

POLITICAL MONITOR NO.8

OFFICIAL MEDIA

UNION PEACE WORKING COMMITTEE, UNFC ISSUES JOINT-STATEMENT

The government peace-making committee and the delegation of the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC) held its first meeting on 20 February in Chiangmai, Thailand. Following the meeting, a joint statement was released and stated that the discussions were conducted in a “frank and friendly manner.” Topics raised included the need to establish a framework for political dialogue as part of the process; mechanisms to secure local and international support for humanitarian assistance, education, health, agricultural and livestock sectors during the preparatory period and political dialogue for areas and to convene a follow-up meeting within two months. *(Please see Appendix A for full text of the Joint Statement).*¹

UNION FOREIGN AFFAIRS MINISTER VISITS BELGIUM, LUXEMBOURG, UK AND FRANCE

Burma’s Foreign Minister Wunna Maung Lwin led a delegation on an official visit to Belgium, Luxembourg, the United Kingdom and France from 4 to 13 February 2013. During his stop in Brussels, he met with the Belgium Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister Mr Didier Reynders on 5 February and also met the 27-member Political and Security Committee of the EU Council on 6 February. The Minister and party also held talks with senior EU officials including Ms Catherine Ashton, the High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy, Ms Kristalina Georgieva, Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Assistance and Crisis Response and Commissioner for Development Mr Andris Piebalgs. The Minister and party attended the EU-Myanmar Roundtable co-organized by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) of Germany and Myanmar Institute for Strategic and International Studies (MISIS) and received Mr. Jonathan Prentice, Senior Political Advisor of the International Crisis Group in Brussels on 7 February.

On 8 February, the delegation visited Luxembourg and held bilateral meetings with Mr Jean Asselborn, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Luxembourg. He also met with Mrs Marie-Josée Jacobs, Minister of Cooperation and Humanitarian Action and Mr Laurent Mosar, President of the Chamber of the Deputies.

The Minister and party also visited the United Kingdom where he met the Speaker of the House of Commons, Mr John Bercow, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Mr William Hague and Minister for International Development Mr Alan Duncan on 11 February 2013. And on his final leg of the European tour in France, the Burmese Foreign Minister met his counterpart Mr Laurent Fabius, on 12 February 2013 and also attended working luncheon hosted by the French President’s Diplomatic Adviser Mr Jean Ortiz Paul.

In his meetings with his European counterparts, the Burmese Minister explained the political developments taking place in the country including the conflicts in the Kachin and Rakhine States, called for the lifting of sanctions and to stop tabling of draft resolution on Human Rights situation in Myanmar at the UN and Human Rights Council by the EU, and to reinstate the Generalized Scheme of Preferences (GSP) to Burma. The Minister also stressed the geographical importance of Burma (Myanmar) in the region, its relations with neighboring countries, and the role of the Tatmadaw (Burmese military) in the country’s future, and the strengthening relations between ASEAN and France during Burma’s Chairmanship of the regional grouping in 2014.²

¹ Union Peace Working Committee, UNFC hold talks, issue joint-statement – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docsMA2013/NLM2013-02-21.pdf> (NLM) 21 February 2013 (p. 1)

² Union Foreign Affairs Minister visits Belgium, Luxembourg, UK and France – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docsMA2013/NLM2013-02-15.pdf> (NLM) 15 February 2013 (p. 9)/

CANADIAN PARLIAMENTARY DELEGATION VISITS BURMA

A 14-member parliamentary delegation led by Mr Deepak Obhrai, Parliamentary Secretary of Canada arrived in Burma (Myanmar) on February 16 as part of a six-day official visit and re-engagement between the two countries. On 20 February Mr Obhrai and party called on both Speakers of the Upper and Lower Houses and discussed cooperation and exchanges; the establishment of linking network between the libraries of two parliaments as well as promoting bilateral ties between Canada and Burma. The Speaker of the Upper House U Khin Aung Myint also received a British parliamentary delegation led by Minister for the Cabinet Office Rt. Hon. Francis Maude in Naypyitaw and discussed Burma becoming a member of the Open Government Partnership (OGP), currently being chaired by Britain. The annual summit of the OGP will be hosted by Britain later this year, and Burma has been invited as an observer.³

RUSSIAN DELEGATION MEETS BURMESE LEADERS

Russian delegations led by Chairman of the Defence and Security Committee of the Council of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation Mr. Viktor A. OZEROV held meetings with Speaker of the Lower House Thura Shwe Mann and Deputy Speaker of the Union and Upper House U Mya Nyein on 19 February. In their meetings, discussions were focused on boosting cooperation between the two parliaments and the two countries. Mr Ozerov and party also met with the Minister for Defense Lt-Gen Wai Lwin and exchanged views on promoting ties between the armed forces of the two countries.⁴

HLUTTAW SESSIONS – Highlights

Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) sessions

The 6th Regular Session of the First Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) held its 17th day meeting on 20th February. During the session six questions were raised and answered and one draft law approved. Key issues included the following:

- U Maung Nyo of Sittway Constituency (RDNP) and Daw Khin Saw Wai of Yathedaung Constituency (RNDP) raised the question **regarding the origins of the “Rohingyas” in the country**. In responding, the Deputy Minister for Immigration and Population U Kyaw Kyaw Win said that, **there is no ‘Rohingya’ ethnic race in Burma (Myanmar), and that the word ‘Rohingya’ is a ‘newly coined word’**. He also added that **non-ethnic citizens currently residing in the country included Chinese, Nepalese, Pakistani, Bengali and Indian**;

Union Foreign Affairs Minister tours UK, France –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docsMA2013/NLM2013-02-16.pdf> (NLM) 16 February 2013 (p. 9)

³ Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker meets Canadian Parliamentary Secretary –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docsMA2013/NLM2013-02-21.pdf> (NLM) 21 February 2013 (p.8)/

Canadian Delegation to Visit Burma to Help Further Democratic Reforms –

<http://www.international.gc.ca/media/aff/news-communiqués/2013/02/15a.aspx?lang=eng&view=d> (Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada) 15 February 2013/

Britain invites Myanmar to join Open Government Partnership –

<http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/4177-britain-invites-myanmar-to-join-open-government-body.html> (Myanmar Times) 22 February 2013/

Taking the Message of Open Government to Burma –

http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/francis-maude/francis-maude-burma-open-government_b_2723277.html?utm_hp_ref%20=uk (Huffington Post) 20 February 2013

⁴ Pyithu Hluttaw Speaker Thura U Shwe Mann receives Russian delegation –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docsMA2013/NLM2013-02-20.pdf> (NLM) 20 February 2013 (p. 9)/

Dy Pyidaungsu Hluttaw speaker receives Russian Federation guest –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docsMA2013/NLM2013-02-20.pdf> (NLM) 20 February 2013 (p. 9)/

Myanmar, Russia discuss military affairs –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docsMA2013/NLM2013-02-21.pdf> (NLM) 21 February 2013 (p. 8)

- U Aung Tun Tha of Mrauk-U Constituency (RNDP) raised the question regarding **the lifting of travel ban on tourists to visit Mrauk-U** which was imposed due to the recent communal violence in 2012;
- **The Central Bank Bill** was approved by the session.⁵

HLUTTAW SESSIONS – Highlights

Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) sessions

The 6th Regular Session of the First Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House) held its 17th day meeting on 20th February. During the session the key issues discussed included the following:

- Amyotha Hluttaw Bill Committee member U Soe Myint submitted the **committee’s report on the bill amending private health care services law**. Deputy Minister for Health Dr Daw Thein Thein Htay submitted the proposal on health care services which was seconded by Dr Htay Naing of Ayeyawady Region Constituency No.7 (USDP). The session approved the bill.⁶

HLUTTAW SESSIONS – Highlights

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Upper House) sessions

The 6th Regular Session of the First Pyidaungsu Hluttaw held its 10th day meeting on 15th February. Key issues raised and discussed included the following:

- Dr Myat Nyana Soe of Yangon Region Constituency No (4) (NDF) with regards to the **2013-2014 FY Plan** stated that **inter-ministry coordination on implementation in certain areas was not adequate and stressed the need for greater coordination in addressing issues related to rural development and poverty alleviation**. He also criticized the manner in which ministries responded to questions and avoid using the phrase “*we are doing*” and should try to provide an exact time frame in implementing projects; MP Daw Khin Hmwe Lwin of Mingin Constituency (NLD) said, **certain problems arose from lack of transparency in implementing projects, calling for bottom-up initiative rather than top-down approach and transparency as well as cost-benefit analysis in developing a project**;
- Dr Kyaw Thein of All Mon Region Democracy Party asked if the **government is formulating legislation to address corruption in the country**.⁷

The 6th Regular Session of the First Pyidaungsu Hluttaw held its 11th day meeting on 18th February. Key issues raised and discussed included the following:

- Border Affairs Minister Lt-Gen Thet Naing Win updated the Hluttaw on the ministry’s efforts for **development of less-developed regions in the country**;
- Continued discussions on the National Plan for 2013-2014 were taken up by MPs, Daw Mi Myint Than of Ye Constituency (AMRDP) stated that **students in her constituency and region are having to pay Kyats 50000 to 10000 a month, when primary education has been declared as free**;
- U Saw Taw Pale of Kayin State Constituency No. (7) (KPP) asked if there are plans by the **government to open more medical schools in the country**.⁸

⁵ No ‘Rohingya’ race in Myanmar, says Deputy Minister – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docsMA2013/NLM2013-02-21.pdf> (NLM) 21 February 2013 (p. 16)

⁶ Amyotha Hluttaw approves bill amending private health care service law – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docsMA2013/NLM2013-02-21.pdf> (NLM) 21 February 2013 (p. 16)

⁷ “We are doing” does not make sense: MP – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docsMA2013/NLM2013-02-16.pdf> (NLM) 16 February 2013 (p.16)

The 6th Regular Session of the First Pyidaungsu Hluttaw held its 12th day meeting on 19th February. Key issues raised and discussed during the session included:

- Deputy Minister for Communications and Information Technology U Win Than briefed the session regarding the **Communication Bill**, and said that the **ministry would improve mobile communication meeting the international standard of 3G and above and would implement the ICT Eco System such as e-government, e-Visa, e-Procurement, e-license, e-Payment, Online Billing System as mentioned in its 2013-2014 FY Plan;**
- Deputy Minister for Commerce Dr Pwint Hsan gave clarifications **regarding border trade and stated that licenses had been issued to implement for manageable border trading in Tamu, Muse, Myawady and Tachilek and that further licenses would be issued to the remaining trade centres in border areas accordingly. Regarding the arrangement for establishing Mawtaung Border Trade Centre, the ministry has taken the necessary measures to open border trading centres in Mawtaung and Htimi in Taninthayi Region, Meisei Border Trade Centre in Kayah State respectively;**
- Union Minister for National Planning and Economic Development Dr Kan Zaw **clarified the policy and basic principles of the National Planning Bill for the 2013-2014 FY, and Union Minister for Finance and Revenue U Win Shein reported on the issue of debt clearance to the session.**⁹

UNOFFICIAL MEDIA

PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION KEY TO DURATION OF PEACE: SHAN-NAYPYITAW MEETING

At a meeting held between the Union Peacemaking Work and Committee (UPWC) and the Restoration Council of Shan State / Shan State Army (RCSS/SSA) on 19 February, the two sides stressed that people's active participation is key to the sustainability of the existing ceasefire process. Other issues discussed at the meeting included the yet-to-be implemented agreements on local ceasefire monitoring (signed 19 May 2012), cooperation against drugs (signed 19 May 2012 and 28 October 2012), joint economic development programs and the reactivation of long-dismantled non-Burman military units.¹⁰

KNU URGES GOVT FOR THE INCLUSION OF MILITARY TO PEACE TALKS

In a meeting between the KNU chairman General Saw Mutu Say Poe and Burmese Vice-President Sai Mauk Kham, held on 20 February in the border town of Myawaddy, the KNU requested the Burmese government to include high-ranking Tatmadaw (Burma Army) leaders in any future 'peace talks'. KNU sources said that the meeting between the Karen leaders and the government delegation was informal and the KNU reiterated its position that regional development projects would be carried out only after a concrete ceasefire is put in place.¹¹

⁸ Education University grads to fill vacant teacher posts –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docsMA2013/NLM2013-02-19.pdf> (NLM) 19 February 2013 (p. 1)

⁹ Communication Bill includes improvement of telephone density-services ratio in rural areas –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docsMA2013/NLM2013-02-20.pdf> (NLM) 20 February 2013 (p. 16)

¹⁰ People's participation key to duration of peace: Shan-Naypyitaw meeting –

http://www.english.panglong.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5263:peoples-participation-ky-to-duration-of-peace-shan-naypyitaw-meeting&catid=85:politics&Itemid=266 (S.H.A.N.) 20 February 2013

¹¹ KNU urge Govt to send higher ranked officers to peace-talks –

<http://karennews.org/2013/02/knu-urge-govt-to-send-higher-ranked-officers-to-peace-talks.html/> (Karen News)22 February 2013

NUP PREPARING FOR 2015

Speaking at a ceremony to mark the Union Day on February 11, Joint General-Secretary U Khin Maung Gyi said that the party is devising a new campaign strategy ahead of the next elections in 2015. He said that the NUP had learnt from the 2010 elections and would said the NUP agreed with other parties on the need to amend the constitution but said the NUP and other parties shared a difference of opinion regarding the specific amendments needed. Central Executive Committee member U Han Shwe said the party's membership had decreased from 750,000 before the 2010 general election to 500,000 after the 2012 by-elections. "The latest figures show a decrease but we still have to re-collect lists from Kachin and Rakhine states, as well as 17 townships in Shan State," he said, adding that the process would be completed by the middle of year. The NUP is ostensibly only 24 years old, but it traces its roots to U Ne Win's Burma Socialist Program Party, founded in 1962.¹²

POLITICAL PARTIES INVITED TO WORKSHOP ON DEMOCRATIC TRANSITIONS

Officials from all 54 of Myanmar's registered political parties attended a two day entitled "the Role of Political Parties in Democratic Transitions" organized by the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) and the Danish Institute for Parties and Democracy (DIPD), in cooperation with the Nyein Foundation. The seminar held in Yangon from 19-20 February is likely to be the first opportunity for Burmese political parties to discuss the challenges to be encountered in the democratic transition currently taking place in the country.

Prior to the seminar, delegations from both NIMD and DIPD undertook visits in June and October 2012 to meet a broad spectrum of political actors and explore possible ways of assisting the democratization process. The seminar is the first element of a "Myanmar Multiparty Democracy Program" that the organizations are jointly implementing. It will include workshops on the themes of strengthening party organization, establishing multi-party dialogue, negotiating democratic space, and responding to voters' expectations. These themes have been decided in close consultation with the parties and what they perceive their key challenges to be. Organizers say that while the political situation in the Burma is unique there are opportunities to draw on experiences from other countries that have gone through similar democratic transitions. Speakers from Nepal, South Africa and Indonesia have been invited to attend the seminar. The Burma (Myanmar) Multiparty Democracy Program began on September 1, 2012 and will run until at least the end of this year but is expected to continue for three more years.¹³

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE APPOINTS SPOKESMAN

Deputy Minister for Defence Brigadier General Aung Thaw is to be appointed as the spokesman for the ministry, Deputy Information Minister U Ye Htut said. Brig-Gen Aung Thaw will replace Lieutenant Colonel Kyaw Thu, head of the Chief of Staff's Office in the Ministry of Defence. Observers said the appointment of a spokesperson was badly needed and would help to improve understanding and communication between the people and Tatmadaw. Journalists regularly complain that they are unable to get a response or accurate information from the Tatmadaw, which makes it hard for them to ensure balance on military-related issues, particularly the conflict in Kachin State. The appointment has been welcomed by many and seen as a step forward; while at

¹² NUP preparing for 2015 – <http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/4103-nup-preparing-for-2015.html> (Myanmar Times) 18 February 2013

¹³ All parties invited to transition workshop – <http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/yangon/4135-all-parties-invited-to-transition-workshop.html> (Myanmar Times) 18 February 2013

the same time serve to promote a better understanding and building trust between the military and the people showing greater transparency.¹⁴

FARMERS SUE MILITARY'S LARGEST CONGLOMERATE OVER 'LAND GRAB'

Forty-eight local farmers in Sagaing Region have filed a lawsuit against Moegyo Sulphuric Plant in Salingyi Township, a chemical plant owned by the military's largest conglomerate, the Myanmar Economics Holdings Limited's, accusing them of appropriating more land more than their legal entitlement.

The conflict dates back to 2006 when a staff housing project was built on about two hectares of land near Kankon Village in the township. On completion, the military-owned conglomerate applied for about 57 hectares of land for a chemical factory. Local farmers stated that this was far more land than was necessary for the plant. However, last year the conglomerate sued more than 30 local farmers, accusing them of encroaching on its land.

Pho Phyu, a lawyer representing the farmers said that land seizure cases were occurring across the country and that this land was seized before the 2012 Farmland Law was passed. "The problems could not be solved by the old law or the new one, which is still unfair. This is why we are suing on the basis of the Specific Relief Act 1877," he explained. He also said it was necessary for Parliament to pass a law to solve land disputes because 2012 Farmland Law did not provide a framework for solving disputes over land that began before it was enacted. The case against Moegyo Sulphuric Plant is scheduled to be heard at Monywa District Court on February 28.

The Burmese (Myanmar) military is under fire for allegedly grabbing land across the country. The Farmland Investigation Commission, formed by the Union Assembly last August, recently released a draft report calling for greater controls over the military's appropriation of land.¹⁵

ANALYSIS

The recent meetings between government and ethnic leaders from the RCSS (Shan) and KNU as well as with the UNFC alliance augurs well for the peace process and it will enhance the building of trust. It is evident from the topics discussed that the on-going national reconciliation process cannot be achieved overnight nor will it become a reality without the commitment of all key stakeholders involved. It is encouraging that the need for people's active participation has been recognized. Similarly, the KNU's request for the inclusion of senior Tatmadaw (military) officials in future peace talks and the discussion on the role of the Tatmadaw in maintaining the existing ceasefires and achieving a sustainable peace are valid points for consideration. If the recent offer 'to extend the olive branch' to the KIO by Commander-in-Chief Vice-Senior General Min Aung Hlaing was genuine, the participation of senior military officials in future peace talks could indeed become a reality. Should both the government and ethnic groups in conducting peace talks continue to take into account the interests of the public and local communities and also seek to find ways for the inclusion, the peace process could indeed lead to genuine national reconciliation. The peace process cannot, however, be seen as a political process that is isolated and separated from the political process that is developing in the parliament. The same issues being debated in parliament and how they are resolved are relevant and will have a direct bearing on the outcome of the peace talks. Therefore, at one point in the future, the two processes will need to merge or intersect. How that

¹⁴ Ministry of Defence appoints spokesman –
<http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/4137-ministry-of-defence-gets-spokesman.html> (Myanmar Times)
18 February 2013

¹⁵ Farmers sue military's largest conglomerate over 'land grab' –
<http://elevenmyanmar.com/national/2521-farmers-sue-military-s-largest-conglomerate-over-land-grab> (Eleven News Media) 19 February 2013

will happen is something that needs to be addressed. Hopefully the Framework for a Political Dialogue that is being proposed will look into this issue.

APPENDICES

Appendix A:

JOINT STATEMENT ISSUED BY UNION PEACE WORKING COMMITTEE AND UNFC

An 11-member Union Peace Working Committee delegation led by its Vice-Chairman U Aung Min held talks with a 12-member delegation of United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC) including Nai Hong Sar and Dr La Ja in Chiangmai of Thailand from 9 am to 5 pm today. Both sides agreed to issue a five-point joint-statement. The full text of the Joint Statement is as follow:-

Joint Statement

February 20, 2013

1. The eleven-member union Peace Working Committee delegation, led by its Vice-Chairman U Aung Min, and including Union Ministers U Khin Yi, U Ohn Myint, and Deputy Attorney-General U Tun Tun Oo met with United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC) twelve-member political negotiation team led by Nai Hong Sar and Dr La Ja to discuss the Framework for Political Dialogue from 9.00 to 17.00 hrs on February 20, 2013 in Chiangmai, Thailand.
2. Both delegations discussed the following issues in a frank and friendly manner:
 - a) Political objectives;
 - b) Framework for political dialogue;
 - c) Timeframe for political dialogue;
 - d) Drafting agenda for political dialogue;
 - e) Venue for future political dialogue;
 - f) Presence and role of mediators, monitors, and observers in the meetings;
 - g) Six-point ethnic nationalities peace plan; and
 - h) other miscellaneous issues.
3. Both delegations discussed mechanisms to secure local and international support for humanitarian assistance, education, health, agricultural and livestock sectors during the preparatory period and political dialogue for areas where member organizations of the UNFC are located.
4. Both delegations discussed holding meetings between respective technical teams.
5. Both delegations also agreed to hold a follow-up meeting within two months.¹⁶

¹⁶ Union Peace Working Committee, UNFC hold talks, issue joint-statement – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docsMA2013/NLM2013-02-21.pdf> (NLM) 21 February 2013 (p. 1)