

POLITICAL MONITOR NO.15

OFFICIAL MEDIA

STATE COUNSELLOR CALLS FOR INCLUSION OF ALL GROUPS IN PEACE CONFERENCE

On 5 July, State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi pushed to invite all stakeholders to the August peace process, at the 21st Century Panglong Preparatory Committee meeting in Nay Pyi Taw. Aung San Suu Kyi expressed the need to develop reconciliation between the government and ethnic minorities and armed groups to help with national reconciliation. Chairman of the Preparatory Committee Dr Tin Myo Win, spoke of the progress in negotiation with the NCA non-signatory groups. “Policies outlined at the meeting include: works for allowing NCA non-signatory groups to join the Conference, relaxation of restrictions on inviting political parties that do not hold a parliamentary seat and functions of the National Reconciliation and Peace Center (NRPC). in dealing with international donors and their assistance to the peace process,” said Zaw Htay, spokesperson for the President’s Office. He said that Aung San Suu Kyi suggested finding the means for participation of all political parties in the peace conference and that the NRPC is set to handle international funds of the peace process. “Talks remain to be held with three groups of 21 Ethnic Armed Organisations regarding the new government’s peace policy,” said the Preparatory Committee Chairman Dr Tin Myo Win. Preparations for the conference are underway and the 21st Century Union Peace Conference is set for late August. Secretary of the preparatory committee Hla Maung Shwe said, “a meeting between the State Counsellor and the Chairman of United Nationalities Federal Council is scheduled to be held in Yangon and the Union Peace Conference is set to take place in Nay Pyi Taw”.¹

NON-SIGNATORIES TO NCA TO MEET STATE COUNSELLOR

Non-signatory Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) to the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) will hold talks with State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi prior to a conference involving all EAOs at Mai Ja Yang in Kachin State. The meeting held on 1 July was between the Union Peace Conference-21st Century Panglong Preparatory Committee and United Nationalities Federal Council’s (UNFC) Delegation for Political Negotiation-DPN. In his address, Dr Tin Myo Win, Chair of the Preparatory Committee, said that the government is willing to give more than take in negotiations with ethnic groups in order to ensure the establishment of a peaceful federal Union. Highlighting the importance of the meeting on the peace process, the Dr Tin Myo Win added that peace is possible if both sides can find a solution through negotiations. Leader of the UNFC Delegation for Political Negotiation-DPN, Khu Oo Reh, expressed his belief that the ethnic side’s understanding is that it is required (for them) to work together with the Tatmadaw to achieve peace in the country. He assured that goodwill and brotherly negotiations will be undertaken between the two sides as the ongoing peace process has been accepted by NCA non-signatories. Hla Maung Shwe, Secretary of the Preparatory Committee, said that State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi welcomed the meeting with the chairman of the UNFC, with the leaders of both sides agreeing in principle to meet in Yangon in mid-July. The Preparatory Committee for the 21st Century Panglong Peace Conference agreed with the DPN’s request for government recognition of the Mai Ja Yang Conference in Kachin State.²

¹ Inclusive is Key: State Counsellor calls for inclusion of all groups in Peace Conference – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-07-06-red.pdf> (GNLM) 6 July 2016 (p. 1)

² Working out the Terms: Non-Signatories to NCA to meet State Counsellor by mid-July – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-07-02-red.pdf> (GNLM) 2 July 2016 (p. 1)

21ST CENTURY PANGLONG UNION PEACE CONFERENCE PREPARATORY SUBCOMMITTEE-1 HOLDS MEETING

The Preparatory Subcommittee 1 held its 2nd Coordination Meeting on 4 July was attended by the Chairman of the Preparatory Committee and Subcommittee 1, Dr Tin Myo Win; Vice Chairman P'doh Saw Kwe Htoo Win, and Chairman of the Subcommittee 2 Lt-Gen Yar Pyae. In his address, Dr Tin Myo Win said, "A framework review process is to be held by the Subcommittee 1 in cooperation with the 8 NCA signatories, while Subcommittee 1 plans to also hold talks with non-signatory groups,". He also added that, "A meeting on policy guidelines between the State Counsellor and the 2 Subcommittees is scheduled for 5 July."

Hla Maung Shwe, Secretary of the Preparatory Committee, said that the meeting focused on timely completion of preparatory works for the Peace Conference, adding that policy guidelines are likely to come out following the talks between the State Counsellor and subcommittees. A review of political framework is set to be made in early August after a meeting between the State Counsellor and NCA non-signatory groups was slated for mid-July, said the secretary. Khet Htein Nan, member of Subcommittee 1, used the meeting for future works, saying that a political dialogue structure presented by subcommittee 1 is quite similar to a structure approved by ethnic sides at Law Khee La conference.

The meeting of the Preparatory Sub-committee 1 continued in Nay Pyi Taw on 6 July reviewed the political dialogue framework, focusing on agenda items to be discussed at the conference and stakeholder involvement in it, said Dr Salai Lian Hmung Sakhong, Secretary 1 of the Sub-committee 1. Ten topics under five agenda themes which are to be discussed in political talks at different levels were chosen at the meeting, added Lian Sakhong. They also discussed issues related to citizens, the CSO forum, topics for discussion and guidelines.

Member of the Subcommittee 1, Khun Myint Tun, said that the meeting made important decisions paving the way towards the planned Peace Conference and that the outcomes of separate topics of discussion held by the working committees will be submitted to the UPDJC meeting through the UPDJC secretariat in order to turn the points into agreements at the Union Peace Conference.

The meeting decided to allow the NCA non-signatories to join the Conference where they will have access to political dialogue, he added. According to Khun Myint Tun, the NCA non-signatory groups are set to hold talks with the State Counsellor on 17 July. Khun Maung Thaug, another member of subcommittee 1, expressed his view that the conference is being seen as a work in progress towards a lasting peace in Myanmar. He called for the participation of all in the conference and for all to do their bit to find a settlement between the factions after more than six decades of conflict.³

DISCUSSIONS UNDERWAY FOR NSCN-K TO JOIN PANGLONG CONFERENCE

National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang (NSCN-K) met the Preparatory Committee for the 21st Century Panglong Peace Conference in Yangon on 2 July to discuss its participation in the peace process. At the invitation of the preparatory committee, the NSCN-K met the Chairman of the Preparatory Committee Dr Tin Myo Win. He quoted State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi's instructions that the peace process should focus on equality and inclusive participation of all ethnic groups. NSCN-K Leader An Kant expressed his support for the new government's commitment to the peace initiative for the 21st Century Panglong Peace Conference, promising their cooperation in regional development

³ A Brief Meeting: Preparatory subcommittee-1 gears up for 21st Century Panglong Union Peace Conference – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-07-05-red.pdf> (GNLM) 5 July 2016 (p. 1)/
Paving the Way: Preparatory sub-c'tee 1 for Union Peace Conference continues meeting – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-07-07-red.pdf> (GNLM) 7 July 2016 (p. 1)

and peace. The ethnic group entered a regional-level ceasefire agreement with the government in April 2012.

The NSCN-K Chairman said that his group would not participate in political dialogue but would work together with the government for regional development. “We will come to the peace conference as an observer, and we warmly welcome their invitation to the peace talks,” he said, adding that his group has not decided whether to sign the nationwide ceasefire agreement. Speaking to the media, Hla Maung Shwe, Secretary of the Preparatory Committee, said that the National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang is an independent ethnic group which forms no alliance with any ethnic armed group. “They have built trust with the army. Not a single engagement has ever broken out between the army and them for 16 years,” he added. According to official reports, there have been no clashes between the ethnic group and the army since 2000. The NSCN-K attended as an observer the peace talks between the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team and the Union Peacemaking Work Committee in spite of not having signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement.⁴

STATE COUNSELLOR AND UNION FOREIGN AFFAIRS MINISTER MEETS WITH BANGLADESHI PM’S SPECIAL ENVOY

State Counsellor and Minister for Foreign Affairs Aung San Suu Kyi received the Bangladeshi Prime Minister’s Special Envoy Foreign Secretary Md. Shahidul Haque in Nay Pyi Taw on 30 June and held discussions on promoting and further strengthening of bilateral relations and cooperation between the two countries. The Bangladeshi delegation also called on Commander-in-Chief of Defense Services Senior-General Min Aung Hlaing on 30 June. During the meeting, the Senior-General stressed the need for greater understanding and acceptance of reality, expressing his belief that constructive engagement will contribute towards ensuring greater friendship between the two nations and discussed talks on further relations between the two Defence Services and greater cooperation between the two border guard forces in an effort to ensure border security and peace and stability.⁵

MYANMAR GOV’T ASSURES IT IS WORKING TO ENSURE SAFE RETURN OF REFUGEES

Ministry of Border Affairs and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees jointly hosted a consultation workshop on a strategic operation plan for the voluntary repatriation of Myanmar refugees in Thailand in Nay Pyi Taw on 6 July. Minister for Border Affairs Lt-Gen Ye Aung said that the government will make the necessary arrangements to ensure the return home of Myanmar refugees on the Myanmar-Thailand border with safety and with dignity. According to sources, some of 105,000 Myanmar refugees, living in a total of nine camps along the Myanmar-Thailand border, are planning to return home. The ministry is planning to ink another MoU with the UNHCR in regard to the ongoing projects to provide returning Myanmar citizens with education, health services, clean water, infrastructure and vocational training, added the Union minister. According to the Ministry, it has been implementing such projects since 2013 in Kayin, Mon, Kayah, Shan and Chin States and Taninthayi and Bago Regions with the use of US\$ 9.05 million in cooperation with the UNHCR. The Union Minister called for a repatriation plan to be developed at the workshop in order to ensure the return of Myanmar refugees in safety, stressing the need for collaborative efforts between the ministry, ethnic groups, CSOs, ethnic communities and the UNHCR. During the workshop those present held

⁴ Getting a Look In: Discussions underway for NSCN-K to join Panglong Conference – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-07-03-red.pdf> (GNLM) 3 July 2016 (p. 1)

⁵ State Counsellor and Union Foreign Affairs Minister meets with Bangladeshi PM’s special envoy – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-07-01-red.pdf> (GNLM) 1 July 2016 (p. 1)/ Myanmar-Bangladesh bilateral ties maintain sound momentum; Senior General says – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-07-01-red.pdf> (GNLM) 1 July 2016 (p. 1)

roundtable discussions on the challenge of repatriating refugees and developing strategic operational plans.⁶

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SNLD BOSS DEMANDS UNLIMITED CHARTER CHANGE

No organisation should have a restriction on amendments to the Constitution and only when all ethnic groups could contribute will peace be established, argued Khun Tun Oo, the Chairman of the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD). The SNLD boss was making an opening speech laying down the main principles of federalisation held by the United Nationalities Alliance (UNA) and the Ethnic Nationalities Affairs Centre at Inya Lake Hotel in Yangon on 30 June. "There should be no restrictions if we build a federal union. All groups must have free and candid discussions. We must learn from the past," Khun Tun Oo said. Speaker of the Lower House Win Myint, said on 10 June that priority was being given to national reconciliation and peace and that the constitutional amendment would be addressed during the current parliamentary term. "Without amending the Constitution, we cannot build a federal union," Khun Tun Oo said.

State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi told a meeting of the 8 national ceasefire signatories on June 28 that she aimed to create a peaceful, federal union. She added that nothing would be hidden from armed groups that attended the peace talks she was planning. "The government doesn't have any secrets. The State Counsellor said a federal union where all the ethnic groups can live with peace of mind will be established.

The Chairman of the SNLD Khun Tun Oo said, "It needs a constitution appropriate for all minorities that can also guarantee autonomy to all ethnic groups,". The federal meeting organised by the UNA and allied organisations is being held from 30 June until 2 July. The SNLD, Arakan National Party, Zomi Congress for Democracy and Mon National Party have been invited to attend Suu Kyi's peace conference, due to be held before the end of August.⁷

AMID MILITARY TENSIONS, KNU OFFICIAL RESIGNS FROM CEASEFIRE MONITORING COMMITTEE

Tensions arose between soldiers from government forces and the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) over a military checkpoint dispute, leading to the resignation of an ethnic Karen official who serves on a ceasefire monitoring body. Col Saw Mu Ker, an official with the Karen National Union (KNU) and the vice-chairman of the state-level Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC)—a group which monitors the implementation of Burma's 2015 nationwide ceasefire agreement (NCA)—has resigned his post after the committee failed to address a dispute over a KNLA-controlled tax collection checkpoint in the Htee Khee area of southern Burma's Tenasserim (Tanintharyi) Division. The KNU is the political wing of the KNLA and one of eight non-state ethnic armed organizations that signed last year's NCA with the former government. The argument was reported after a tactical commander from the army's military operations command ordered KNLA soldiers to shut down the checkpoint within three days in late June—an order which the KNLA ignored up to this point. In his resignation letter, Col Saw Mu Ker said he would leave his post because the JMC had not taken action to resolve the disagreement which had upset his fellow soldiers. The colonel belongs to KNLA Brigade 4, which is based in Tenasserim Division. He said that it was more appropriate to look after his soldiers than to serve on

⁶ Myanmar gov't assures it is working to ensure safe return of refugees –
<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-07-07-red.pdf> (GNLM) 7 July 2016 (p. 1)

⁷ SNLD boss demands unlimited charter change –
<http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/politics/5308> (Eleven Myanmar) 1 July 2016

the JMC, as there was no reason to cooperate with the committee if they could not handle disputes as they arose.⁸

JMC-S ESTABLISHED IN KAREN STATE

A state-level Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee (JMC-S) responsible for overseeing that signatories of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) adhere to the consensus that was reached and signed last year has been formally established in Karen State. Member of the Union-Level Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee (JMC-U) and also from the 88 Generation Peace and Society Ko Gyi, said the Karen State JMC-S has been established to work with the union-level group in order to strengthen the ceasefire agreement across the nation. "When we study the reasons for war it's more of a political issue. So it's important to solve political issues using political methods. I believe that protecting the civilians as much as we can while the problems are being worked out will aid in peace dialogue and the political process." The JMC-S will observe whether or not the non-state armed groups (NSAGs) and Burma Army follow the rules and regulations outlined in the NCA intended to prevent trespassing on one another's territories and violating the rights of the civilian population, said member Pado Saw Tar Do Hmu from the Karen National Union (KNU). When it was established during the previous Thein Sein administration, the JMC-U was criticized for lacking civilian representation. Only the government, Burma Army, non-state armed groups and some experts were included. After the new NLD government took office more civilian members were added, as well as for the state-level monitoring group.

Over 60 representatives from the KNU; Karen National Union/Karen National Liberation Army Peace Council; Klo Htoo Baw Karen Organization (DKBA-KKO); the Arakan Liberation Party (ALP) and All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF) attended the official JMC-S ceremony recently held at the 22nd Light Infantry Division (LID-22) headquarters in Karen State's capital Hpa-an.⁹

SSPP/SSA ASKS PRESIDENT HTIN KYAW TO RELEASE DETAINEES

The Shan State Progress Party/Shan State Army (SSPP/SSA) has sent President Htin Kyaw and other senior government officials a letter calling for the release of civilians who have been detained by the Burma Army for their association with the group. The SSPP/SSA has also requested that a number of their troops, who were also detained by the army over the past few months, be released as well. Col Sai Aung, an official stationed at the SSPP/SSA's Wan Hai headquarters, said that in addition to President Htin Kyaw, the letter calling for the release of the detained soldiers and civilians had also been sent to the armed forces Commander-in-Chief Sen Gen Min Aung Hlaing, State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, North Eastern Commander Maj Gen Phone Myat, Vice Sen Gen Yar Pyae and Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD) Chairman Khun Htun Oo. "As they have detained our people, this affects peace because we have already signed the state-level and union-level ceasefires but they don't recognize us as a peace group. They keep detaining our men," explained Col Sai Aung. His group did not however sign last year's National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA). In their letter, the SSPP/SSA stated that they are saddened that these kinds of incidents have continued to take place as the country has been moving towards a nationwide ceasefire, national reconciliation and peace. "We sent a letter to the Ya Ma Kha (North Easter Command)'s commander Maj Gen Phone Myat on May 13th to release the detained men. He told us not to worry about our men as they were being treated well and held in a secure place. But they have been electroshocked and hit with rifle butts. Their arms were tied up behind their backs and they were interrogated thrice a day for 14 days straight. They were hit at least five times during each interrogation," said an official from the SSPP/SSA. The Burma

⁸ Amid Military Tensions, KNU Official Resigns From Ceasefire Monitoring Committee – <http://www.irrawaddy.com/burma/amid-military-tensions-knu-official-resigns-from-ceasefire-monitoring-committee.html> (the Irrawaddy) 4 July 2016

⁹ JMC-S Established in Karen State – <http://www.bnionline.net/news/karen-state/item/1920-jmc-s-established-in-karen-state.html> (BNI) 4 July 2016

Army detained one SSPP/SSA soldier in November 2015. In March of this year 20 SSPP/SSA soldiers were arrested by the army. On 31 May, 8 civilians were detained by the army. The total number of people detained in connection with the SSPP/SSA appears to be 31. On 21 January the SSPP/SSA released a number of Burma army personal who had been detained during clashes with the Burma Army. The list of released Burma army soldiers includes one colonel, two warrant officers, one sergeant, two corporals, one lance corporal and two privates. Although the SSPP/SSA said that they released the detainees in the spirit of national reconciliation and peace, the Burma Army has yet to reciprocate.¹⁰

WOMEN'S GROUPS CALL FOR 30% QUOTA AT PEACE TALKS

Women's groups from Burma are pushing for a 30 per cent quota of female representatives at the upcoming peace talks. The renewed call for a minimum quota to be legislated was made at the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) review in Geneva, which kicked off on 4 July. "We want at least 30 percent [women] sitting at the table and discussing – not helping as technical support or logistics persons, but meaningful participation," said Julia Marip, Secretary of Women's League of Burma (WLB), an NGO that was the only women's organisation from Burma to submit a shadow report at the last CEDAW review in 2008. Marip said she believed they are aiming for a modest target, so they expect no excuses for the government not to cement the target in law. "The women's population is more than 50 per cent in Burma so we would like half," she said. "But we understand it is very difficult to negotiate with a male-dominated group." At the last Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee conference in January, a precursor to political dialogue among the signatories to the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, only one woman was included in the committee. Government, military and ethnic delegates have all put pen to paper in the drafting of the Nationwide Framework Agreement. In their Framework for Political Dialogue it was recorded that all stakeholders would "strive to achieve 30 per cent female participation" in future talks. The 30 per cent target was reaffirmed at the First Union Conference in Naypyidaw on 12-16 January this year. Despite the widespread commitment to a fair representation of females in the political process, no legislation has been passed in Naypyidaw to make the objective obligatory. "Generally, the former government agreed on 30 per cent women's participation [in future peace talks and political dialogue], but we would like to see it not just written on paper but also implemented," said Marip, speaking by telephone from Geneva. WLB is joined at the conference by other Burmese groups, including CEDAW Action Myanmar, the Gender Equality Network, the Women's Organisation Network, and Karen Human Rights Group. Each group submitted a shadow report with their recommendations to policymakers to review or abolish laws in Burma's Constitution that discriminate against women. The WLB's shadow report focuses on women's human rights in Burma's ethnic regions, in particular in remote and conflict-affected areas. Marip says that despite the different groups focusing on different areas of reform in their shadow reports, they all worked closely together. "The shadow reports are not against each other, but rather are complementary reports," added Marip. "It doesn't matter if we are based on the border, ethnic areas or central Burma, we are similarly impacted by the systematic discrimination against women, so this is very good to build in the process." Myanmar ratified CEDAW in 1997 and was last examined by the Committee in 2008. Tomorrow, the CEDAW Committee will hand down its conclusions to a delegate from the Burmese government.¹¹

ANALYSIS

The government's move to invite the Non-Signatory Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) to the upcoming 21st Century Panglong Peace Conference is indeed a bold step in the right direction.

¹⁰ SSPP/SSA asks President Htin Kyaw to release detainees – <http://english.panglong.org/?p=14512> (S.H.A.N.) 5 July 2016

¹¹ Women's groups call for 30% quota at peace talks – <http://www.dvb.no/news/womens-groups-call-for-30-quota-at-peace-talks/67950> (DVB) 6 July 2016

However, the approach to integrate the Non-Signatories into the current Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) process remains to be seen. The meeting between the Union Peace Conference-21st Century Panglong Preparatory Committee and the United Nationalities Federal Council's (UNFC) Delegation for Political Negotiation-DPN as well as the scheduled meeting between State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and the Chairman of United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC) will also be crucial to the on-going peace process. The government on its part will need to tread carefully in its juggling act to integrate the Non-signatory Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) into the current process and its handling of the three armed groups (AA, MNDAA & TNLA) could be crucial factors to the holding of the Peace Conference.