Early Release: President grants Amnesty to 6,966 – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-07-31-red.pdf> (GNLM) 31 July 2015 (p. 1)

² Gov't, ethnic armed groups open latest ceasefire talks, agree on 4 amendments –

UN SPECIAL ENVOY ANGELINA JOLIE MAKES FIRST VISIT TO MYANMAR

United Nations' goodwill ambassador Angelina Jolie began an official visit to Myanmar and called on President U Thein Sein at the Presidential Palace in Nay Pyi Taw on 29 July. During the meeting, they discussed human rights, women's affairs and the prevention of sexual violence against women in conflicts. They also spoke about measures to improve children's access to education. According to a press release issued by the British Embassy in Yangon, Ms Jolie is visiting Myanmar for 4 days "to learn more about the situation in the country and encourage efforts to build a peaceful and inclusive future for all its people." Ms Jolie was quoted in the press release as saying she would meet many groups of people in Myanmar "to learn firsthand from them about their concerns and hopes for the future of their country." "With elections on the horizon in November it is an important moment for people to exercise their democratic rights and help to address the fundamental issues critical to a peaceful future," she said. During her first visit, Ms Jolie also held talks with Speaker of the Pyithu Hluttaw Thura U Shwe Mann, on the role of Myanmar parliament in implementing tasks of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. She also met with Minister for Defence Lt-Gen Wai Lwin and discussed prevention of sexual violence and recruitment of minors as soldiers. The UN goodwill Ambassador also visited IDP camps in Rakhine and Kachin States and held meetings with non-governmental organizations in Yangon. In 2014, Ms Jolie visited Karenni refugees at a Thai-Myanmar border camp in Thailand's Mae Hong Son province as a special envoy for the UNHCR.³

PRESIDENT THEIN SEIN MEETS FORMER AUSTRALIAN PRIME MINISTER KEVIN RUDD

President Thein Sein received a delegation led by former Prime Minister of Australia Kevin Rudd at the Presidential Palace on 28 July and discussed Myanmar's ongoing reforms as well as arrangements for the upcoming general election, which marks the next phase in the country's transition to democracy. The talks covered security arrangements for the pre-election, election and post-election periods. Mr Rudd and party also met with Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker Thura Shwe Mann and the Chairman of the Union Election Commission Tin Aye and discussed election issues including compilation of voters' list, voter's education and inviting local and international observers to the general election.⁴

UNION ELECTION COMMISSION MEETS CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

The Union Election Commission (UEC) held a meeting on 20 July in Yangon with civil society organizations to boost cooperation in the run-up to the general elections set for 8 November. The UEC Chairman Tin Aye said that coordination and collaboration with CSOs has helped the commission identify weaknesses and requirements of the previous elections and called on the CSOs in putting their efforts to make the upcoming general elections a success. He also urged the election monitoring groups to write a report on whether the commission, political parties and media behaved well in the

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-07-23-red.pdf> (GNLM) 23 July 2015 (p. 1)/

Gov't, ethnic armed groups optimistic of ceasefire deal after Day 2 –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-07-24-red.pdf> (GNLM) 24 July 2015 (p. 1 & 2)/

Gov't, ethnic armed groups adjourn ceasefire talks until next month –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-07-25-red.pdf> (GNLM) 25 July 2015 (p. 3)/

Gov't, ethnic negotiators hopeful of breaking impasse in August talks –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-07-26-red.pdf> (GNLM) 26 July 2015 (p. 1 & 3)

³ UN Special Envoy Angelina Jolie makes First visit to Myanmar –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-07-30-red.pdf> (GNLM) 30 July 2015 (p. 1 & 3)/

UN envoy Angelina Jolie visits IDP camps in Myitkyina –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-07-31-red.pdf> (GNLM) 31 July 2015 (p. 5)

⁴ President U Thein Sein meets former Prime Minister of Australia Kevin Rudd –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-07-29-red.pdf> (GNLM) 29 July 2015 (p. 3)/

Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker meets President of ASPI –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-07-29-red.pdf> (GNLM) 29 July 2015 (p. 3)/

UEC chairman receives former Australian Prime Minister –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-07-31-red.pdf> (GNLM) 31 July 2015 (p. 2)

elections in line with the law, not to interfere in the process. List of candidates and campaign period will be announced after verifying the list, he added. During the meeting, the CSO made suggestions regarding the use of rubber stamps in voting and valid and invalid votes.⁵

VOTERS URGED TO CHECK ELECTORAL ROLL BEFORE POLLING DAY OR RISK EXCLUSION: UEC CHAIRMAN

At a press conference held at the Union Election Commission (UEC) Press Centre on 22 July, the Union Election Commission Chairman Tin Aye, said that eligible voters must ensure they are listed on the electoral roll before the 8 November election, as complaints about omissions will not be accepted on polling day. Enrolled voters will not be prevented from casting their ballots, however, even in cases of incorrect voter data, the chairman said. Another two-week review period is tentatively set to begin in the last week of August, and will be the final one before the election, the chairman said. "Check the voter lists, submit corrections and inform authorities of exclusion from the lists during the period in which it is allowed," he said. Amid mounting complaints about numerous errors in voter lists across the country, the commission extended the initial review period, originally scheduled to run two weeks, until the end of this month. Only 10 percent of eligible voters have so far come to check the lists, leaving uncertainty over the accuracy of much of the voter data, the chairman said.⁶

NOMINATION FOR HLUTTAW CANDIDATES CONTINUES

15 candidates for Pyithu Hluttaw, 2 candidates for Amyotha Hluttaw, 28 candidates for State/Region Hluttaws and one candidate for State/Region Ethnic Affairs submitted their nomination for 2015 General Election on Tuesday. From 20 to 28 July, a total of 114 candidates including 31 for Pyithu Hluttaw, 12 for Amyotha Hluttaw, 58 for state/region Hluttaws and 13 for ethnic affairs constituencies. They represent 14 political parties while 22 of them are individual candidates. Detailed nomination process is available at www.uecmyanmar.org.⁷

HLUTTAW SESSIONS (HIGHLIGHTS)

Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) sessions

The 12th regular session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) met on the below dates. Highlights of the issues raised and discussed include:

21 July⁸

- **The Deputy Minister for Home Affairs Brig-Gen Kyaw Tun** stated that the term '*political prisoner*' **contravenes the State Constitution, which grants all prisoners the same legal status and that it would not be officially used.** He added that, under a recent Presidential Amnesty the government had already released a total of **70,904 prisoners held on a variety of charges, including 354 dissidents.**
- **Bills amending laws on electing the President and Vice President**, as well as **foreign currency management**, were submitted by the Hluttaw Rights Committee for approval during the session.

⁵ Union Election Commission, civil society organizations meet – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-07-21-red.pdf> (GNLM) 21 July 2015 (p. 3)

⁶ Voters must check electoral roll before polling day or risk exclusion: UEC chairman – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-07-23-red.pdf> (GNLM) 23 July 2015 (p. 2)

⁷ Nomination for Hluttaw candidates continues – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-07-29-red.pdf> (GNLM) 29 July 2015 (p. 2) / More candidates submit nominations for general election – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-07-28-red.pdf> (GNLM) 28 July 2015 (p. 2)

⁸ Term 'political prisoner' unconstitutional: ministry – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-07-22-red.pdf> (GNLM) 22 July 2015 (p. 2)

23 July⁹

- MP Dr Soe Moe Aung of Bilin Constituency raised a **question regarding the formation of a union ministry or regional ministries on ethnic affairs**. Deputy Minister Kyaw Win stated that **if regional and state governments wish to form their own ministries for ethnic minorities' affairs, they must put the issue forward to President's office**. The Deputy Minister also said, **the government has been working on formation of a union-level ministry for ethnic minorities affairs, aiming at serving in the interests of ethnic minorities in accordance with the law to protect their rights**.
- MP Kyaw Ni Naing of Laukkai Constituency asked **how many members would be allowed within an expanded leading body of the Self-Administered Division or Self-Administered Zone**. Deputy Minister Kyaw Win replied that **the expansion of the leading body was not within the rights of the Union Government, as the constitution limited a leading body to not more than 10 members**.

24 July¹⁰

- Union Election Commission official Myint Naing, informed the session that **people with temporary National Registration Cards will not be allowed to vote in the 8 November general election**. Myint Naing said, the electoral register for early voting has been posted in offices of UEC sub-commissions to ensure that a person cannot vote twice.
- MP Kyi Tha of the Gwa constituency called **for improved record keeping for rural farmlands that belong to the Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings Ltd**. In responding, the Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation Ohn Than said that **the Settlement and Land Record Department is making efforts to digitalize a map of farmlands and fields so as to provide accurate data on land use**.
- The session also approved **the Banks and Financial Institutions Bill submitted by the Central Bank of Myanmar**.

Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) sessions

The 12th regular session of the First Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) met on the below dates. Highlights of the issues raised and discussed include:

21 July¹¹

- MP Sai San Min of Shan State Constituency No 3 raised a **question regarding plans to release confiscated lands of farmers used in construction of military units in Lashio**. Deputy Minister for Defence Maj-Gen Kyaw Nyunt said that **18.86 acres of farmlands and croplands confiscated by No 41st Infantry Regiment will be released to 8 original owners as the lands are clear from security line of the regiment**.
- MP Paw Lyan Lwin of Chin State Constituency No 9 raised a **question on enactment of laws for legal protection of prisoners with regard to the jails bill and that laws should allow prisoners to have rights of medical treatment and rights of worship on respective religions for their mental improvement**. Similarly, MP Aung Kyi Nyunt of Magway Region constituency No 9 discussed **the issue of political prisoners and that the Jails Bill should include provisions on protection of rights for political prisoners**.

⁹ Region, state ethnic ministries can be formed: President's Office – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-07-24-red.pdf> (GNLM) 24 July 2015 (p. 2)

¹⁰ UEC explains electoral differences at Pyithu Hluttaw – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-07-25-red.pdf> (GNLM) 25 July 2015 (p. 2)

¹¹ Defence Ministry to release confiscated farmlands to original owners – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-07-22-red.pdf> (GNLM) 22 July 2015 (p. 2)

23 July¹²

- In responding to a question on over delays regarding compensation of 1,000 acres of farmland in Oaktwin Township used for the Yangon-Mandalay Highway, the Deputy Minister for Construction Soe Tint said, the amount of Kyats 1.5 billion would be disbursed to farmers on 29 and 30 July, setting compensation at K 1.5 million per acre.
- Regarding the national races and ethnics in the 2014 national census, Deputy Minister for Immigration and Population Win Myint said that the ministry would release the draft of the list of ethnics in the future after discussing the issue with organizations concerned. Currently, Myanmar has eight national races and more than 135 ethnics.
- the Upper House Bill Committee put forward its recommendations on **the Bill Amending the Election for the President and Vice Presidents Law and the Marriage Bill** and also agreed to discuss the **Basic Education Bill and the Technical and Vocational Educational Bill**.

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Parliament) sessions

The 12th regular session of the First Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Parliament) met on the below dates. Highlights of the issues raised and discussed include:

22 July¹³

- The session voted in favour of postponing a constitutional referendum until after the 8 November general election. The referendum on Section 59 (d) of the Constitution had been scheduled to be held in conjunction with the election, but the Union Election Commission proposed holding it separately at a later date. The referendum will ask voters whether the term “military” in the section — which states the president of the union “shall be well acquainted with the affairs of the Union such as political, administrative, economic and military” — should be changed to “defence.” A majority of MPs backed the UEC proposal, saying the concurrent staging of the referendum with the election would pose several difficulties but would not reduce costs significantly. Earlier this month, Speaker of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Thura Shw Mann said he would send a proposal to the Union Election Commission to hold a referendum on amendment of Section 59 (D) alongside the parliamentary elections on 8 November.
- MPs also discussed the Public Account Joint Committee’s report on **the national budget for the second half of the fiscal year for 2014-2015**.

UNOFFICIAL MEDIA

KIO VICE CHAIRMAN SAYS ARMY’S PUTAO OFFENSIVE NOT HELPING PEACE PROCESS

Vice-Chairman of the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) General N'ban La Awng met with the government's chief negotiator in the northern Thai city of Chiang Mai on 19 July for talks. Vice Chair N'ban La accompanied by KIO Joint General Secretary Dr La Ja as well as the Chairman of the Karen National People's Party Abel Tweed took part in the informal discussions with the Burmese government's chief negotiator Aung Min relating to the National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA). In an interview with the Kachin News Group Genereal N'ban La explained that during his meeting he told Aung Min that the “KIO is ready to sign on to the NCA under the right conditions”. This includes the withdrawal of government troops from certain areas in Kachin state. N'ban La added the recent attack on KIO forces by government troops in Putao district were not helping the negotiations process.

The recent clashes between government forces and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) in Putao District's Sumprabum Township east of the Mali Hka river has displaced more than 1,000 people, according to aid groups. The clashes in the area which began in June intensified significantly after the

¹² Farmers in Oaktwin Tsp to receive compensation over land acquisition – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-07-24-red.pdf> (GNLM) 24 July 2015 (p. 2)

¹³ Pyidaungsu Hluttaw votes to postpone constitutional referendum – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/GNLM2015-07-23-red.pdf> (GNLM) 23 July 2015 (p. 2)

army launched air strikes on KIA posts on Saturday July 11th. The air strikes were followed by shelling against KIA posts. It appears that more army reinforcements are being sent to the area, the Kachin News Group has learned. So far the government and the army have blocked local humanitarian groups from getting access to the group of more than displaced 1,000 people from Mali Yang, Ja Ra Yang, Nhtan Zup, Hpung Ing Yang and Sama Bum villages. It remains unclear if the various UN agencies operating in Kachin state will be allowed to help the recently displaced families either. The UN has so far made no public comment on the deteriorating humanitarian situation that those displaced by the recent wave of fighting face.¹⁴

ETHNIC POLITICAL PARTIES SEEK ALLIANCE WITH NLD

The United Nationalities Alliance (UNA) an alliance of ethnic political parties has formally proposed joining forces with the National League for Democracy (NLD) for the November 8 general election. The NLD party has yet to respond to the request, but plans to discuss it at the next meeting of senior officials. Vice Chair of the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD) Sai Saw Aung, said that the NLD should ally itself with UNA members because it will result in stronger ethnic representation in parliament.

Following a meeting with SNLD officials, the NLD agreed not to contest seats in which members of the Committee Representing the People's Parliament (CRPP) will run. However, the CRPP contains only two representatives of UNA parties: SNLD leader Khun Tun Oo, and Rakhine National Party official Aye Thar Aung. "We already told the NLD only two CRPP members will contest the election," said Sai Saw Aung. "Allying with only the CRPP will "not lead to stronger ethnic representation in parliament. So we requested the NLD to ally with UNA parties instead." The CRPP was formed by MPs-elect from the 1990 election in 1998 after the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) failed to recognise the results of the vote.

The NLD has not yet responded to the alliance proposal but the UNA said it expects to negotiate the issue in the coming weeks. A deal would likely have to be reached by 8 August, when the deadline for submitting candidate lists closes. A key plank of the alliance would be for parties to not field candidates against each other in the election. NLD Central Executive Committee member Win Htein, confirmed that his party had received the UNA request. "We support the request of the UNA but we need to discuss it at our CEC meeting ... We will negotiate with the UNA soon," he said.

Aye Thar Aung from the RNP said the NLD should not contest state hluttaw seats in ethnic minority areas because it would hinder ethnic parties' attempts to form or participate in state governments. "If the NLD wants stronger ethnic representation then they shouldn't contest seats in ethnic parties' areas," he said. The UNA has also announced it will hold a conference in Yangon from July 27 to 29 to discuss the election, constitutional amendments and the peace process, including nationwide ceasefire accord negotiations and planned political dialogue. The UNA comprises the SNLD, the RNP, the Kayah National Party, the Zomi Democracy League Party, the Mon National Party, the Shan State Kokang Democratic Party, the Kachin National Democracy Congress Party and the Karen National Party.¹⁵

KAREN POLITICAL PARTY TO CONTEST ALL KAREN STATE CONSTITUENCIES

Vice Chairman of the Hpa-an based, Plone-Sgaw Democratic Party (PSDP) Mahn Aung Pyi, said that they are planning to contest all constituencies in Karen State for the November 8, 2015 general

¹⁴ KIO vice chairman says army's Putao offensive not helping peace process – <http://www.kachinnews.com/news/2750-kio-vice-chairman-says-army-s-putao-offensive-not-helping-peace-process.html> (Kachin News Group) 22 July 2015

¹⁵ Ethnic political parties seek alliance with NLD – <http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/15605-ethnic-political-parties-seek-alliance-with-nld.html> (Myanmar Times) 22 July 2015

election. “We will contest all 36 constituencies including places where Burman, Pa-o, Mon ethnic people live. We have not yet confirmed the names of [our] candidates. Our target is to win the constituencies, particularly at the state level and to have PSDP as the main party in the Karen State government.” Mahn Aung Pyi Soe said that candidates for the Minister of Karen Ethnic Affairs, PSDP would contest in the Kyaikmayaw and Pong townships in Mon State and also in Bilin Township and Yangon Division.

In Karen State, the main opposition parties that PSDP will compete against are the current government’s Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) and the National League for Democracy (NLD).” Based primarily in Karen State, the PSDP was founded in 2010 and in that year’s general election, won a total of nine seats – four seats in the State Assembly, two seats in the lower house (House of Representatives) and three seats in the upper house (House of Nationalities). According to a media release by the Union of Election Committee – in Karen state, there are 36 constituencies: 7 for the Lower House, 12 for Upper House, 14 for the State Assembly, and 3 for Burman, Pa-o, and Mon Ethnic Affairs.¹⁶

UNHCR PRESENTS FIRST DRAFT OF REPATRIATION PLAN

The UN’s refugee agency unveiled a draft plan detailing how to carry out the voluntary repatriation of 110,000 refugees residing in Thailand’s camps, drawing mixed reactions from camp leaders. Thailand currently has more than 110,000 refugees from Burma residing in 9 camps along the border. Open for more than 30 years, recent talks of repatriation has sent shockwaves through the camps as refugees remain wary about Burma’s current nominally civilian government. There are still reports of fighting within various parts of Burma, including Karen State, where the majority of the refugees are from.

The draft document, titled “**Operations Plan for Voluntary Repatriation,**” was presented by Senior Coordinator for UNHCR, Iain Hall, during a closed-door meeting to roughly 70 camp leadership members on 28 July, along with relevant NGOs. Held every 3 months, this meeting is for various stakeholders working on refugee issues along the border to air their concerns and needs. This plan comes at the heels of a “**Strategic Roadmap for Voluntary Repatriation,**” released earlier this year, which deals more generally with the principles of the voluntary return of refugees, should they choose to take that step. The Operations Plan presented on at the meeting, provided more details to facilitating the return, such as transportation logistics, helping people with specific needs (like children, elderly, and those who are disabled), and ensuring voluntariness among refugees. The Joint General-Secretary of the Karen Refugee Committee (KRC) Blooming Night Zan, which oversees camp management in 7 of the border camps, said that the KRC does not intend to help UNHCR with the operations plan. Her main concerns were that “[the KRC is] not involved or participating in it, and it is not ours,” she said. Another KRC official Bweh Say said, “We do have a little bit of worry because first we talked about the strategic roadmap and now we are moving towards an operations plan,” he said. “But we do trust UNHCR because I think it is important to know where we are going and what is in our future.” “Our concern is more about how the camp management will figure in the operations plan,” he added, reiterating that KRC’s policy on repatriation is that it should only happen when there is a signed national cease-fire agreement and “genuine peace.” First Secretary of the Karenni Refugee Committee (KNRC)– which oversees the two Karenni camps in Mae Hong Son – agreed, though he thinks the plan comes a little too soon. “At the same time, they are following the plans of both governments – the Thai and the Burmese – because after the election, if something happens and the refugees are given the green light to return, [the UNHCR] would like to catch up on that,” he said, referring to the Burma’s national poll scheduled for 8 November. “For us, we are not very sure about

¹⁶ Karen Political Party To Contest All Karen State Constituencies – <http://karennews.org/2015/07/karen-political-party-to-contest-all-karen-state-constituencies.html/> (Karen News) 20 July 2015

the strategy yet, but when they present the plan it's a little bit concerning for us," he added. "We don't want them to push the refugees."

Hall, the UNHCR senior coordinator, explained that this came about because the UNHCR has had specific questions in recent months on what should be done if a refugee were to decide to voluntarily return. He declined to provide the specifics, saying that it is only the first draft. "We've been saying for the last two or three years it's too early to do planning, but in the last six months, people have been talking more and more and we've had specific requests, so we said 'Let's start planning'," he said. "UNHCR made very clear yesterday that if refugees don't feel comfortable about the planning, then we will stop." Hall added that just because there is a draft plan does not mean that repatriation is imminent. "Even if we complete the document in the next six months, they might not go home for the next six years," he said. "We don't know — it doesn't depend on our plans; it depends on peace and politics, and there's no peace," Hall said. "But if there is peace, and politics sort itself out, we will need to be ready if the refugees start to decide when to go home." Patrick Kearns, the chair of the Committee for Coordination of Services to Displaced Persons in Thailand (CCSDPT) – a joint organization made up of 19 NGOs working on camp issues – said that the general consensus among the camp leadership, the UNHCR, and NGOs is that the time now is not appropriate to consider a large-scale return. That being said, Kearns believes that it is important to begin planning should refugees choose to return on their own. "The consistent message is nobody is in a hurry to have a finished document," he said. "But there is a necessity now to start to address these questions to begin looking at what the needs are."¹⁷

ANALYSIS

The Presidential amnesty and preparations for the November general elections with registration of voters and would-be candidates reflect a positive nature in Myanmar's democratic process. While agreement was reached on some general issues at the nationwide ceasefire talks the inability by both sides to see eye to eye on some key issues including security integration (also referred to as Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration/DDR and Security Sector Reform/SSR) ; land use and natural resources management remain unresolved. Other issues of "all-inclusiveness" and presence and participation of international observers (witnesses) which have long been called for by EAOs as a vital component of any peace deal by will also need to be ironed out in the next round of talks. With key issues still remaining unresolved, both the UPWC and the senior delegation of the EAOs will need to make compromises if the NCA is to be signed before the November elections. While many issues and challenges remain unresolved it is important to note that the on-going peace process is crucial in shaping Myanmar's democratic reforms and the country's political future. And if the government and EAOs are committed to achieving peace then it is incumbent for both sides to adopt and make compromises as well as ending all military confrontations inside the country.

¹⁷ UNHCR presents first draft of repatriation plan – <http://www.dvb.no/news/unhcr-presents-first-draft-of-repatriation-plan-burma-myanmar-refugees/55299> (DVB) 29 July 2015