

POLITICAL MONITOR NO.14

OFFICIAL MEDIA

PRESIDENT HOLDS TALKS WITH THAI DEPUTY PM AND DEFENCE MINISTER

President Htin Kyaw stressed the need of respect for and adherence to laws, rules and regulations by each other's citizens working in each country during a meeting with General Prawit Wongsuwan, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence of Thailand at the Presidential Palace in Nay Pyi Taw on 29 June. The Thai Deputy PM explained to the President that Thailand handled criminal cases involving Myanmar nationals with care, that there are only around 100 criminal cases involving Myanmar workers in Thailand at the moment despite the fact that over one million migrants are working within the country. They also discussed on further cooperation in border security and developmental undertakings between the two ministries of defence, police training, counter-terrorism measures, the fight against transboundary crimes, the creation of better situations for IDP returnees in their own regions between the two governments, the completion of the construction of a friendship bridge on the Myawady border and promotion of the volume of bilateral trade to reach the target of US\$20 billion by 2017.

State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi also met with General Prawit Wongsuwan on 29 June. During the meeting, she affirmed that she would co-operate with Thailand in order that the friendly relations between Myanmar and Thailand could become exemplary not only within the region but also in the international community. The two leaders also discussed matters relating to promoting the amity between the two peoples, holding of joint border committee meetings in Myanmar to be able to draw demarcation lines, protection of Myanmar workers according to the law and settlement of disputes and remedy of grievances, acceleration of Dawei special economic Zone construction activities for mutual benefits, exchange of training programmes for the two police forces and sending of a Myanmar government delegation to scrutinize citizenship in order that those 196 Myanmar migrants wishing to return to Myanmar can be called back and resettled.¹

SENIOR GENERAL MIN AUNG HLAING ADDRESSES PEACE PROCESS STEERING TEAM

"It is neither the place nor the land, that counts; what counts is for the ethnic armed organizations to tread upon the correct political path," said Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services Senior General Min Aung Hlaing during his meeting with Peace Process Steering Team (PPST) on 29 June at Bayintnaung Yeiktha in Nay Pyi Taw. The Commander-in-Chief said that Tatmadaw adhered to the Three Main Causes and that they will not deviate from the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement in the 21st Century Panglong Conference. He said that mutual trust matters most and he believes that if all the ethnic armed organizations are united and make concerted effort for peace and development, success will be achieved in no time. "Freedom, unity and justice are the dhammas that govern the world, treading upon the path to peace and stability, we are required to trust one another, he added. We cannot be dogmatic; we must be flexible. As long as we harbor the union spirit or Myanmar spirit we can reach our goal fast and peacefully," said Min Aung Hlaing. He also added that the Tatmadaw had invited all organisations to sign the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, that if a multi-party democracy and unity among national brethren is really wanted, the NCA must be signed. He said that, the strength of the nation lies only within, that the ethnic armed organisations are needed to adhere to the political means, that in the age of democracy, people can differ in their political doctrines but

¹ President U Htin Kyaw holds talks with Thai Deputy PM and Defence Minister – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-06-30-red.pdf> (GNLM) 30 June 2016 (p. 3)/
Talks with Thailand : Border means sharing, not dividing : State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-06-30-red.pdf> (GNLM) 30 June 2016 (p. 1)

people ought not to differ in the affairs of the ethnic people and the Tatmadaw is not willing to wage battles against their brethren ethnic people.²

GOV'T, NCA SIGNATORIES AGREE TO HOLD UPC NO LATER THAN 31 AUGUST

Myanmar government and 8 signatories to the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) have decided to hold the 21st Century Panglong Peace Conference before the end of August, as State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi met with leaders of Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) in Naypyitaw on 28 June. The meeting is aimed to include others who have not signed the previous government's NCA or have been left out of the previous talks and signing. The State Counsellor further pushed the need to create peace in Myanmar, saying that "peace is the best legacy to pass on to younger generations." Highlighting the importance of inclusion of all in the process to establish a federal democratic Union that can guarantee security and freedom for all, asking for cooperation and participation from all groups, who agree to the terms and conditions. "The government has no secret intentions and it is clear that its aim is to create a federal Union allowing all peoples to enjoy peace and prosperity," said Suu Kyi. She also called for establishing a basis of trust and understanding between the ethnic groups and the government in order for peace to properly be implemented and for a sense of responsibility for peace talks and goodwill in working towards achieving a federal Union. She said that Myanmar gained independence 68 years ago and a federal union must be established and urged all ethnic groups to cooperate with each other and the government in order to have a true beginning. Aung San Suu Kyi acknowledged the anxiety that ethnic leaders may face in the face of change, encouraging them to overcome it by trust. She asserted that various groups should trust the government and that the new Panglong agreement is to establish peace, to establish a federal union and to create new opportunities for the future generations. Leader of ethnic armed organizations' Peace Process Steering Team PPST, Saw Mutu Sae Poe, and members Sai Baung Khay, Khun Okkar, Pu Zing Cung, Khaing Soe Naing Aung, Dr Naw Kapaw Htoo, Than Ge and Saw Mo Shae explained that the peace process is still in its infant stages. It was the first meeting between the government and the PPST to assist the upcoming '21st Century Panglong Union Peace Conference.' Khun Okkar of PNLO who was present at the meeting said that he felt more optimistic about a brighter future for the country's peace process as NCA non-signatories are set to meet with the government.³

AUNG SAN SUU KYI PAYS OFFICIAL VISIT TO THAILAND

State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi called for improving Myanmar migrant workers' access to education and healthcare services in Thailand during her talks with Thai Prime Minister retired General Prayuth Chan-ocha at the Government House of Thailand on 24 June. In his response the Thai Prime Minister said that measures would be taken to give Myanmar migrant workers the rights to equal treatment as Thai workers, saying that 500 million Bahts has been allocated to all migrant workers to access education and 500 million Bahts for healthcare services. State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi also requested the Thai Prime Minister to allow Myanmar migrant workers to work legally in Thailand as soon as possible and to protect Myanmar migrants working on fishing boats against human trafficking and torture by local authorities. During the talks, Aung San Suu Kyi promised faster implementation of boundary demarcation between the territories of the two countries, citing that a boundary allows the two countries to share, not become more separate. She also stressed the need for the two governments to underscore bilateral friendship and bilateral negotiations to address problems. The Thai Prime Minister said that a hotline and applications for migrant workers would be set up to help them seek help in the face of difficulties and operators who understand Myanmar language will be appointed. The two governments will work together on the return of refugees to their homes from

² Not place and land but political path important : Senior General Min Aung Hlaing – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-06-30-red.pdf> (GNLM) 30 June 2016 (p. 1 &3)

³ Right time and place : Gov't, NCA signatories agree to hold UPC no later than 31 August – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-06-29-red.pdf>(GNLM) 29 June 2016 (p. 1 &4)

camps and transportation is set to commence following the creation of employment, social and health-care conditions for returnees, he added. The Thai PM stressed the need for cooperation between the two governments as well as CSOs for the promotion of bilateral trade including border trade. During the talks the two leaders also discussed matters relating to the implementation of the Dawei deep-sea port, special economic zone projects and further cooperation between the two nations in accordance with the ASEAN framework and attended the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding on Labour Cooperation, an Agreement on Cooperation in the Employment of Workers and a Transboundary Agreement. The MoU and agreements will enable the two countries to promote cooperation in labour affairs, thereby contributing towards ensuring better conditions for Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand.⁴

UN HUMAN RIGHTS ENVOY HOLD TALKS WITH AUNG SAN SUU KYI AND GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

Foreign Minister Aung San Suu Kyi and the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Yanghee Lee, held talks related to promotion and protection of human rights in Myanmar, focusing on the new government implementing them in its '100-day plan.' During talks in Nay Pyi Taw on 20 June, they exchanged views on efforts to address the situation in Rakhine State, the on-going peace process, human rights laws, freedom of assembly and freedom of association, economic and social rights, providing humanitarian aid, and developments on joining the remaining international core human rights treaties. During the 12-day visit, the UN Special Rapporteur met with Defence Minister Lt-Gen Sein Win, Border Affairs Minister Lt-Gen Ye Aung, Labour, Immigration and Population Thein Swe and Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement Minister Dr Win Myat Aye. The UN Special Rapporteur discussed issues related to national reconciliation, human rights, ending recruitment of child soldier, internally displaced persons (IDPs), development of Myanmar's border areas, human resource development of ethnic groups, to bring labour rights to workers in accordance with the law and putting an end to labour disputes between employers and employees, establishing a better social security scheme for workers, rehabilitation and resettlement of homeless children, disaster preparedness and rights for children. Yanghee Lee also met the Speaker of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw and Amyotha Hluttaw Mahn Win Khaing Than and Chairman of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Legal Affairs and Special Cases Assessment Commission Thura Shwe Mann. The Special Rapporteur also visited relief camps, correctional facilities and shelters for internally displaced persons and the victims of armed conflict Rakhine State, Shan and Kachin States.⁵

CSOs TO PLAY PART IN PEACE PROCESS

Civil Society Organisations concluded a two-day forum on 22 June that focused on measures to develop the new government's '21st Century Panglong Peace Conference' and the implementation of

⁴ Cross-border support : Daw Aung San Suu Kyi holds talks with Thai PM on Myanmar migrant workers – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-06-25-red.pdf> (GNLM) 25 June 2016 (p. 1)

⁵ Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, UN human rights envoy hold talks on human rights matters – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-06-21-red.pdf> (GNLM) 21 June 2016 (p. 1)/
UN special rapporteur holds separate talks with Speakers, chairs of Hluttaw committees, commissions – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-06-30-red.pdf> (GNLM) 30 June 2016 (p. 2)/
UN special rapporteur holds talks with Union Ministers – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-06-29-red.pdf> (GNLM) 29 June 2016 (p. 2)/
UN Special Rapporteur Visits Rakhine – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-06-23-red.pdf> (GNLM) 23 June 2016 (p. 1 &2)/
UN special rapporteur visits Sittwe – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-06-24-red.pdf> (GNLM) 24 June 2016 (p. 2)/
Yanghee Lee visits correctional facilities in Kachin – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-06-25-red.pdf> (GNLM) 25 June 2016 (p. 2)/
UN special rapporteur holds talks with officials in Yangon – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-06-28-red.pdf> (GNLM) 28 June 2016 (p. 2)

the previous government's Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement. Ma Ran Jaw Gun, a member of the work committee for the Civil Society Organisation Forum, said that preparatory committees for the peace conference briefed their ongoing activities at the first day of the meeting. On the second day, the Union Level Joint Monitoring Committee explained the extent of respect by both sides of signatories to the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement. Thwin Lin Aung of the Civil Society Forum of Peace (CSFOP), said they had to work against time as the Panglong Conference was expected to take place in August. The political dialogue at the conference is reported to focus on five topics—politics, security, economy, social affairs, and land and environment. Civil Society Organisations will take part in the discussion of three topics, excluding politics and security. "We want peace tomorrow if possible. The sooner, the better. We're doing our utmost to attain peace. The national development needs political stability, which in turn requires ceasefire and freedom from conflicts. Without political stability, the country will never prosper. They are all connected. We've not met with the State Counsellor yet," said Yan Kyaw from Myanmar Political Analyst. The inclusion of civil society organisations in the conference is to encourage community-based seminars and develop closer cooperation among them.⁶

ELECTORAL TRIBUNAL DEGAZETTES INDEPENDENT MP OF KACHIN STATE FOR ELECTION OFFENCE

The electoral tribunal under the Union Election Commission (UEC) has reached a verdict to de-gazette Sakhon Tein Yein as an independent representative of the Amyotha Hluttaw. The tribunal announced his dismissal on 24 June, saying that the representative of Kachin State was found guilty of an election offence. Sakhon Tein Yein, leader of Kachin State Special Region-1, was removed from his position on account of the intimidation of rival candidates during his electioneering last year. The UEC was presented with an election petition filed by a number of candidates, including a candidate of the National League for Democracy, who lost the 2015 Election. According to the complaints filed to the Union Election Commission, the soldier-turned-politician Sakhon Tein Yein disturbed candidates from other parties including the ruling party with their election campaigns. He formally belonged to New Democratic Army (Kachin) (NDA) and acted as their commander. The NDA was later converted into a border guard force. Among the petitioners were Yaw Nar, an independent election candidate in Kachin State, and a resident named San Wai Khaung Lwam. As last year's election runner-up to Sakhon Tein Yein, Yaw Nar will be a replacement for him. The tribunal heard the case for seven days, with a UEC official saying that an appeal could be lodged within 14 days under the Union Election Commission Law.⁷

REQUESTS MADE FOR OPENING OF ILO OFFICE IN MYANMAR

Requests have been made for the opening of an International Labour Organisation (ILO) representative office in Myanmar, according to the Confederation of the Trade Unions of Myanmar (CTUM). "The request was made during the 105th Session of the International Labour Conference which was held between May-June. The ILO currently has a liaison office and an office focusing on the elimination of child soldiers [in Myanmar]. But, even these offices have limitations. Only if [their request is granted] can the problems of workers be acted on extensively. We want a country office to be opened, which will allow effective work to be done relating to the affairs of employers and workers, together with tax systems. We'll be able to work in accordance with an international standard," explained Maung, chair of the CTUM. A request has been made for the appointment of a country

⁶ CSOs to play part in Peace Process –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-06-23-red.pdf> (GNLM) 23 June 2016 (p. 1)

⁷ Electoral tribunal degazettes independent MP of Kachin State for election offence –

<http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-06-25-red.pdf> (GNLM) 25 June 2016 (p. 2)

director for the opening of an ILO country office, while it has reportedly been predicted this will take place around the end of this year. “The opening of a country office is a good thing. I support such an effort. It’ll allow for more effective work to be carried out over the affairs of workers. If there was an ILO country office in Myanmar, it would allow for direct demands to be made if our Myanmar maritime workers were to find themselves in trouble overseas,” said San Thein, chair of the Myanmar Maritime Workers Federation. The beginning of Myanmar’s democratic transition has witnessed the start of changes to the affairs of workers, with the establishment of a national minimum wage. “I support [the initiative to open an ILO country office in Myanmar]. Demands for workers will be able to be made with an international standard. As it would allow [workers] to speak directly [with the ILO], I want [the office] to be opened quickly.” said Ko Yan Naing, a factory worker from Yangon’s Hlaingthaya Township. The ILO is an organisation that seeks to resolve the problems of workers internationally. It reportedly has offices in a total of 168 countries around the world.⁸

UNOFFICIAL MEDIA

WA AND MONGLA ACCEPT INVITATIONS TO JOIN PEACE PROCESS

Two powerful ethnic armed groups based in the Wa and Mongla groups have reportedly accepted invitations to participate in the government’s peace process, according to a member of the government negotiating team. “We invited them to join the nationwide ceasefire agreement [NCA], attend the 21st-century Panglong Conference and meet with the heads of state when they are ready for talks,” said Khin Zaw Oo, a member of the government peace delegation led by Tin Myo Win, who was appointed the National League for Democracy government’s chief peace negotiator. “The ethnic leaders happily accepted our invitation.” The United Wa State Army (UWSA) and the National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA) were not signatories to last year’s Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, and the two groups enjoy full administration of areas carved out of Shan State under deals made with Myanmar’s former military regime. Neither ethnic armed group was reachable for comments regarding the 17 June meeting in Mongla, the NDAA’s stronghold, which has established a reputation as a freewheeling hub of illicit narcotics, animal trafficking, prostitution and gambling. The NCA was signed by 8 non-state armed groups last year but excluded several others, resulting in a boycott of the accord by some armed groups including the NDAA and the UWSA, the latter being Myanmar’s largest ethnic armed fighting force. Prior to the convening of the 21st-century Panglong Conference, arranged by State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, peace negotiators plan to review and amend the framework for political dialogue with ethnic armed groups, including those who signed the NCA and those outside of it. A preliminary meeting with this agenda in mind is scheduled for the first week of July. So far, only those who have signed the NCA will be invited to the Panglong Conference, which is scheduled for the end of July, or possibly August if pre-conference meetings run longer than anticipated, government negotiator Hla Maung Shwe has said. The government peace team has also invited other groups that have remained outside the NCA framework, most of which are members of the United Nationalities Federal Council, an ethnic bloc of nine groups, to meet with government leaders including Aung San Suu Kyi, however a date for those talks is not yet set.⁹

NCA SIGNATORIES DISCUSS PEACE AGENDA IN CHIANG MAI

Representatives of the 8 non-state Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) who signed last year’s Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) with the previous government held a two-day meeting in Chiang Mai, Thailand, to review their peace program agenda, according to ethnic leaders. Leaders of the 8 EAOs, including Saw Mutu Say Poe, chairman of the Karen National Union (KNU) and Lt-Gen

⁸ Requests made for opening of ILO Country Office in Myanmar – <http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs22/GNLM2016-06-19-red.pdf> (GNLM) 19 June 2016 (p. 3)

⁹ Wa and Mongla accept invitations to join peace process : govt negotiator – <http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/20958-wa-and-mongla-accept-invitations-to-join-peace-process-govt-negotiator.html> (Myanmar Times) 21 June 2016

Yawd Serk, chairman of Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS), joined representatives from the respective groups at the meeting. No official statement was made and the leaders would not speak to media, but participants said that the eight groups reviewed their peace agenda and terms of reference for the Union-level Joint Monitoring Committee of the NCA. "We [the eight groups] have a peace process steering team [PPST] to represent us and lead peace talks. So, they are reviewing our work thus far," said one participant who asked to remain anonymous because he was not authorized to speak to the media. Khun Okkar, an ethnic Pa-O leader and spokesperson for the groups, said that a meeting with State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi will take place in Naypyidaw on 28 June to discuss an upcoming peace conference and that representatives from each of the eight NCA signatory groups have been selected to attend.

Additionally, ethnic Chin, Kachin and Shan leaders will hold a meeting in Thailand next week to discuss the upcoming "21st Century Panglong Conference," which will be modeled after an original interethnic summit in Panglong, Shan State, in 1947; Chin, Kachin and Shan representatives were signatories—along with Suu Kyi's father, independence leader Aung San—to the original 1947 Panglong Agreement, which promised equal rights to Burma's ethnic minorities.

Some current leaders have expressed their willingness to continue dialogue with the government and the Burma Army, saying that it appears to be the only option to resolve ongoing conflict between the military and Burma's ethnic armed groups, who have been fighting for federal reform and greater autonomy. One ethnic leader said, "We know that there are weaknesses in the NCA, but it is impossible to rewrite a new one to replace it. We will keep discussing it to see if we can sort it out and improve it." When asked about the Burma Army's suggestion that ethnic armed organizations disarm, demobilize and reintegrate—a process known internationally as DDR—the ethnic leader said there was no pressure to implement these steps in the near future, as they still needed to hear Suu Kyi's stand on the process. When asked why the Burma Army had excluded groups like the Arakan Army (AA), Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), and Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) from peace talks, the source speculated that the Burma Army remains angry after suffering heavy attacks by the MNDAA last February; it is believed that the AA and TNLA assisted the MNDAA in the conflict.¹⁰

PNLO VOWS TO WORK WITH ALL MYANMAR PEOPLE IN PEACE PROCESS

The Pa-O National Liberation Organisation (PNLO), an ethnic armed group that has signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), issued a statement on 18 June saying it would continue to work together with all national brethren, including Pa-O people, for the preparation of the 21st Century Panglong Conference and for the success of Myanmar's peace process. The statement came after the 10th Central Committee meeting during PNLO conference, which was held in Shan State from 15 to 17 June. The PNLO said it had passed a resolution to discuss the upcoming effort to achieve nationwide peace by ending civil wars and solving political problems through political means. The group also decided that all Pa-O nationals and parties from all backgrounds will contribute one voice to the peace process by adopting policies that represent all Pa-O people. At the meeting, PNLO patron Colonel Khun Okka was promoted to the position of leading patron and appointed as the PNLO representative to Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee in place of Khun Tun Tin. "We have four patrons. In carrying out the ongoing peace process, Colonel Khun Okka is assigned duties as a member of the Peace Process Steering Team. Among the four, he has been promoted to leading patron. He will have power and the right to make decisions," said PNLO chairman Khun Myin Tun.¹¹

¹⁰ NCA Signatories Discuss Peace Agenda in Chiang Mai – <http://www.irrawaddy.com/burma/nca-signatories-discuss-peace-agenda-in-chiang-mai.html> (the Irrawaddy) 24 June 2016

¹¹ PNLO vows to work with all Myanmar people in peace process – <http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/politics/5220> (Eleven Myanmar) 21 June 2016

WOMEN DISCUSS PEACE PROCESS PRIORITIES

A conference on women's peace process priorities was held in Naypyidaw during the last week of June to generate recommendations for a civil society forum to be held in tandem with the upcoming Union Peace Conference. The two-day Myanmar Women's Peace Conference—titled "From the Margins to the Centre: Including Women and their Priorities in Myanmar's Peace Process"—was co-organized by the Alliance for Gender Inclusion in the Peace Process (AGIPP) and UN Women. Nearly 90 participants discussed women, peace and security, highlighting strategies for women's meaningful participation in the peace process. Mi Kun Chan Non, co-founder of the Mon Women's Organization and a steering committee member at the AGIPP, said that the groups gathered common recommendations based on the five main topics discussed during the Union Peace Conference in January. Under the new peace conference model initiated by State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi, politics and security affairs will be prioritized on the peace conference agenda, while social, economic, environmental, education and refugee repatriation issues will be highlighted at a parallel civil society organization (CSO) forum. "Of course, our collective views will be shared with the civil society forum," added Nang Phyu Lin, chair of the AGIPP. The Union Peace Conference under the new National League for Democracy (NLD) government will convene in late August, and Suu Kyi encouraged the CSO forum to run concurrently with and provide input to the peace conference. The women's groups have been advocating to set a minimum 30 percent gender quota system to increase women's representation in political leadership. Female parliamentarians and policymakers participated in the talks as well. Meanwhile, some 50-60 CSOs in Burma began organizing the national forum earlier this month. Nang Raw Zahkung, deputy director of the Nyein (Shalom) Foundation told local news media that the CSO forum would reflect the voices of civil society groups working in different sectors. So far, CSOs are drafting the term of references, in which they design the aims, process and number of participants. The forum organizers are attempting to consult with local groups in all of Burma's states and regions. They plan to share the draft TOR with all of the groups in an upcoming meeting in July. Given that the Union Peace Conference will begin no later than the last week of August, it might not be possible to cover all of the issues when the conference opens, but CSOs will be able to provide input throughout the conference, explained Nang Raw Zahkung.¹²

CIVIL SOCIETY MUST BE PART OF THE PEACE PROCESS, SAYS 88 GENERATION LEADER

The public and youth can play an important role in solving political issues says Ko Gyi, one of the leaders of the 88 Generation Peace and Open Society. Speaking before the Myanmar Youth Forum held in Monywa on 11 June, the veteran student activist said that it was important for youth and civil society to be involved in the ongoing national peace process. Civil society groups will not be participating in the upcoming Panglong conference however because of a new policy implemented by Aung San Suu Kyi. During his speech Ko Gyi urged youths to think beyond normal problem-solving methods when thinking about the solving the civil war and ethnic issues. "The problem is not a new one. It's an old one. It's older than us. Attempting to find solutions for an old problem with old ways of thinking has still not been successful up until now. So, youth need to find new ways of thinking and new solutions. It's not enough to solve this between the armed groups. The role of the public is important. The voices of youth and civil society organizations need to be included," said U Ko Gyi.

State Counselor, Aung San Suu Kyi, announced recently that political parties that have failed to win at least one seat in parliament will not be allowed to directly participate in the 21st Century Panglong Conference. Those parties not represented in parliament and civil society groups can instead submit their suggestions and comments to the conference through the Civil Society Organization Forum. Civil society organizations were allowed to take part in the peace conferences held by former President Thein Sein's administration. But civil society organizations like the 88 Generation Peace and Society

¹² Women Discuss Peace Process Priorities –

<http://www.irrawaddy.com/burma/women-discuss-peace-process-priorities.html> (the Irrawaddy) 30 June 2016

will not be allowed to attend the 21st Century Panglong Conference due to Aung San Suu Kyi's new policy change. Human rights activists and civil society organizations from ethnic areas will only be allowed to attend the Civil Society Organization Forum. "Civil society needs to be allowed to participate directly. Civil society organizations held a peace forum in Mon State recently. Civil society groups have called for the right to participate in peace conferences," said Min Nwe, an official from a Mon State-based civil society organization. Observers say that civil society organizations have played a major role in the peace process in successful transitions in foreign countries. "Not asking youths [to do something] or giving them tasks in fear of them making mistakes is a hindrance on the qualifications of youths. They will learn as they work. When they make mistakes, they will fix them. There isn't much time left to fix the mistakes made by adults. Youths still have much time left to fix their mistakes. The development of the history of mankind is a process of fixing the mistakes," said Ko Gyi.¹³

RNP ISSUES STATEMENT ON USE OF 'MUSLIM COMMUNITY IN RAKHINE STATE'

The Rakhine National Party has issued a statement on the usage of the term 'Muslim community in Rakhine State' at the Human Rights Conference on 21 June. A Myanmar representative submitted a proposal to the 32nd Session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva, Switzerland, on 17 June, instructing participants to refer to the Rohingya community as the 'Muslim community in Rakhine State', rather than as 'Rohingya' or 'Bengali'. The RNP's statement said: "Our party holds the view that Rakhine ethnics are blamed for the Bengali issue of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar by undermining the Union spirit. Now, the government is issuing citizenship scrutiny cards in Rakhine State after forming various committees to ensure stability, peace and development in Rakhine State. The plan to issue citizenship scrutiny cards is timed to coincide with the human rights conference. At this time, the term 'Muslim community' instead of 'Bengalis' seems to create a good chance for Bengalis to be citizens." The statement continues: "The Rakhine region fell into the hands of the British colonisers after the first war between Myanmar and the British in 1824. In taking a census, the earliest term for the community was 'Chittagonian'. The Myanma Socialist Programme Party took censuses in 1973 and 1983. U Thein Sein's administration took a census in 2014. Only 'Bengali' was used as a racial term in Rakhine State, while other terms were not stated. Now, instead of 'Bengalis', the terms 'Muslim community' and 'Islamists' in Rakhine State were submitted to the human rights conference. The new term is aimed at trying to hide the truth about the native place of the Bengalis. It is also intended to mislead the people into believing that the Rakhine region is the Bengalis' native place." "It also goes against Section 364 of the 2008 constitution. Section 364 states that the abuse of religion for political purposes is forbidden. Moreover, any act that is intended or is likely to promote feelings of hatred, enmity or discord between racial or religious communities or sects is contrary to this constitution. A law may be promulgated to punish such activity. This attempt cannot settle the Bengali issue in the long term. We don't believe that good political results will come out of this," the statement said. "In accordance with our policies and objectives, the RNP must make an all-out efforts not to lose any sovereignty in Rakhine State. The RNP will continue using only the term 'Bengalis' in Rakhine State. We wholly reject the term 'Muslim community' and 'Islamists'," the statement said. Aye Nu Sein, the vice chairperson of the RNP, said: "The submission of the term 'Muslim community' to the human rights conference is a severe blow to the entire Rakhine community. The statement of the Ministry of Information used the term 'Islamists' in Rakhine State, and the Rakhine people were referred as 'Buddhists' in Rakhine State. The government should not pay too much attention to the international pressure without taking into consideration the prevailing conditions of a race. Our party believes that something should be done for the entire Rakhine community in time, so we issued the statement." "Different national races reside together in Myanmar. The 21st Century Panglong Conference is going to be held soon. All the national races enjoy equal rights. Citizenship scrutiny cards are being issued in

¹³ Civil society must be part of peace process, says 88 Generation leader – <http://english.panglong.org/?p=14411> (S.H.A.N.) 19 June 2016

accordance with the law. Rakhine people feel that the Bengali issue discriminates against ethnic Rakhine people and other ethnic groups living in the Union. The Bengali issue concerns the entire nation. Therefore, discrimination hurts the Union spirit and the Union principle,” Aye Nu Sein added.¹⁴

ANALYSIS

Preparations for the 21st Century Panglong Conference are moving ahead with the aim of bringing peace to the country. Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing’s comments to the Peace Process Steering Team (PPST) that the Tatmadaw will adhere to the Three Main Causes and that they will not deviate from the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement once again can be seen as reflecting the position of the military. State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi will now need to take on board such comments when dealing with both the 8 NCA signatories and the Non-NCA signatories. Her work will not be made easier in attempting to make the forthcoming peace conference to be inclusive. The government will need to overcome these challenges while at the same time trying to bridge trust between the military and ethnic armed organisations. Leaders from the government, military, ethnic armed organisations as well as civil society in the past have adhered to distinct and persistent mindsets regarding the on-going peace process. It therefore is important that the State Counsellor as the key and prominent leader of the Conference finds ways to accommodate the interests of all stakeholders while on the other hand the stakeholders themselves will need not only to have the political will but also be prepared to make compromises.

¹⁴ RNP issues statement on use of ‘Muslim community in Rakhine State’ – <http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/local/5225> (Eleven Myanmar) 22 June 2016