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## POLITICAL MONITOR No.19

### OFFICIAL MEDIA

#### **AUNG SAN SUU KYI, SENIOR GENERAL MIN AUNG HLAING DISCUSS WAYS TO MOVE PEACE PROCESS FORWARD**

State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and Commander-in-Chief of Defense Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing held talks on 8 August to find ways to push forward the country's peace process. They discussed matters related to ending armed conflicts in Kachin State and northern Shan State, national reconciliation, internal peace, stability and the rule of law and holding the Union Peace Conference - 21<sup>st</sup> Century Panglong. Before the meeting with Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, Aung San Suu Kyi announced that the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Union Peace Conference would be convened on 31 August later this month. The Chairperson of the Central Committee for holding the Union Peace Conference-21<sup>st</sup> Century Panglong and State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi emphasized the need for continued coordination on preparatory works being carried out by the government. During the meeting, those present reported on progress in preparations for holding the conference and work to be done by respective committees. The meeting was attended by the Union ministers, central committee and working committee members and officials.<sup>1</sup>

#### **POLITICAL DIALOGUE FRAMEWORK REVIEW MEETING BEGINS**

A Political Dialogue framework review meeting involving the representatives from the government, Tatmadaw, parliament and political parties was held at the National Reconciliation and Peace Centre in Yangon on 11 August. In his address, the Chairman of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Union Peace Conference Preparatory Committee Dr Tin Myo Win said that efforts are being made to ensure inclusivity in the peace conference, expressing hope that political dialogue would continue after the conference. According to Tin Myo Win, the review meeting was between the government and a group representing political parties. The meeting is also set to be held with representatives from NCA signatory and NCA non-signatory groups before representatives from the government, parliament, Tatmadaw, political parties and signatories and non-signatories of the NCA meet on 13 August, said the chairman. The review of the political dialogue framework will be approved at a UPDJC meeting scheduled to be held on 15 August, he added. Chairman of the Subcommittee (1) Lt-Gen Yar Pyae highlighted the importance of the political dialogue framework, saying that the NCA is a basic principal to solve all problems by political means. The political dialogue framework created within 60 days after the signing of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement needs to be revised to allow non-NCA signatories to join the peace conference, added the Subcommittee (1) Chairman. He warned that ceasefire deal will not last long unless political agreement is reached, stressing that political dialogue is very important. It is required that a review of NCA non-signatories on the framework be taken into account, he added. The Secretary of the Preparatory Committee Hla Maung Shwe said that the review meeting between the government and ethnic armed organisations will be held today, adding that a decision on revision of the political dialogue framework will be made at the UPDJC meeting.<sup>2</sup>

#### **700 PARTICIPANTS TO ATTEND 21ST CENTURY PANGLONG CONFERENCE**

700 representatives are expected to attend the planned Union Peace Conference 21<sup>st</sup> Century Panglong and a list of the participants in the conference is set to be announced in mid-August, said the Minister for Office of the State Counsellor Kyaw Tint Swe. In his response to a question about the

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<sup>1</sup> Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, Senior General discuss ways to move peace process forward – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-08-09-red.pdf> (GNLM) 9 August 2016 (p. 1)

<sup>2</sup> Political dialogue framework review meeting begins – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-08-12-red.pdf> (GNLM) 12 August (p. 1 & 3)

peace conference scheduled to be held on 31 August, the Minister Kyaw Tint Swe said that an emphasis is being placed on the participation of all stakeholders in the conference. According to a political dialogue framework approved previously, the government and parliament are set to hold 75 seats each with 150 seats each for Tatmadaw, ethnic armed organizations and political parties and 50 seats each for ethnic representatives and other invitees. The Union Minister said that the political dialogue framework will be reviewed at a UPDJC meeting scheduled to be held this month. The list of the participants in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Panglong Union Peace Conference will also be approved at the meeting. An agenda of the conference depends upon the outcome of the UPDJC meeting, added the Minister.<sup>3</sup>

### **USDP TO SUBMIT PEACE POLICY TO UPCOMING UNION PEACE CONFERENCE**

The Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) will submit its peace policy to the upcoming government-led Union Peace Conference, said USDP Chairman Thein Sein while addressing a workshop on National Reconciliation and Internal Peace in Nay Pyi Taw on 8 August. The USDP's stance on peace implementation is set to be announced at the Union Peace Conference following discussions among party members from regions and states, added the party leader, expressing hope that the peace policy will assist the country's peace process. Also present at the workshop set to last for four days were central committee members, hluttaw representatives and party members. In his address, USDP Chair Thein Sein stressed the need of taking balanced measures while building a federal Union, highlighting the importance of peace in the country. According to the sources, peace initiatives that emerge from the workshop will seek approval at the USDP's third national convention on 20 August.<sup>4</sup>

### **MYANMAR-AUSTRALIA UN PEACE KEEPING TRAINING PROGRAMME OPENED**

A United Nations Peacekeeping Training Course, a programme involving the Myanmar Tatmadaw (Defense Services) and Australia, was opened in Nay Pyi Taw on 8 August, with an address by Deputy Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Commander-in-Chief (Army) Vice Senior General Soe Win. In his address, the Deputy Commander-in-Chief expressed thanks for cooperation extended by Australian officials to conduct the training programme and called on trainees to strive for producing beneficial results. The Australian Ambassador to Myanmar also spoke on the occasion. The training programme is scheduled to last for 10 days until 18 August, with the aim of enabling Myanmar Tatmadaw's officers to learn about the UN peacekeeping processes, exchange views between trainees and trainers and strengthen bilateral relations between the two Defense Services.<sup>5</sup>

## **UNOFFICIAL MEDIA**

### **TATMADAW SOFTENS STAND TOWARDS THREE ARMED GROUPS**

In a significant move, the Tatmadaw has relaxed its attitude towards the participation of three armed ethnic groups in the national peace conference planned for later this month, media reports said. The softening of the Tatmadaw's stand towards the ethnic Kokang Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and the Arakan Army (AA), comes amid intense efforts to ensure the Panglong 21<sup>st</sup> Century Peace Conference is inclusive. The Tatmadaw had previously insisted on the surrender of the three groups before they could join the talks but a military negotiator told Reuters the army would accept a statement of their "political willingness to abandon their weapons". The Tatmadaw had relaxed its demand because the three groups had shown "they

<sup>3</sup> List of 700 participants in 21st Century Panglong Conference to be announced after UPDJC meeting – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-08-11-red.pdf> (GNLM) 11 August 2016 (p. 3)

<sup>4</sup> USDP to submit peace policy to upcoming Union Peace Conference – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-08-09-red.pdf> (GNLM) 9 August 2016 (p. 3)

<sup>5</sup> Myanmar-Australia UN Peace Keeping Training Programme Opened – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-08-09-red.pdf> (GNLM) 9 August 2016 (p. 9)

really want peace,” Khin Zaw Oo, a member of the Myanmar Peace Commission, told Reuters on 4 August. The retired lieutenant general said meetings would be held soon with the three groups to discuss conditions for their participation in the Panglong 21<sup>st</sup> Century Peace Conference, the news agency reported. The three groups fought the Tatmadaw last year during a failed attempt by the MNDAA to regain control of the Kokang region in Shan State on the border with China. Because of Tatmadaw opposition they were excluded from the so-called Nationwide Peace Agreement signed last October by the 8 Ethnic Armed Organisation (EAOs). Some of the nation’s biggest armed ethnic groups, including the Kachin Independence Army and United Wa State Army, refused to sign the agreement. Khin Zaw Oo said the military had relaxed its stand “because we want all of them to be included” in the peace conference. The Tatmadaw and State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi shared the same goal of ending armed conflict before the next election in 2020, he said. “We are working toward democracy,” he told Reuters. “That’s why we want to see all armed groups enter politics together, with no armed conflict.”<sup>6</sup>

### **MNDAA, AA, AND TNLA REFUSE TO LAY DOWN ARMS**

Three of Myanmar’s armed ethnic organisations have refused to agree to lay down their arms in order to participate in the government’s Panglong Peace Conference at the end of the month, according to a leader from the TNLA. Representatives from the Arakan Army (AA), the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), and the Palaung State Liberation Front/Ta’ang National Liberation Army (PSLF/TNLA) met on 9 August with the Vice Chairman of the government’s Peace Commission Thein Zaw in Mongla. Government peace negotiators had told the three ethnic armies that they would be allowed to attend the Panglong Conference if they first released a statement saying they desired to lay down their arms.<sup>7</sup>

### **ETHNIC ARMED GROUP LEADERS DISCUSS SECURITY SECTOR REFORM**

Ethnic armed group leaders are holding a three-day workshop on Security Sector Reform (SSR) in Burma, which started on 8 to 10 August in the northern Thai city of Chiang Mai. Participants included members of the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC), alongside the Karen National Union (KNU) and the All Burma Students’ Democratic Front (ABSDF) - two groups that, unlike UNFC members, signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) with the previous government last year. Discussions focused on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR)—one of the key demands of the Burma Army in the peace process with respect to ethnic armed groups. The latter have responded with demands for reforms in Burma’s security sector, including the formation of a “federal army” incorporating ethnic armed groups. Participants expressed concern at apparent efforts to fast track DDR and SSR processes simultaneously with political negotiations, and the Burma Army’s insistence that ethnic armed groups accept the terms of both the NCA and the 2008 military-drafted Constitution as a pre-condition for full participation in peace talks. “We are discussing our strategy on security related affairs, and exchanging thoughts. We have invited others from Burma to hear their views and advice,” said Nai Hong Sar, a spokesperson for the workshop. Representatives of ethnic political parties in Burma, who are members either of the United Nationalities Alliance (UNA) or the Nationalities Brotherhood Federation (NBF), also took part. The participants shared their disagreements with the positions of the government and the Burma Army on the NCA, which was signed by eight ethnic armed groups. Signing the NCA is currently a precondition for full participation in the Union Peace Conference scheduled to begin in Naypyidaw on 31 August. Ethnic armed group leaders said they were worried by the plan of the government and Burma Army to implement DDR

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<sup>6</sup> Tatmadaw Softens Stand Towards Three Armed Groups –

<http://frontiermyanmar.net/en/news/tatmadaw-softens-stand-three-armed-groups> (Frontier Myanmar) 8 August 2016

<sup>7</sup> MNDAA, AA, and TNLA refuse to lay down arms –

<http://mizzima.com/news-domestic/mndaa-aa-and-tnla-refuse-lay-down-arms> (Mizzima) 11 August 2016

and SSR simultaneously with peace negotiations. Participants also expressed disagreement with the Burma Army's demand that ethnic armed groups "accept" the 2008 Constitution and "follow democratic processes" outlined in the charter, and with recent political proposals from the government that offer only limited autonomy for border regions where ethnic armed groups are currently based. They also signalled frustration with the Burma Army's insistence of there being only "one-armed force" in Burma, with regards to future SSR—an apparent rejection of the demand of ethnic armed groups for a "federal army." International security and conflict specialists also took part in the workshop, sharing their knowledge and experience, alongside women's rights activists and civil society leaders. The "SSR/DDR and Security Policy Workshop" was organized by the Ethnic Nationalities Affairs Centre, an organization that supports political dialogue in Burma's peace process. Meanwhile, representatives of ethnic armed organizations that signed the NCA are holding a separate meeting in Chiang Mai with leaders of the UNFC.<sup>8</sup>

### **CEASEFIRE MONITORING TRAINING PROVIDED IN SOUTHERN BURMA**

Two civil society groups recently gave ceasefire monitoring training in Dawei in Tenasserim Region. Since last year, the Karen Development Network (KDN) and Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) have been cooperating in providing education campaigns on the peace process in southern Burma. NP trainer Rosemary Kibaki said that the recent training in southern Burma focussed on ceasefire "monitoring and civilian protection", including providing assistance to victims, collecting information and "connecting" with "authorities". Thirty-five people, from fifteen villages in Yebyu, Palauk, and Thayetchaung townships, attended the latest training session that ran for three days ending on 3 August. Naw Tha Lay Htoo from Yebyu Township said : "We talked about Nelson Mandela and his achievements and what the government and ethnic armed groups have been doing for the public regarding the NCA (nationwide ceasefire agreement)." Similar training was provided in Dawei in March and in Thandaung Gyi, Karen State in February.<sup>9</sup>

### **RAKHINE PARTY PLEDGES TO TAKE UP OPPOSITION MANTLE**

An ethnic minority party is seeking to position itself as the democratic opposition to the ruling National League for Democracy in parliament. The Arakan National Party, the most successful ethnic party in last November's election in terms of seats won, says it will criticise the government and the NLD, both in parliament and outside. Pyithu Hluttaw MP Pe Than (ANP ; Myebon) said his party, which holds 12 seats in the Lower House and 23 seats in the Rakhine State legislature, will speak up about the government's weaknesses because no other party is doing so. The NLD wiped out the formerly ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party, winning large majorities last November in both houses of parliament and nearly all states and regions. In many parts of the country, the only significant opposition resides with the 25 percent of seats allocated under the constitution to the military. "I will point out the weakness of the government because the number of MPs in opposition to the government is rather small," said Pe Than. Before the election, opposition led by the NLD to the USDP was active and vocal. But few voices are being raised against the government now, he said. "NLD lawmakers don't criticise the NLD government and they are not allowed to talk to the media. Our party will point out the weaknesses of the government as much as we can," Pe Than said. "The better the opposition, the better the government." A major ANP objective is to work for the development of Rakhine State, he said, adding that the party's MPs would hold separate meetings to discuss conditions in the state and the country as a whole. "Our MPs will meet in collaboration with other ethnic peoples

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<sup>8</sup> Ethnic Armed Group Leaders Discuss Security Sector Reform – <http://www.irrawaddy.com/burma/ethnic-armed-group-leaders-discuss-security-sector-reform.html> (the Irrawaddy) 9 August 2016

<sup>9</sup> Ceasefire Monitoring Training Provided In Southern Burma – <http://www.bnionline.net/news/karen-state/item/2088-ceasefire-monitoring-training-provided-in-southern-burma.html> (KIC/BNI) 6 August 2016

to point out the weakness of the government,” he said. A lack of infrastructure is one factor that has led to Rakhine State’s underdevelopment, and many young people leave the state in search of work overseas. The MP said he wanted to create more job opportunities back home. “If there are job opportunities, our Rakhine nationals abroad will come home. We’re focusing on questions of regional development in this hluttaw session,” he said. Another goal is to reduce conflict among ethnic groups, thus strengthening security and establishing greater economic, social and inter-religious stability. Dismissing the government’s recent 100-day project, Pe Than said it was too short a timeframe to effect real change. “The time was too short and the legacy of bad government too long. The government will have to continue its efforts for far longer to overcome the ill effects left by the previous government,” he said. Plunged into disarray by the scale of its defeat, and with most of its MPs turfed out of their seats, even the former ruling party has been restrained in its criticism of the NLD. Former USDP Amyotha Hluttaw MP U Nu on 3 August said, “The government needs time to do what it wants to do. It can’t be rushed. We just have to wait and see.”<sup>10</sup>

### ANALYSIS

The recent meeting between State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and Defense Services Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing is a step in the right direction reflecting signs of hope that the government and Tatmadaw are keen to cooperate in promoting national reconciliation. Furthermore, news that the the Tatmadaw is prepared to change its stance to the inclusion of the Kokang Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), the Ta’ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and the Arakan Army (AA) to attend the Panglong 21<sup>st</sup> Century Peace Conference is indeed significant and encouraging. It is important that all stakeholders in the peace process reassess their positions and take into consideration the interest of the country and people in order to achieve peace. While the Peace Conference to be convened at the end the month will see around 700 participants and observers presenting and promoting their positions and views towards the on-going peace process any substantive outcome from the Conference it will depend mainly on the NLD government, the Tatmadaw and the Ethnic Armed Organisations.

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<sup>10</sup> Rakhine party pledges to take up opposition mantle –  
<http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/21883-rakhine-party-pledges-to-take-up-opposition-mantle.html>  
(Myanmar Times) 11 August 2016