

## Myanmar's National Reconciliation Process

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### Abstract

The conflicts in Myanmar between the diverse ethnic armed groups and the ruling governments had been deeply rooted as a civil war since her independence, 1948. The result was to create a federal system. In order to end her internal conflicts, successive Myanmar governments often negotiated several issues with almost all ethnic groups. Obviously, under the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), the former Chief of Military Intelligence, General Khin Nyunt, achieved ceasefire negotiations with ethnic armed groups in the 1990's. Under U Thein Sein regime, Myanmar Peace Center (NPC) was established to assist the peace committees for the peace process. Moreover, the 2015 Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) was drafted and the 2016 Union Peace Conference 21<sup>st</sup> Century Panglong was initiated to resolve the conflicts. Despite difficult questions about inclusiveness, the conference is recognized as a beginning and historical step on the path to peace and also an important milestone and opportunity for Myanmar and her people. This paper will examine how national reconciliation in Myanmar develops.

Key words: SPDC, NCA, 2016 Panglong Conference, Myanmar Government, Ethnic groups

### Introduction

The internal conflict in Myanmar began after the country's independence in 1948, as successive central governments of Myanmar fought various ethnic and political rebellions. Officially there are (135) national races though the seven major ethnic groups are the Arakan, Chin, Kachin, Karenni, Karen, Mon, Myanmar and the Shan. About 40% of Myanmar's population (around 55 million) is composed of ethnic minorities often referred to as ethnic nationalities. The ethnic groups are located on the peripheral mountainous areas of the country occupying around 60% of the land area while the majority Myanmar peoples are in the inland plain areas<sup>1</sup>. Some of the earliest insurgencies were by Myanmar-dominated "multi-colored" leftists and by the Karen National Union (KNU). The KNU fought to carve out an independent Karen state from large swaths of Lower Myanmar. Other ethnic rebellions broke out only in the early 1960s after the central government refused to consider a federal style government. By the early 1980s, politically oriented armed insurgencies had largely withered away, but ethnic-based insurgencies remained alive and well during the conflict. In the 1980s, rebel groups controlled most of the country's periphery. The two major organizations fighting against the Myanmar Socialist Programme Party - led government, were 2 umbrella groups, the pro-Chinese Communist Party of Burma (allied to local Kokang Chinese, Wa and Shan groups), based along the Chinese-Myanmar border and the pro-West

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<sup>1</sup> "Myanmar: The Second Round of Ceasefire with Ethnic Groups", <<http://www.eurasiareview.com/10022012-myanmar-the-second-round-of-ceasefire-with-ethnic-groups/>>

National Democratic Force (made up of ethnic Mon, Karen, Karenni and Shan opposition groups), based along the Thai-Myanmar border. By the late 1980s, the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) had weakened considerably, because of waning Chinese financial support and internal strife. During the 1988 Uprising, the CPB failed to seize the opportunity to invoke political change. A month later, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), a council of military men, staged a coup d'etat. Consequently, ethnic Wa and Kokang armed forces led a mutinee against CPB, forming the United Wa State Party (UWSP) and National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA) respectively<sup>2</sup>. SLORC used this opening to arrange ceasefires with the armed rebel groups that had just mutined, under a policy designed by General Khin Nyunt, the former intelligence chief and deposed prime minister (who was under house arrest since 2004 and released under an amnesty in January 2012) was the main architect for the ceasefire arrangements entered into. Most of these agreements were unwritten understanding or arrangements and varied in content also from group to group<sup>3</sup>. The major groups that did not enter into any ceasefire agreement were the Shan State Army-South, Karenni National Progressive Party and the Karen National Union.

### **National Reconciliation after 1988**

Government troops heavily used 4 cuts counter insurgency tactics in ethnic areas in 1990s<sup>4</sup>. The “four cuts” policy involved cut off communications among rebel armed groups as well as local people, cut off information among people and trade route in designated territories, searches and destruction of any possible supplies in the areas<sup>5</sup>. On the other hand, the military government forced ethnics groups to sign ceasefire agreements with ethnic rebels groups while government troops were trying to root out their main bases in 1990s. In meanwhile, ethnic minorities’ political parties which won seats in 1990 elections and formed the second largest pro-democracy block after National League for Democracy (NLD) were severely oppressed in cities. By the end of the century, there were 20 armed opposition groups ceased fire with governments<sup>6</sup>. However, government made political dialogues with neither cease fire groups nor winning political parties. Therefore, some ethnic groups didn't cease fire with government and continued armed struggle. The ethnic populations were the most suffered from a result of long-standing hostilities with the central government. They have been treated as enemies of the state and second class citizens. The signed ceasefire agreements have been nothing more than temporary military truces to suspend fighting and preserve the status quo, allowing the rebel groups to retain administrative control of their territories. Weaker or

<sup>2</sup> "Ceasefires in Myanmar" , <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ceasefires\\_in\\_Myanmar#cite\\_note\\_tni-1](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ceasefires_in_Myanmar#cite_note_tni-1)>

<sup>3</sup> "Myanmar: The Second Round of Ceasefire with Ethnic Groups", <<http://www.eurasiareview.com>>

<sup>4</sup> "Ceasefires in Myanmar", < [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ceasefires\\_in\\_Myanmar#cite\\_note\\_mmpeacemonitor.org-3](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ceasefires_in_Myanmar#cite_note_mmpeacemonitor.org-3)>

<sup>5</sup> "Ceasefires in Myanmar", < [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ceasefires\\_in\\_Myanmar#cite\\_note4](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ceasefires_in_Myanmar#cite_note4)>

<sup>6</sup> "Ceasefires in Myanmar", < [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ceasefires\\_in\\_Myanmar#cite\\_note5](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ceasefires_in_Myanmar#cite_note5)>

splinter rebel groups typically wield forfeit their territories to the government. Most agreements simply stipulated that the groups would be allowed to retain their arms and territories until the promulgation of a new Constitution. As part of the ceasefires, the government began the Border Area Development Programme in 1989, which became a ministry-level body in 1992, as Ministry for the Progress of Border Areas and National Races and has built road infrastructure, schools and hospitals in rebel-occupied territories. In April 2009, Lieutenant General Ye Myint led a government entourage to meet with Kokang, Shan and Wa insurgent groups, to discuss plans to create "collective security" formed by insurgent groups and under the command of the Tatmadaw, which would eventually lead to the creation of the Border Guard Forces.<sup>[8]</sup> In 2009, four of the insurgent groups, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army, the Kachin Defence Army (4th Brigade of the KIA), the New Democratic Army - Kachin (NDA-K) and the Pa-O National Organisation/Army (PNO/A), accepted the transition plan's terms and transformed into Border Guard Forces groups. Since 1989, the Myanmar government had signed the following ceasefire agreements with 35 ethnic armed groups<sup>7</sup>.

#### List of Ceasefires

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Region</b>	<b>Effective Date</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA)	Special Region 1, Shan State	21 <sup>st</sup> March, 1989	Kokang-led, split from the Communist Party of Burma
United Wa State Army (UWSA)	Special Region 2, Shan State	9 <sup>th</sup> May, 1989	Also known as the Myanmar National Solidarity Party, split from the Communist Party of Burma
National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA)	Special Region 4, Shan State	30 <sup>th</sup> June, 1989	
Shan State Army (SSA)	Special Region 3, Shan State	2 <sup>nd</sup> September, 1989	
New Democratic Army - Kachin (NDA-K)	Special Region 1, Northeast Kachin State	15 <sup>th</sup> December, 1989	

<sup>7</sup> "Understanding Myanmar's Peace Process: Ceasefire Agreements", <[www.swisspeace.ch/.../Catalyzing\\_Reflections\\_2\\_2014\\_online.pdf](http://www.swisspeace.ch/.../Catalyzing_Reflections_2_2014_online.pdf)>

Kachin Defense Army (KDA)	Special Region 5, Northern Shan State	13 <sup>th</sup> January, 1991	Former 4 <sup>th</sup> Brigade of the Kachin Independence Organisation
Pa-O National Organisation (PNO)	Special Region 6, Southern Shan State	11 <sup>th</sup> April, 1991	
Palaung State Liberation Army (PSLA)	Special Region 7, Northern Shan State	21 <sup>st</sup> April, 1991	
Kayan National Guard (KNG)	Special Region 1, Kayah State	27 <sup>th</sup> February, 1992	
Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO)	Special Region 2, Kachin State	24 <sup>th</sup> February, 1994	Ceasefire broke down on 9 <sup>th</sup> June, 2011, when fighting resumed <sup>8</sup>
Karenni State Nationalities Peoples' Liberation Front (KNPLF)	Special Region 2, Kayah (Karenni) State	9 <sup>th</sup> May, 1994	
Kayan New Land Party (KNLP)	Special Region 3, Kayah (Karenni) State	26 <sup>th</sup> July, 1994	
Shan State Nationalities Peoples' Liberation Organisation (SSNPLO)	Southern Shan State	9 <sup>th</sup> October, 1994	
New Mon State Party (NMSP)	Mon State	29 <sup>th</sup> June, 1995	
Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA)	Karen State	1995	
Mongko Region Defence Army (MRDA)	Shan State	1995	Split from Myanmar National Alliance Army
Shan State National Army (SSNA)	Shan State	1995	
Karenni National Defence Army (KNDA)	Karen State	1996	Split from KNPP
Karen Peace Force (KPF)	Karen State	1997	Former 16 <sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Karen National Union

<sup>8</sup> "Untold Miseries: Wartime Abuses and Forced Displacement in Myanmar's Kachin State", <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ceasefire.com>>

Communist Party of Burma (Arakan Province)(CPB)	Rakhine State	1997	
Mon Mergui Army (MMA)	Mon State	1997	Split from New Mon State Party
KNU Special Region Group Toungoo (KNU)	Bago Division	1997	
	Kayah State	2005	Ceasefire broke down within 3 months
	Shan State	2006	
	Kachin State	2007	
KNU/KNLA Peace Council (KNU/KNLA PC)	Karen State	2007	Former 7 <sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Karen National Union
Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) 3 <sup>rd</sup> Brigade	Karen State	3 <sup>rd</sup> November, 2011	Fighting resumed on 19 <sup>th</sup> February 2012 <sup>9</sup>
Kaloh Htoo Baw armed group	Karen State	5 <sup>th</sup> November, 2011	Former DKBA
Chin National Front Karen National Union Shan State Army-South		19 <sup>th</sup> November, 2011 <sup>10</sup>	Informal ceasefire agreement. Despite a ceasefire agreement in place, fighting is still occurring between the Tatmadaw and SSA-South troops, as of March 2012 <sup>11</sup>
Chin National Front (CNF)	Chin State	8 <sup>th</sup> January, 2012 <sup>12</sup>	
Karen National Union (KNU)	Karen State	7 <sup>th</sup> February, 2012 <sup>13</sup>	
Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS)	Shan State	17 <sup>th</sup> January, 2012 <sup>14</sup>	Political arm of Shan State Army

<sup>9</sup> "DKBA Ceasefire Breaks Down", The Irrawaddy, 20<sup>th</sup> March, 2012

<sup>10</sup> "Kayin State peace making group, Kaloh Htoo Baw armed group (former DKBA) sign initial peace agreement", New Light of Myanmar, 5<sup>th</sup> November, 2011

<sup>11</sup> "Government Troops Clash wit SSA-South Despite Truce", The Irrawaddy, 20<sup>th</sup> March, 2012

<sup>12</sup> "Initial peace agreement inked between State Level Peace-making Group and CNF", New Light of Myanmar, 8<sup>th</sup> January, 2012

<sup>13</sup> "Kayin State peace-making group, KNU/KNLA Peace Council sign initial peace agreement", New Light of Myanmar, 8<sup>th</sup> January, 2012

<sup>14</sup> "Union Level peace-making group, RCSS/SSA peace-making sign 11 initial agreement", New Light of Myanmar, 17<sup>th</sup> January, 2012

Shan Progressive Party (SSPP)	Shan State	28 <sup>th</sup> January, 2012 <sup>15</sup>	Political arm of the Shan State Army
New Mon State Party (NMSP)	Mon State	31 <sup>st</sup> January 2012 <sup>16</sup>	
Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP)	Kayah State	6 <sup>th</sup> March, 2012 <sup>17</sup>	

### **The Myanmar's New Ceasefire Agreement**

With the formation of a civilian government in March 2011 under President U Thein Sein, Myanmar had undergone the reforms' changes for ushering in democracy and to achieve national reconciliation. U Thein Sein administration had made Myanmar's peace process and reconciliation with ethnic armed groups a top policy priority. As such, it had put tremendous effort into finalizing a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA). The ideal NCA that the administration envisioned would have brought to a halt ongoing fighting between Myanmar's military and ethnic armed groups, primarily those along the China and Thailand borders. As a first step, 15 ethnic armed groups were identified to participate in negotiations led by representatives of the administration's peacemaking team along with the Myanmar military and other individual armed ethnic factions<sup>18</sup>. The government had initiated peace talks with the ethnic groups resulting in the second round of ceasefire with the following ethnic groups.

**Chins :** Representatives of the Chin National Front (CNF) met the government delegation led by U Aung Min, the Minister of Railways at the Thai-Myanmar border on 19 November 2011 and the CNF informally agreed to a ceasefire along with Shan State Army-South (SSA-S) and the Karen National Union (KNU). **Karen Rebel Groups :** The Karen National Union (KNU) had a series of meetings with the government peace representatives in November and December 2011 before signing a ceasefire agreement on January 12, 2012 with the government's peace committee led by U Aung Min, the Railway Minister in the Karen State

<sup>15</sup> "KNU and SSA-South Informally Agree Ceasefire with Government", The Irrawaddy, 20 March, 2012

<sup>16</sup> "Mon State level peace-making group, NMSP peace-making group initial agreement", New Light of Myanmar, 2<sup>nd</sup> February, 2012

<sup>17</sup> "State level peace-making group, KNPP peace-making group sign initial agreement", New Light of Myanmar, 8<sup>th</sup> March, 2012

<sup>18</sup> "The recently concluded nationwide ceasefire agreement is a step in the right direction", New Light of Myanmar, 30<sup>th</sup> October, 2015

Capital– Pa-an. Karen National Union was the only major group which had not signed a peace agreement earlier and has been fighting for autonomy for the last 63 years (since 1949)<sup>19</sup>. Karen leaders clarified that the present agreement is at the state level and would like to take up the process at the national level as and when progress is made on the issues decided in the present agreement. The issues in the present agreement related to, cessation in fighting, opening of liaison offices, development programs for the state, state expenditures and freedom of travel for rebels in the state. The peace agreement with the KNU has a special significance for the Dawei deep sea port project in which Thailand, Italy and a few other multinational companies are involved. An article published in the New York Times published on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2012, the KNU General Secretary Zipporah Sein has denied that the deal with government made on January 12, 2012 was a cease fire agreement and that a final decision will be arrived after further discussions on the conditions<sup>20</sup>. It indicated that the KNU leadership is divided over the agreement signed on 12<sup>nd</sup> January 2012 and some hardliners are not still trusting the overtures of the Myanmar Government. The 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade of Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) known as Kaloo Htoo Baw signed an initial peace agreement with the Kayin State Government Peace Making Group in Hpa-an on 3<sup>rd</sup> November, 2011. This was followed by a further six point peace agreement with the Union Government delegation led by Aung Thang on 12<sup>th</sup> December, 2011. **New Mon State Party (NMSP) :** The New Mon State Party and the Myanmar Government entered into a five point peace agreement on February 1, 2012 after two rounds of peace talks (once in the bordering town of Sangkhlaburi in Thailand in December 2011 and the second in the Mon state capital Moulmein). The five points are: to stop fighting, to hold political talks at the Union government level, to open liaison offices, not to allow weapons to be held in certain restricted areas and to base troops only at agreed-upon locations. The government delegation was headed by U Aung Min, the Railways Minister and the Mon delegation by the NMSP vice-chairman Nai Rot Sa. The Mon leader said that this agreement was different from the one entered into in 1995 in that the talks were on political and economic issues and not just to stop fighting. **Shan State Armed Rebel Groups:** The United Wa State Army signed a peace agreement with the Shan State Government Peace Making Group on 6<sup>th</sup> September, 2011.

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<sup>19</sup> "The time to rebuild the nation", <[frontiermyanmar.net/.../we-hope-that-now-is-the-time-to-rebuild-the-nation](http://frontiermyanmar.net/.../we-hope-that-now-is-the-time-to-rebuild-the-nation)>

<sup>20</sup> "Government peace plan-Myanmar Peace Monitor", <[www.mmpeacemonitor.org/peace-process/government-peace-plan](http://www.mmpeacemonitor.org/peace-process/government-peace-plan)>

This was followed up with further discussions on 1<sup>st</sup> October, 2011 at Lashio. The National Democratic Alliance Army– NDAA (Mongla) signed a peace agreement with the Shan State Peace Making Group on 7<sup>th</sup> September 2011 on similar lines with UWSA. The Shan State Army- South (SSA- South) had met the government delegation led by U Aung Min, the Minister for Railways at Taunggyi (Thai-Myanmar border) on November 19, 2011 along with some other groups. According to the minister the three steps involved in the peace process are the ceasefire, co-operation between ceasefire groups and the government for development and tackling of political conflicts. The SSA- South reportedly signed an agreement on December 2, 2011. The Union Level Peace Making Group led by Aung Thaung signed a six-point peace agreement in December, 2011 in Mongla with the Shan State (East) Special Region (4) led by Chairman U Sai Lin. The Union Level Peace Making Group led by Aung Thaung signed a six point peace agreement at Panghsang on 26<sup>th</sup> December 2011 with the “Wa” Special Region (2) Shan State (North) Chairman U Pak Yu Chan. This was a follow up on the talks held at Lashio on 1<sup>st</sup> October, 2011 and related to representation of this area’s leaders in various parliamentary assemblies and to refrain from secession and disintegration of the region from the union. The government and the Shan State Army North (SSA-N) signed a five point cease fire agreement on 30<sup>th</sup> January, 2012. The SSA-N has reportedly been permitted to maintain their bases in certain locations and open liaison offices in some specified places. According to media reports, the Shan State Progressive Party signed two peace agreements on 28<sup>th</sup> January, 2012. Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP): The KNPP leaders met the government peace delegation led by Aung Min, the Minister of railways at Chiang Mai, Northern Thailand, on 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> February 2012. The points discussed were on bilateral ceasefire, opening of KNPP’s liaison officers and free movement and rehabilitation of displaced persons in Karenni State. However, the signing of an agreement has been postponed pending further discussions scheduled to be held in the near future. **Kachin Independence Organisation/Army (KIO-KIA):** The Myanmar government has still not been able to strike a deal with Kachin Independence Army despite protracted negotiations. The KIO had earlier signed a ceasefire agreement in 1994, which broke down in June 2011 when the government troops started attacking KIA held areas, which are still continuing. A delegation from the KIO, the political wing of the KIA met with the government peace delegation led by U Aung Thaung on 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> January 2012. The two sides failed to reach an agreement. Despite pressure from other ethnic groups which have entered into a ceasefire agreement, KIO is believed to be insisting on an autonomous Kachin homeland and political talks prior to ceasefire. The government troops are believed to be



attacking the KIA held areas especially in the northern Shan State area despite an order from the government in December, 2011 and again in January 2012 to halt military operations through out the tribal territories (Northern & Eastern Myanmar), except for defensive purposes. **All Burma Student's Democratic Front (ABSDF)** : Leaders of armed dissident group ABSDF met with a Myanmar government delegation (the first ever such meeting) on 9<sup>th</sup> February 2012 at Mae Sot (Thailand). Both sides have decided to have a second round of talks aimed at ceasefire and a peace agreement<sup>21</sup>. The ABSDF established by student activists of the 1988 uprising is allied with KNU and KNPP.

### **The Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement of October 15, 2015**

U Thein Sien government made to ensure a peaceful environment in the country before the November 8, 2015 parliamentary elections signed Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) with 8 insurgent groups on October 15. The rebel groups participated in the NCA under the banner of United Nationalities Federal Council included: Karen National Union, Democratic Benevolent Karen Army, Karen Peace Council, Arakan Liberation Party, All-Burma Students Democratic Front, Palaung National Liberation Organisation and Chin National Front. Most of these insurgent groups belong to the Karen-inhabited region bordering Thailand and a hub of narcotics trade<sup>22</sup>. The rebel groups which signed the NCA would be excluded from the country's terrorist lists and considered for much needed development and investment after long isolation. The cadres of these outfits could also move freely and participate in politics. U Thein Sien government wanted to sign the NCA first with 15 of Myanmar's 21 armed groups<sup>23</sup>. The government does not recognise some of the ethnic militias such as Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), the ethnic Kokang's Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) and Arakan Army (AA). All the three ethnic armed groups have recently been engaged in intense fighting with the Myanmar Army. The union government also did not invite three smaller groups - Wa National Organisation, Lahu Army and Arakan National Council. One of the oldest insurgent groups KIA that controls territories along

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<sup>21</sup> "Burma's ethnic armed groups are reluctant to agree", <[karennews.org/.../why-burmas-ethnic-armed-groups-are-reluctant-to-agree-to-thein-sein-governments-peace-plan-a-minority-perspective.html](http://karennews.org/.../why-burmas-ethnic-armed-groups-are-reluctant-to-agree-to-thein-sein-governments-peace-plan-a-minority-perspective.html)>

<sup>22</sup> "The peace process in Myanmar", <[burmacampaign.org.uk/what-now-for-the-peace-process-in-myanmar/](http://burmacampaign.org.uk/what-now-for-the-peace-process-in-myanmar/)>

<sup>23</sup> "Understanding Myanmar's Peace Process: Ceasewfire Agreements", <[www.swisspeace.ch/.../Catalyzing\\_Reflections\\_2\\_2014\\_online.pdf](http://www.swisspeace.ch/.../Catalyzing_Reflections_2_2014_online.pdf)>

northern borders with China—a major route of drug trafficking and smuggling of gems, also did not join the signing ceremony<sup>24</sup>. Besides Kokang armed groups, Mon State Party and Karenni National Progressive Party were not represented in the NCA meeting.

### **21<sup>st</sup> Century Panglong Conference**

The country's new civilian government has initiated the process of resolving the lingering ethnic conflict and the recently-concluded 21<sup>st</sup> Century Panglong is an effort in that direction. The five-day conference began on August 31, 2016 in Myanmar's capital Nay Pyi Taw with an emphasis on unity in building a federal union. It was attended by stakeholders of the government, Parliament, Myanmar Army, numerous ethnic groups, foreign diplomats and United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon<sup>25</sup>. The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Panglong Conference was a historic step towards national reconciliation and political dialogue. Daw Aung San Su Kyi's father and independence hero General Aung San organised the original Panglong Conference in 1947 in an attempt to grant autonomy to the ethnic minority groups like Shan, Kachin and Chin before Myanmar attained independence from Britain. However, his assassination in July 1947 halted the implementation of the agreements signed during the conference and several ethnic minority groups took up arms against the union government<sup>26</sup>. Amidst fresh fighting between the Myanmar Army and armed ethnic rebel outfits in Kachin and Shan states, representatives from 17 ethnic militias attended the conference. Three other groups (AA, MNDAA and TNLA) were not invited to participate as they had refused to surrender their arms before the talks<sup>27</sup>. The conference also did not address the problem faced by the country's stateless Rohingya population since this minority Muslim community is not included in the list of Myanmar's recognised ethnic groups. The participants of the conference agreed that in addition to the political aspects, the parties would engage in talks regarding the modus operandi of sharing natural resources such as gas, minerals and timber between the state and ethnic regions where they are in plenty. The other contentious issues

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<sup>24</sup> "Understanding Myanmar's Peace Process: Ceasefire Agreements", <[www.swisspeace.ch/.../Catalyzing\\_Reflections\\_2\\_2014\\_online.pdf](http://www.swisspeace.ch/.../Catalyzing_Reflections_2_2014_online.pdf)>

<sup>25</sup> UN chief to attend 21st-century Panglong Conference, <[www.mmtimes.com/.../22118-un-chief-to-attend-21st-century-panglong-conference.html](http://www.mmtimes.com/.../22118-un-chief-to-attend-21st-century-panglong-conference.html)>

<sup>26</sup> "The Panlong Agreement and the Birth of the Union States", <[eng.moemaka.net/.../khin-maung-saw-the-panlong-agreement-and-the-birth-of-the-union-states](http://eng.moemaka.net/.../khin-maung-saw-the-panlong-agreement-and-the-birth-of-the-union-states)>

<sup>27</sup> "The Panglong Conference", <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panglong\\_Conference](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panglong_Conference)>

discussed in the conference were total laying down of arms by the ethnic rebel groups and the question of their merger with the Myanmar armed forces<sup>28</sup>. It can be noted that the government has been working hard to persuade the non-NCA armed groups to sign the peace pacts since the government wants to move forward the peace dialogue on the basis of NCA. The Myanmar government aims at finding a permanent solution to the lingering ethnic conflict by 2020.

### **Conclusion**

Throughout our history, trust between the government and ethnic armed groups had been nearly lost since 1948 and long-term hatred by other ethnic groups had been established by the civil war. However, successive Myanmar governments used various ways to end these internal conflicts and to get national reconciliation and they regarded national reconciliation as the most important objectives to make our society strong, stable, peaceful, and prosperous. U Thein Sein government used to attract armed ethnic groups to its national peace process since after taking power in 2011. The peace process seeks to implement the National Peace Accord after a nation-wide ceasefire agreement and political dialogue. Since the beginning of the reconciliation process, most ethnic groups, especially armed ones, preferred political dialogue before a ceasefire agreement, while the Army and Union Peace Working Committee (UPWC) insisted on first signing the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA). Without addressing the aspirations and grievances of ethnic minorities, social and political problems cannot be solved. The national reconciliation policy of the Myanmar government had resulted in the return to the legal fold of 17 out of 18 insurgent groups. The government had effectively put an end to the 40 years of insurgency. The current Myanmar government also regarded that national reconciliation is the top priority for establishing nation building with peace and security. State Council Daw Aung San Suu Kyi concluded a landmark peace summit with ethnic rebels calling it the first step on what promises to be a tough road to peace. The conference in the capital Naypyidaw was Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's first great drive to end ethnic minority insurgencies that have rumbled across Myanmar's frontier states for nearly seven decades. Although three groups still actively clashing with troops did not attend the talks, and the powerful Wa -- a heavily armed militia based on the border with China -- stormed out on day two over what the government said was an organisational mishap, State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's biggest achievement was bringing many

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<sup>28</sup> "Panglong Agreement", < [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panglong\\_Agreement](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panglong_Agreement) >

key players to the table, including rebel armies that did not sign a shaky ceasefire brokered by the former military-backed government in 2015. But, the national reconciliation process faces a number of challenges, including the issue of the withdrawal of the armed forces from ethnic minority regions and providing them some amount of autonomy to manage their affairs. One formidable obstacle of democratic transition and national reconciliation is the preeminent position of the armed forces in the country's current political dynamics. It is a matter of concern that the political role of the military has been institutionalised in Myanmar. Another seemingly intractable problem confronting national reconciliation is the future of the Rohingya Muslims in Buddhist majority Myanmar. Nevertheless, the prevailing conditions of peace and stability also provide better opportunities for the whole people of Myanmar to completely create liberal democratic government with a significant progress in economic and social sectors.

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