

POLITICAL MONITOR No.16

OFFICIAL MEDIA

STATE COUNSELLOR AUNG SAN SUU KYI ADDRESSES RAKHINE STATE COORDINATION MEETING

State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi called for pragmatic action to bring peace, stability and development to Rakhine State at a work coordination meeting in Nay Pyi Taw on 14 July. The State Counsellor, who is also the chairperson of the central committee for the implementation of peace, stability and development in Rakhine State, stressed the need for the government to gain public trust including from those involved in the process of scrutinising citizenship and all local people. Aung San Suu Kyi welcomed frank and open discussions on the challenges of implementing undertakings related to peace, stability and development in the state. Minister for Border Affairs Lt-Gen Ye Aung, Minister for Home Affairs Lt-Gen Kyaw Swe, Minister for Immigration Thein Swe, Rakhine State Chief Minister Nyi Pu and State Counsellor's Office Minister Kyaw Tint Swe elaborated on ongoing works and progress in developmental undertakings for townships in Rakhine State and work plans set to be implemented by ministries concerned as well as works being carried out in co-operation with the international community and matters related to the provision of international aid. In her concluding remarks the State Counsellor highlighted the importance of cooperation and collaboration between the ministries concerned and the State government.¹

CSOs SUBMIT TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR UPCOMING PANGLONG PEACE CONFERENCE

Civil Society Organisations have finalised the terms of reference in an effort to gear up for the 21st Century Panglong Peace Conference scheduled for August. They gave a press briefing in Yangon on 8 July to announce their plan of organising a forum as prelude to the peace conference. Member of the organising committee for the CSO Forum Phwe Yu Mon, a, said that the civil society organisations (CSOs) have been meeting to discuss their participation in the conference since 1 June. "In the previous meetings, we sought ways of how to play our role at the event. And we all agreed on the fact that we should develop the terms of reference on our own," she said. The CSOs have sent the copies of the terms of reference to the Preparatory Committee for 21st Century Panglong Peace Conference, the United Nationalities alliance (UNA) and the 8 Ethnic Armed Organisations who are signatories to the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA). "We met the ethnic armed organisations to explain our stance and the terms of reference," Phwe Yu Mon said, adding that the copies of the terms of reference have also been sent to ethnic armed organisations which are yet to sign the NCA. Member of the organising committee for the CSO forum, Saw Min Naing said that CSOs are determined to play an active part in the upcoming peace conference by representing the voices of the people. The terms of reference fall into seven parts focusing on the rights of civil society organisations, a time frame for the implementation of procedures, and the CSO forum to the peace conference.²

CHINESE MINISTER OF STATE SECURITY CALLS ON AUNG SAN SUU KYI AND SENIOR GENERAL MIN AUNG HLAING

State Counsellor and Minister for Foreign Affairs Aung San Suu Kyi received the Minister of State for Security of the People's Republic of China Geng Huichang in Nay Pyi Taw on 8 July. At the meeting, matters on bilateral relations and security cooperation between the two countries were discussed in a cordial manner. Geng Huichang and party also called on Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services

¹ Rakhine State needs pragmatic action to ensure peace, stability and development – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-07-15-red.pdf> (GNLM) 15 July 2016 (p. 1)

² CSOs Make Their Case: CSOs come up with terms of reference for its forum – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-07-09-red.pdf> (GNLM) 9 July 2016 (p. 1)

Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and discussed cooperation between the two Defence Services, border security and matters related to terrorism prevention and drugs control.³

OVER 200 ACRES OF CONFISCATED FARMLAND RETURNED TO OWNERS IN MANDALAY

Over 200 acres of land have been returned to its rightful owners in the presence of Vice President Henry Van Thio in Mandalay Region. A ceremony took place in Madaya Township on 9 July to hand over 208 acres of land lost to the construction project of a leper hospital, with officials announcing that more than 800 acres of land would be returned on completion of the scrutiny process. The Vice President described farmland as crucial property for farmers in an agricultural country, pledging justice in returning the confiscated land and urged farmers to enhance their agricultural output through a shift from conventional and traditional to mechanised farming. According to officials, the land was originally seized by the Ministry of Industry-1 in 1977 and was later passed to the Ministry of Health. In Mandalay Region, more than 35,000 acres of land were seized and some 32,000 acres have been returned.⁴

NATIONAL RECONCILIATION AND PEACE CENTER FORMED

The President's Office issued Order No. 50/2016 dated 11 July 2016 on the formation of an 11-member National Reconciliation and Peace Center headed by State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi. The newly formed NRPC will set policies and guidelines needed for national reconciliation process, coordinate with local and foreign donors, governments, international nongovernmental organizations and international institutions regarding assistance to national reconciliation and peace processes. *(Please see Appendix A for full text of Order No. 50/2016).*⁵

UNOFFICIAL MEDIA

21 ETHNIC ARMED GROUPS INVITED TO SUMMIT

Twenty-one ethnic armed groups, including Wa, Mongla and Naga armies, and political parties, will be invited to the Maijayang Summit, according to Pado Saw Kwel Htoo Win, Vice-Chair of the Organising Committee. The Mai Ja Yang summit in Kachin State scheduled for July 26 to 29 aims to help encourage all groups to participate in the 21st-Century Panglong Conference next month. "We will invite all armed groups and political alliances, like the United Nationalities Alliance (UNA) and Nationalities Brotherhood Federation (NBF), to the Summit. Youth and women's groups will also be invited." Sai Kyaw Nyunt, Joint Secretary of the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy, said: "We haven't received any official invitation yet. I don't know whether we are observing or participating yet." Wa and Mongla armed groups may find it difficult to attend the summit. Pado Saw Kwel Htoo Win said: "We will inform them about the purpose of the summit. The Zomi Revolutionary Organisation may struggle to attend despite calling for it. "We find it difficult to invite groups which straddle two countries. We will invite the Naga group, although it is partly based in India."⁶

³ FM Daw Aung San Suu Kyi receives Chinese Minister of State Security –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-07-09-red.pdf> (GNLM) 9 July 2016 (p. 1)/
Senior General Min Aung Hlaing meets with Chinese State Security Minister –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-07-09-red.pdf> (GNLM) 9 July 2016 (p. 2)

⁴ Over 200 acres of confiscated farmland returned to owners in Mandalay Region –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-07-10-red.pdf> (GNLM) 10 July 2016 (p. 1 &3)

⁵ National Reconciliation and Peace Center formed –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-07-12-red.pdf> (GNLM) 12 July 2016 (p. 2)

⁶ 21 rebel armies invited to summit –
http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/politics/5385_10_July_2016 (Eleven Myanmar) 10 July 2016

WOMEN'S RIGHTS GROUPS DEMAND CHANGES TO CONSTITUTION

Women's rights advocates have demanded changes to the constitution to ensure women's basic rights, especially in conflict areas, at a press briefing on their experience of attending the United Nation's (UN) 64th Session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in Geneva, Switzerland. About two-dozen advocates for gender equality and peace shared their CEDAW shadow reports with the UN CEDAW committee, while also receiving responses from the delegation representing the Myanmar government. The reports covered issues including violence against women and impunity, rule of law and women's access to justice, human trafficking, women's participation in political leadership and the peace process, the need to allocate budgets for gender equality and the advancement of rural women. The government delegation committed to collaborating with civil society groups, including women's groups, and pledged to work towards a national law on the Prevention of Violence against Women (PoVAW) and a National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women (NSPAW). Myanmar's last CEDAW report was in 2008. This year's report from the government lacks data on violence against women in areas of armed conflict and makes no mention of human trafficking and women's participation in the peace process—issues the women's rights groups brought up with the UN in their shadow reports. Lway Cherry of the Ta'ang (Palaung) Women's Organization said that she was heartened by government team's pledge of cooperation, calling it unprecedented. However, she said "constitutional change remains key because, under the 2008 Constitution, there is a clause ensuring impunity for military personnel, even if they abuse women." This has especially grave consequences in conflict areas, she said. 92 cases of sexual violence in conflict areas of Burma between 2010-2015, mostly in Shan and Kachin states, were recorded in the Women League of Burma's CEDAW shadow report—compensating for the dearth of data on this subject in the government's report. Director of the Gender Equality Network May Sabe Phyu, questioned the government's understanding of the articles contained in the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, which it ratified in 1997. Both the UN Committee and Women's Rights groups have criticized Myanmar's 2008 Constitution and its domestic laws for falling well short of the commitments outlined in the convention—for instance in failing to properly define and prohibit direct and indirect forms of discrimination against women, and in the incorporation of restrictive gender stereotypes in legal provisions. May Sabe Phyu said that, despite the government's insistence that equal rights for women are enshrined in the constitution, "substantive equality" for women in the workplace or in education is still lacking. The advocates also demanded that the number of women at decision-making levels should be increased, rather than a mere quantitative increase of women in the workplace. Nga Ngai, an ethnic Kuki woman from the Women's League of Burma, said that, although the government delegation was not able to respond to the specificities of the concerns raised with them, government and civil society have "strengthened their relations" as a result of this engagement. May Sabe Phyu said that, although the non-government delegation had very little time in which to present their findings, the experience of presenting directly to the UN committee marked a "milestone" for civil society in Myanmar.⁷

UNFC HOLDS EMERGENCY MEETING

To prepare for several upcoming engagements, the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC) held an emergency meeting in Chiang Mai on 12 July. In his opening speech, UNFC's chairman Lt. Gen N'Ban La explained how it's crucial to make important decisions regarding the ethnic armed groups. "We have arrived at an important time now...I'm sure everyone understands by now that the UNFC is an organization that can cooperate with various political parties and ethnic armed groups from within the country. We must carry out future plans under close supervision (but only) after considering them

⁷ Women's Rights Groups Demand Changes to Constitution –
<http://www.irrawaddy.com/burma/womens-rights-groups-demand-changes-to-constitution.html> (the Irrawaddy) 11
July 2016

with sincerity.” The central executive committee has much to discuss. Some of these topics include: the drafting of a constitution for a federal union; protection policies for security and defence; the agenda for an upcoming meeting with State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi; Ethnic Armed Summit in Maijyang; and the 2nd UNFC conference. The emergency meeting was attended by Chairman of the New Mon State Party Nai Htaw Mon, Chairman Karenni National Progress Party Abel Tweed; Patron of the Shan State Progress Party Maj.-Gen. Say Htin and Kachin Independence Organization Vice Chairman Lt. Gen. N’Ban La. The Palaung State Liberation Front and Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army didn’t attend the meeting.⁸ Both groups have requested to leave the UNFC.

ANALYSIS

Myanmar’s transition to democracy under the NLD led government has recently completed its 100 days in office and is now embarking on taking the initiative to hold the 21st Panglong Peace Conference with the aim of ending decades of fighting. While the Peace Conference may have assumed the main focus and talk of the town, it is important to note the recent coordination meeting chaired by State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi to bring to peace, stability and development to Rakhine State is as equally as important. The situation in Rakhine State remains fragile due to the communal riots which also spread beyond its region to other parts of the country and which created a major challenge for the previous Thein Sein government. The NLD government will need to monitor closely the situation in the Rakhine State not only to diffuse the racial and religious tensions between the Buddhist and Muslim communities but also to put in place measures to counter future communal disturbances. Successive governments in the past have either ignored the issues prevailing in the Rakhine State or may have turned a blind eye to the situation which in turn has created friction and tension and thus even seeing the creation of nationalistic community based organisations. The NLD government has an array of tasks and challenges ahead and will need to adopt and implement clear policies on issues regarding race, religion and culture if it is to be seen as a promoter of democracy and basic human rights.

⁸ UNFC Holds Emergency Meeting – <http://mizzima.com/news-domestic/unfc-holds-emergency-meeting> (Mizzima) 13 July 2016

APPENDICES:

Appendix A: FORMATION OF THE NATIONAL RECONCILIATION AND PEACE CENTER

Republic of the Union of Myanmar

President's Office

Order 50/2016

7th Waxing of Waso, 1378 ME (11 July, 2016)

Formation of National Reconciliation and Peace Center

1. In order to set necessary policies and guidelines for ensuring the successful implementation of national reconciliation and peace process, the NRPC is formed with the following persons:

SR.	NAME	CURRENT PORTFOLIO	APPOINTED DESIGNATION
1.	Daw Aung San Suu Kyi	State Counsellor	Chairperson
2.	U Kyaw Tint Swe	Union Minister for the Office of State Counsellor	Vice-Chairman (1)
3.	Dr Tin Myo Win	Chairman of Preparatory Committee for 21 st Panglong Peace Conference	Vice-Chairman (2)
4.	Lt-Gen Ye Aung	Union Minister for Border Affairs	Member
5.	Nai Thet Lwin	Union Minister for Ethnic Affairs	Member
6.	U Tun Tun Oo	Union Attorney-General	Member
7.	Lt-Gen Yar Pyae	Commander of Bureau of Special Operations (2), Ministry of Defense	Member
8.	Lt-Gen Min Naung	Commander of Bureau of Special Operations (4), Ministry of Defense	Member
9.	U Khun Maung Thaung	Chairman of Pyithu Hluttaw Ethnic Affairs and Internal Peace Implementation Committee. <i>(MP for Pinlaung Constituency, Shan State)</i>	Member
10.	Daw Shila Nan Taung (a) Daw M Nan Taung	Chairman of Amyotha Hluttaw Ethnic Affairs Committee. <i>(MP for Kachin State Constituency 2)</i>	Member
11.	U Khin Maung Tin	Deputy Minister for the Office of the State Counsellor	Secretary

2. Functions and duties of the National Reconciliation and Peace Center are as follows: -

- (a) to set policies and guidelines needed for national reconciliation process,
- (b) to set policies and guidelines needed for internal peace process,
- (c) to set policies for coordination with local and foreign donors, governments, international nongovernmental organizations and international institutions regarding assistance to national reconciliation and peace processes,
- (d) to lead and lay down guidelines paving the way to participation of the government, Hluttaw, Tatmadaw, ethnic organizations and ethnic armed groups, civil society organizations, international community and donors and local and foreign experts from various sectors in national reconciliation and peace processes,
- (e) to seek ways and means for turning the Republic of the Union of Myanmar into a Democratic Federal Union, and
- (f) to release procedures and directives needed for implementation of functions of the National Reconciliation and Peace Center-NRPC.

3. The NRPC shall form and appoint technical board and support team in order to ensure successful implementation of national reconciliation and peace processes in accord with rules and regulations.

Sd/

Htin Kyaw

President

Republic of the Union of Myanmar.⁹

⁹ National Reconciliation and Peace Center formed –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-07-12-red.pdf> (GNLM) 12 July 2016 (p. 2)