

# ISP-MYANMAR RESEARCH REPORT

Working Paper

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## International Actors in Myanmar's Peace Process



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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The international community has played an important role in supporting the peace process in Myanmar from the beginning, when the new government reached out to the ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) to initiate – in some cases renew-- ceasefire negotiations in 2011. As the peace negotiation process has become protracted and even triggered new armed conflicts in some regions of the country, many international actors including donors have come to view Myanmar's peace process with cynicism as if it is becoming "a process without peace".

The surging COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated a sense of peace fatigue, which has sapped attention and resources of the international community from Myanmar. Moreover, the magnitude of the Rohingya crisis and subsequent international interventions coupled with the growing geopolitical rivalry between the United States and China have distracted the attention away from efforts to end a seven-decade long civil war in Myanmar.

The National League for Democracy's (NLD) landslide victory in the general elections held in November 2020 means that the party will likely form a government to serve a five-year term. NLD won 920 out of 1,117 total representatives in the state, regional, and national level parliaments, which is 82.36% of the seats Ethnic political parties strived hard in the elections, and their performance in the election fell short of expectations. The election results could produce further ethnic tensions and polarization, as voting behavior suggests that identity politics were salient issues in the election.

The election results will likely produce further ethnic tensions and polarization, as identity politics continue to play a role in electoral politics. The Union Election Commission disenfranchised several constituencies from holding elections citing security concerns.<sup>1</sup> Many ethnic political parties indicate that the first-past-the-post voting system has weakened them by creating an uneven play field. For instance, ethnic Karens represent 6.7% of Myanmar's population, but Karen political parties won only one seat (a candidate from Karen People Party). Different ethnic population makes 27.66% of the nation's population, but ethnic political parties can make only 9.9% of seats in 2020 general elections out of 664 representatives in Union parliament.<sup>2</sup> The situation could lead to anti-system sentiments and ethnic tensions, as elections don't work for them. Moreover, the Tatmadaw (Myanmar's Defense Services) has cited their concerns over voting irregularities, which is a new concerning development in civil-military relations.<sup>3</sup> A landslide victory for a national party means super-majoritarian rule, weak checks-and-balances, and politically disincentive for political engagement by ethnic political parties. Together, these developments present further challenges for the peace process.

Although the Myanmar government claims the peace process is a "home-grown" effort, the increasingly assertive role of China and the escalation of armed conflicts in geo-strategically significant regions – such as Rakhine and Shan states – suggests that the stakeholders in the peace process do not have the capacity and perhaps even political will to pull it off on their own. This is a critical time for international actors to re-examine their roles, navigate, or even reset the nature, approach, and scope of their support for the peace process in Myanmar.

This research paper aims to map out and assess the roles of key international actors in Myanmar's peace process. It also documents the impact of past international involvement in the process, analyzes possibilities for international actors to help revive or even reset the stalled peace process, and offers recommendations for where and how international support can be more effective in reaching its intended goals.

This paper also recommends a reconceptualization of the peace process as a "joint-venture", rather than "home-grown". The aim of this approach is to allow for international involvement in terms of normative contributions such as prevention of genocide and promotion of human rights, peace architecture construction, and peace aid.

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1 Citing security concerns, the Union Election Commission canceled elections in 15 entire townships in Rakhine and Shan states and in part of 42 townships in Karen, Mon, Shan, Rakhine, Chin states and Bago region, covering 1.5 million population from 675 wards and village-tracts. Refugees located in border areas, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh could not participate in the elections.

2 The classification of ethnic population is a sensitive and controversial issue in Myanmar, as the government doesn't release disaggregate data from the 2014 National Census. The data is taken from Pon Yate Ethnic Population Dashboard. Retrieved from <https://www.ponyate.org/ethnic-population-dashboard-740399e7fbclid=IwAR1BkWL7rq6HoJHHYjEVjYsZHrrBcdP8H3k4VsQz9nPK7fuc-qEYrj5cErg>

3 Zin, M. (November 23, 2020). Myanmar Still Loves Aung San Suu Kyi, but Not for the Reasons You Think. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/23/opinion/myanmar-election.html>

**ACRONYM**

AA	Arakan Army (Armed wing of the United League of Arakan)
AGIPP	Alliance for Gender Inclusion in the Peace Process
ASEAN	Association of South-East Asian Nations
BGF	Border Guard Forces
BIMSTEC	Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CDNH	Centre for Diversity and National Harmony
CMEC	China-Myanmar Economic Corridor
CMI	Crisis Management Initiative, Finland.
CPCS	Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, Cambodia.
CPB	Communist Party of Burma
CPR	Centre for Peace and Reconciliation
EAOs	Ethnic Armed Organizations
EBA	Everything But Arms policy
EBO	Euro-Burma Office
EU	European Union
FOF	Forum of Federation
FPNCC	Federal Political Negotiation and Consultative Committee
HD	Humanitarian Dialogue
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICG	International Crisis Group
ICoE	Independent Commission of Enquiry (ICoE)
ICJ	International Court of Justice
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
IIFMM	Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar
INGOs	International Non-Governmental Organizations
JCB	Joint Coordination Body for Peace Process Funding
JMC	Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee
JPF	Joint Peace Fund
KIO	Kachin Independence Organization
KNPP	Karenni National Progressive Party
KNU	Karen National Union
MIPS	Myanmar Institute for Peace and Security
MPC	Myanmar Peace Center
MPSI	Myanmar Peace Supportive Initiative
NCA	Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement
NDAA	National Democratic Alliance Army
NLD	National League for Democracy
NMSP	New Mon State Party
NPA	Norwegian People's Aid
NRPC	National Reconciliation and Peace Council
NSCN- K	National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang
PC	Peace Commission
PI	Pyidaungsu Institute

PSF	Paung Sie Facility
PSG	Peace Support Group
RCSS	Restoration Council of the Shan State
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SLORC	State Law and Order Restoration Council
SPDC	State Peace and Development Council
TNLA	Ta'ang National Liberation Army
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UPC	Union Peace Conference
UPDJC	Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee
USDP	Union Solidarity and Development Party
USIP	United State Institute of Peace
UWSA	United Wa State Army

## INTRODUCTION

A variety of international actors has supported the peace process since its inception in August 2011, when President Thein Sein, a former army general, launched a peace initiative after the general election in 2010 that brought the formation of a quasi-civilian government.

International actors have played important supporting roles in the peace process. For example, dignitaries and diplomats, including former United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, witnessed the signing ceremony for the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) in 2015.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, many international parties have provided support through process facilitation, technical assistance, workshops, trainings, exposure trips, providing models of negotiation, expert consultations, and humanitarian assistance, sending special envoys, assisting crisis management and ceasefire monitoring, providing direct funding to the peace process, and finally strengthening communities, especially in conflict-affected areas.

A new round of peace process began in Myanmar in 2011 with the negotiation of fifteen bilateral ceasefire agreements between the government and EAOs over a two-year period. These agreements laid the groundwork for negotiation of a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), signed by eight EAOs and the government in October 2015. After the National League for Democracy's (NLD) victory in the 2015 general elections, two more EAOs became the NCA signatories, raising the number of EAO participants to ten. However, several key EAOs in the Northeastern regions of Myanmar refused to sign the NCA.

Local stakeholders participating in the peace process have regularly insisted that the process must be "home-grown", which effectively limits the role and scope of international parties in mediations and negotiations. Local stakeholders, such as the Myanmar government, Tatmadaw and EAOs participating in the negotiations also came to agree to pool their resources and agenda in a kind of "joint-venture" to achieve their goals, and the participants are solely responsible for its success or failure. Therefore, international actors find virtually no role in "mediation" other than supporting local actors' initiative. The reasons behind the characterization of the peace process as "home-grown" and a "joint-venture" could be because of national pride in having a locally crafted process and the Myanmar government's deep-seated concern about foreign infringement of the country's sovereignty. Additionally, the military and the ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), which is made up of former high-ranking military officers, were wary of foreign involvement in the peace process. Geopolitics is another issue. For instance, the roles for the United States and United Kingdom are

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4 UN Special Envoy for Myanmar, Mr. Vijay Nambiar signed as an international witness. Other international witnesses are high ranking diplomatic officials including Mr. Sun Guoxiang (China), Mr. Ajit Kumar Doval (India), Mr. Sasakawa Yohei (Japan), Mr. Apichat Chinwanno (Thailand), and Mr. Roland Kobia (EU).

limited in the peace process, but China, India and ASEAN are allowed as neighbors. Such concerns led the USDP and Tatmadaw not to allow foreign mediation. But during the time of President U Thein Sein, United Nations and Chinese Special Envoys were afforded “observer” status in peace negotiations.

Soon after the NCA signing in October 2015, President Thein Sein launched the Union Peace Conference (UPC) to provide a forum for political dialogue aimed at addressing the root-causes of civil conflict. After the NLD-led government came to power in March 2016, the de facto government leader – State Councilor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi – rebranded the political dialogue as 21<sup>st</sup> Century Panglong Conference (UPC-21CPC), referring to back the Panglong conference in 1947 between the leaders of Burma proper and ethnic frontier areas to stay together as a union, prior to country’s independence. Meetings of the UPC-21CPC were held in August-September 2016, May 2017, July 2018, and August 2020, during which agreement were reached on seventy-one political principles. This agreement, christened, the “Union Accord”, was meant to serve as the basic principles for amending the 2008 Constitution with the goal of building a democratic federal union.

After years, the peace process has lost its steam – it can neither be considered inclusive nor has it resolved the deeply rooted causes of Burma’s civil war. Moreover, uninterrupted fighting and renewed violence has intensified in recent years, especially in Rakhine State and in Northeastern Myanmar, bordering with China.

Although Myanmar maintains a home-grown approach to the peace process, the country has opened up to international involvement significantly since the political transition in 2010 and 2011. By comparison, the previous military regime was an international pariah. Therefore, it is important to identify nature, scope, and role of the international support and approach of its actors in order to understand and analyze its impact.

One challenge in understanding the role of international actors in Myanmar’s peace process is the sheer multitude of the actors: China, India, and Japan, provide unilateral support both to the process itself and to individual participants in the process through special relationships, Western and Southeast Asian governments tend to participate through multilateral platforms – such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nation (ASEAN), the Myanmar Peace Support Initiative (MPSI), the Joint Peace Fund (JPF), and the Paung Sie Facility (PSF). There are also many non-state actors, such as international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and individual experts, providing various forms of support. Meanwhile, many of these actors often function in overlapping roles as both donors and indirect participants in the process.

In the peace process, many international actors respect and uphold “the

Myanmar government as the main driver" approach in the international actors accept that they will follow the agenda of government. When the government fails to lead the process, international support can be unproductive. On the other hand, China becomes a key player as the nature of peace process has shifted from engagement to more substantive negotiations.

Under the previous Thein Sein-led government (2012-2016), the key function of peace process was to build trust with EAOs and achieve a multilateral ceasefire agreement with them. Building the trust necessary for the NCA that was signed in October 2015 was not an easy task. The previous government's negotiating team engaged in more than 250 rounds of negotiation with EAOs over the course of 50 months. The NCA was the first ever comprehensive agreement on ceasefires, and holds the status of a binding accord as it was ratified by the Union parliament on December 8, 2015.<sup>5</sup> But after the NLD government came to power, the main task of peace-building significantly shifted towards holding political dialogues with NCA signatories and reaching out to the EAOs who are not NCA signatories, particularly the groups based in areas of Myanmar near its border with China.

The EAOs, especially those in Northeastern Myanmar, have yet to engage in any ceasefires with the government and sporadic fighting continues between the military and several EAOs.<sup>6</sup> One of the bold moves by members of "Northern Alliance" was their attack of four strategic locations at points on the highway to China, including Myanmar military's Defence Services Technological Academy (DSTA) in Pyin Oo Lwin, a military garrison town close to Mandalay, in August 2019. The attack resulted in several deaths and a halt in border trade with China for a few days.<sup>7</sup> For that reason, the Myanmar government apparently relies more on China to exert influence on these EAOs. Over time, the peace process has become skewed, so that China's exerts greater influence, in contrast to claims about its "home-grown" agenda.

More importantly, the international community has called for the Myanmar government to hold accountable the persons involved in large-scale human rights abuses, particularly human rights abuses committed in 2017 against Rohingyas in Northern Rakhine State, which could constitute "genocide". A mass exodus of Rohingyas to Bangladesh took place. Steps taken by international actors in response to this crisis have an indirect bearing on the peace process. Notably, the legal proceedings about the involvement of Myanmar authorities in crimes against the Rohingyas initiated by the International Criminal Court (ICC), International Court of

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5 Myanmar Peace Monitor. (April 2019) "Deciphering Myanmar's Peace Process: A Reference Guide (2017-18)". Burma News International. p. 4.

6 Some EAOs in the North formed a military alliance, called "Northern Alliance" with four groups, namely the Arakan Army (AA), the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) (or Kokang forces) and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA).

7 *The Myanmar Times*. (August 15, 2019). "The Rebel Forces attack Military Defence Academy in Pyin Oo Lwin". Retrieved from <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/rebel-forces-attack-military-defence-academy-pyin-oo-lwin.html>

Justice (ICJ), and UN Fact Finding Mission have sent mixed messages to Myanmar. For instance, actions taken against Myanmar military commanders for their alleged involvement in large scale human rights violations in Rakhine State by Western countries, diplomatic pressure on the Myanmar government to hold people accountable for those abuses, and rescinding awards bestowed to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi have led the Myanmar government to shy away from engagement with the international community. Meanwhile, many local stakeholders consider the Rohingya crisis is not the part of the peace process and the legal actions taken against the authorities make exposed vulnerable to international criticism and make less enthusiastic to cooperate with international community at large.

## METHODOLOGY

This study draws on secondary sources and primary data collected from July to November 2019, again updated in October 2020. This includes publicly available information and interviews with key stakeholders involved in the peace process. A total of 14 interviews with government officials, the peace commission, leaders of EAOs, civil society organizations, and individual experts were conducted for this project. Additionally, there were two research trips to Mon and Karen states to gain local perspectives on the current peace process.

The COVID-19 pandemic created challenges to conduct some field research, which delayed the publication of this paper. The paper includes updates assessing the impact of recent developments regarding the COVID-19, geopolitical competition in Myanmar and surrounding areas, the fourth round of the UPC-21CPC, and the 2020 general elections.

## LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study examines the involvement of international actors in Myanmar's peace process with the aim of "preventing the resumption of armed conflict" and "promoting the consolidation of peace." Though other efforts the international community are crucial to Myanmar, such as assistance on democratization, the strengthening of state institutions, judicial and legislative reforms, this study does not analyze their linkages and impact on the peace process, due to time and resource limitations.

Another limitation is that it does not address the Rohingya crisis in Northern Rakhine State. The situation of Northern Rakhine is alarming. There were eruptions of extensive violence in 2013, 2016, and 2017, and a large refugee exodus in 2017 after large scale violence, which led the United Nations to form the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar (IIFMM)<sup>8</sup> in 2017. Lately, the Gambia, on behalf of

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8 UN Human Rights Council. (September 2019). Independent Fact Finding Mission on Myanmar. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/hrc/myanmarffm/pages/index.aspx>

Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) responded to the incident with a lawsuit filed against the Myanmar government in the ICJ and against responsible persons in the ICC for widespread violence in Myanmar. Yet, key dialogue parties in Myanmar's peace process are not prepared to include the Rohingya case as part of the peace process.

## MYANMAR PEACE PROCESS

A peace initiative for Myanmar, which led to the unprecedented national-level negotiations for a multilateral ceasefire for the first time in Myanmar's modern history, began in August 2011 after a general election in 2010 and reforms by the new administration.

Prior to that, Myanmar's military junta, known as the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), introduced a ceasefire scheme in 1989 after an ethnic Wa-led rebellion against the leadership of the Communist Party of Burma (CPB). The military junta claims to have reached ceasefire agreements with 14 ethnic armed groups and another 14 smaller ethnic forces.<sup>9</sup> The resumption of bilateral ceasefire negotiations in the aftermath of the political transition in 2011 was part of a longer process dating back to the first ceasefires in 1989. The three-decades-long process of ceasefires muddled through many ups and downs without any political resolution.

The scope of the first ceasefires, spearheaded by the Military Intelligence, was limited to the suspension of fighting and preserving the status quo – under this arrangement, EAOs retained administrative control of their territories. In exchange, the junta granted business concessions under the guise of border area development programs. Regarding political questions, the junta maintained that political dialogue would take place only after an elected civilian government came to power, noting that the military government was provisional. The previous ceasefire had resulted a military-to-military relationship (between the Tatmadaw and EAOs), military exclusive capitalism, and Wa and a few areas enjoying de facto autonomy.

But in 2009 April, before the general election, the military junta (by then the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC)) attempted to demobilize ethnic armed forces, demanding them to transform into Border Guard Forces (BGF) under the command of the Tatmadaw. In several instances, fighting erupted when ceasefire EAOs refused to comply with the request (Myanmar Peace Monitor, 2013, p. 4).<sup>10</sup>

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9 List of ceasefire agreements with the junta by January 2004. (November 2019.) [https://web.archive.org/web/20111218073438/http://irrawaddy.org/research\\_show.php?art\\_id=444#](https://web.archive.org/web/20111218073438/http://irrawaddy.org/research_show.php?art_id=444#)

10 Four of ethnic forces – namely the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army, the Kachin Defense Army (formerly the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the KIA), the New Democratic Army - Kachin (NDA-K), and the Pa-O National Organization/ Army (PNO/A), Karenni Nationalities People's Liberation Front (KNPLF) along with one faction of the MNDAA, – accepted the transition plan and transformed themselves into government allied militia. The 3<sup>rd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> battalions of SSA-North and Lasang Awng Wa splinter group of the KIA became People's Militia Forces, which did not involve direct control by the military.

The government formed after 2010 general elections made a new peace overture on August 18, 2011, which led to several new bilateral ceasefire agreements with EAOs and, later, the NCA on October 15, 2015 with eight ethnic armed organization and later two more EAOs joined. The NCA is a comprehensive agreement on ceasefires, which received consent from the government, the military, and ten EAOs. The agreement became a binding accord after its ratification by the Union parliament on December 8, 2015 (Myanmar Peace Monitor, 2019).

The government also held the first UPC in January 2016 as part of the NCA's measures for providing a forum for political dialogue intended to resolve the root-causes of the decades-long armed conflicts. A concern of the EAOs is that government may fail to commit to a political dialogue after the ceasefire agreement, as was the case after the first round of ceasefires under the military junta in 1990s, when there was no political dialogue. This situation runs contra to the NCA accord, which clearly states that a series of political dialogue will be held within sixty days of the agreement. During the NCA negotiation, the ethnic parties insisted that political dialogue be held after the ceasefire.

In 2015, the NLD won a landslide electoral victory. The party then formed a new government led by State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. She restructured the leadership and style of the peace process. The newly elected government formed the National Reconciliation and Peace Council (NRPC), which she chairs. The NRPC plays a leading role in the peace process. In doing so, she replaced most of the peace negotiators working for the Myanmar Peace Center (MPC).<sup>11</sup> The MPC was a semi-government service center led by former President Office Minister U Aung Min, which coordinated peace initiatives funded by governments and INGOs in support of the peace process and facilitated peace negotiation between the government and the EAOs. Aung San Suu Kyi has continued the process of political dialogue but rebranded it as the Union Peace Conference/21<sup>st</sup> Century Panglong (UPC-21CPC).

A key development in this new NLD-led phase of the peace process was the decision by two EAOs to join the NCA in February of 2017, bringing the number of EAOs participating in the NCA up to 'ten'. The UPC-21CPC has also produced seventy-one political agreements, known as the "Union Accords" Number I, II and III, which later received endorsement by the Union parliament.<sup>12</sup> Later, these accords are intended to serve as basic principles for amending the 2008 Constitution with the aim of building a democratic federal union. The government, the military and EAOs generally agree that a political approach is necessary to resolving the root-causes of civil war in Myanmar.

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11 The NRPC, chaired by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, coordinates the policy issues related to peace, while the Peace Commission (PC), established in July 2016 and chaired by Dr. Tin Myo Win, negotiates with the EAOs that are not-signatories to the NCA.

12 The Union Accord I contains thirty-seven agreements, which were approved during the second session of the UPC-21CPC in May 2017. Additionally, fourteen points that make up Part II of the Union Accord were drafted during the 3rd session of the UPC-21CPC in July 2018.

However, political dialogue has stalled since after third UPC-21CPC held in July 2018, as some key groups withdrew their participation. The peace conference then can resume in 2020, prior to the general elections. The EAOs need assurance from the government and Tatmadaw that the peace process would resume after the election whoever win. In August 2020, the 21<sup>st</sup> Panglong UPC was convened briefly with reduced participants and the agreed document in that peace conference includes three topics: (1) fifteen points of agreements on NCA implementation, (2) eight points for implementation of step-by-step processes and phase-by-phase implementations in the post-2020, and (3) four points of agreements on principle guidelines for establishment of a Democracy Federal Union.<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless, the increasingly assertive role of China in Myanmar's peace process and the never abating escalation of conflicts after eight years of "home-grown" peace efforts suggests that the stakeholders in Myanmar conflicts do not have the capability and perhaps even political will to end the conflict on their own. As Myanmar emerged out the 2020 general elections, it is critical for international actors to re-examine their roles, navigate or even reset nature, approach and scope of their support for the peace process in Myanmar.

## DESIGN, CHALLENGES, AND LEGITIMACY OF MYANMAR PEACE PROCESS

The NCA is currently the only guide and reference for the peace process and, nevertheless, it should be maintained despite hassles and frustration. One justification for maintain the NCA is that presently it serves as the key venue for negotiations involving the government, the military, EAOs, and political parties.

Initially, the peace process was "home-grown" and "joint-venture" processes. The government had started negotiating bi-lateral ceasefire agreements with respective State/Region government and EAOs operating in the areas, which resulted in more than a dozen of bi-lateral ceasefire agreements. The government formed the Union-level Peace Central Committee (UPCC) to oversee the peace process and it was chaired by President U Thein Sein. UPCC was formed with other key leaders, such as the Commander in Chief of the Defense Services and the speakers of the two Parliaments. Underneath the central committee, a Union-level Peace Working Committee (UPWC) was formed and chaired by Vice-President Sai Mauk Kham. There were 52 members in UPWC including Union ministers, State/Region chief ministers, parliament members, and regional military commanders. The Myanmar Peace Center (MPC), a semi-governmental agency operated as main negotiators as well as a body to collaborate with EAOs, civil society organizations, and

13 State Counsellor Office, Government of Myanmar. (August 20, 2020) "UPDJC Finalizes Part III of Union Accord to be Signed at 4th Session of 21st Panglong." <https://www.statecounsellor.gov.mm/en/node/2966>

international actors.<sup>14</sup> In 2013, sixteen EAOs formed the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordinating Team (NCCT), led by Nai Hong Sar, and initiated talks for a common text of a nationwide ceasefire agreement with the government.<sup>15</sup> After the NCA, the government and dialogue partners formed a Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee (UPDJC) to coordinate its implementation.

After the NLD's victory in 2015, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi restructured the leadership of the peace team. She took the position as the Chair for the NRPC and refashions the whole peace team. She formed the Peace Commission (PC) staffed by loyal officers to hold further peace negotiations. Notably, former President U Htin Kyaw (2016 - 2018) and current President U Win Myint (2018 - present) are absent from the peace process and the NRPC. Two of the most important people - the Commander in chief and deputy Commander in Chief were also passed over in staffing the NRPC.

The peace negotiation team is unproductive. The staffing of the peace leadership with personnel lacking appropriate skills indicates that the State Counsellor has fundamentally misread the whole peace process. This has slowed down the process. Since 2016, many stakeholders complain about the problems with a more centralized style of management, the difficulty in accessing government decision makers, and more formal engagement in meetings rather than trust building facilitation with the EAOs. Government peace institutions are weak and cannot respond to the massive challenges in the peace process.

As a mechanism of the NCA, there are three key agencies operates. They are: 1) Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee (UPDJC), 2) Joint Coordinating body for Implementing the NCA (JICM), and 3) Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC). As of December 2020, twenty meetings of UPDJC, eight meetings of JICM, and nineteen meetings of JMC were organized. Initially, it was widely appreciated that the State Counsellor showed enthusiasm for the peace process and made it a priority. But later she is found with the peace process without any proper strategy and tackling with a weak team. Moreover, her peace team is failed to equip with necessary subject-matter expertise, as the negotiation expanded to other critical issues dealing with the nation's federal structure and central-local relationship rather than a ceasefire. Those with experience and institutional memory previously working in the MPC were kicked out because of their relationship to previous government at a time when their insights had become more valuable.

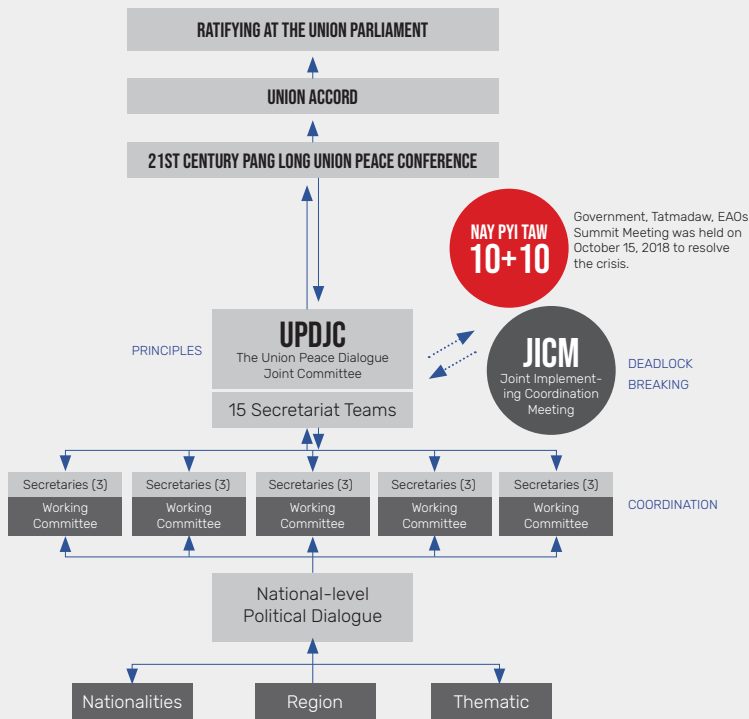
Major stakeholders complained that the centralization of the process

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14 Myanmar Peace Monitor. Retrieved from <https://www.mmpeacemonitor.org/government-peace-plan>

15 Myanmar Peace Monitor. Retrieved from <https://www.mmpeacemonitor.org/1661>  
Seventeen EAOs held a conference in Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) controlled area, Laiza on October 30 Oct - November 2, 2013. After the conference, ethnic leaders formed the NCCT to represent EAOs for negotiation with government peace team.

## Political Dialogue and the Role of JICM



Source : ISP-Myanmar Peace Desk

### ROLE OF THE JICM

The JICM is the most important meeting in peace process to implement agreed provisions of the NCA. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is head of the JICM representing the government, and deputy-Senior General Soe Win represents the Tatmadaw. In JICM meeting, delegates from the government, Hluttaws, NCA-signatories ethnic armed organizations can attend according to assigned numbers. It is recommended that the JICM meeting to be held in every quarter and emergency meeting can be organized as necessary.

**9** Since October 2015 to February 2018, there are seven JICM meetings held.

#### JICM MEETING 7 ROUNDS

1. October 16, 2015 (Under USDP administration)
2. November 18, 2015 (Under USDP administration)
3. December 16, 2015 (Under USDP administration)
4. August 24, 2016 (Under USDP administration)
5. April 4, 2017 (Under NLD administration)
6. November 27, 2017 (Under NLD administration)
7. February 28, 2018 (Under NLD administration)
8. January 8, 2020 (Under NLD administration)
9. August 13, 2020 (Under NLD administration)

**5**

Union Peace Conference

**71**

Agreed points signed in Union Accords

produced a trust deficit, which inhibited collaboration. Despite the centralized execution of the process, a weak commitment by the Chairperson of the NRPC, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, to participate in key events negatively affected the process. Analysts have noted that she does not attend the dialogue meetings at the UPC-21CPC for their full duration. Instead, she often delivers the opening speech and leaves. She often failed to listen the speeches and discussions raided by leaders of EAOs and others. She limits her role to mandatory matters such as signing documents and giving keynote speeches. She has missed five meetings of the UPDJC – the main coordinating body – from 13<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> meeting. She then showed up in later meetings, but in the 20<sup>th</sup> UPDJC meeting, she just deliver an opening speech, in advance to the last UPC/21CPC in 2020.

Tension among key stakeholders have emerged since the 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting of the UPC-21CPC on July 11 to 16, 2018. After a meeting of top officials from the government, Tatmadaw, and NCA-signatory EAOs as part of a “Ten + Ten summit”<sup>16</sup> in October 2018. At the end of the summit meeting, leaders of the EAOs, such as the Karen National Union (KNU) and the Restoration Council of the Shan State (RCSS), withdrew their formal cooperation in the process, and the RCSS leaders announced their suspension of participation in the JMC -- directed track of ceasefire monitoring. Reports

16 A leadership summit held in 2018 after the third anniversary of the NCA was intended to be a forum for negotiating parties to iron out disagreements. Leaders of the ten NCA signatory EAOs met with ten officials from the government, parliament, and the military. Instead of frank and open discussion, the official position issued by the leaders contributed to further misunderstandings and a suspension of the peace process. The Karen National Union (KNU) announced the temporary suspension of its participation in negotiations. And later, the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS) withdrew from its discussion with the Joint Monitoring Commission (JMC), an organization tasked with monitoring ceasefire violations.

suggest that the atmosphere of the meeting was neither frank nor friendly. Leaders put forth statements outlining their positions which produced tensions and further misunderstandings. Additionally, the lack of prior consultations hindered the meeting from making progress.

Despite the initial view that the peace process was a joint venture, it can no longer be maintained that process is inclusive. Previously, it is assumed that if some parties do not come up to the negotiating table, the process cannot allow to work in unilateral fashion. The government or Tatmadaw alone cannot proceed the peace process. After the formation of the NRPC, members of EAOs, political parties, and civil society organizations agree that the process has become more centralized. The government barred participation by political parties that failed to gain a parliamentary seat in the 2015 elections from participating in the peace dialogue. The government also asked civil society organizations to limit their involvement by joining a parallel session rather their direct participation in peace conferences.

EAO members have complained about the slow and inadequate implementation of the NCA and the almost absence of 'interim arrangements' – which acknowledge some degree of EAOs' governance functions, administrative authority and service delivery (particularly on health and education systems in conflict affected areas) agreed upon in the NCA. Although contentious and problematic, the Tatmadaw views these arrangements as permitting a rival administration and offering exclusive control of territory to EAOs through which they can expand their popularity and their control of areas (South et al, 2019).

Although the UPC-21CPC has put forth seventy-one points that make up the 'Union Accords', EAOs and ethnic political leaders have criticized them for being too general and ill-suited for establishing a democratic federal union. At the same time, important issues – particularly those related to collaborative security sector reform – have not yet been thoroughly discussed. The Tatmadaw takes the position that security sector reform will be partial and regionalized and that it is not necessary to restructure the whole army.

The NLD's priorities for legislation and other measures also raise concern about its commitment to federalism and ethnic equality. The NLD government's policies on many critical issue – such as national educational reform, ethnic language education, decentralization, the handling of Rakhine crisis, adopting laws (e.g. Vacant, Fallow and Virgin Land Management Law (2012, 2018))<sup>17</sup>, and the installation of General Aung San statues in ethnic states<sup>18</sup> – are not contributing to the

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17 The promulgation of such law makes ethnic population with well-founded fears that its implementation will facilitate the displacement of villagers from their ancestral lands and will weaken customary land tenure rights.

18 Gen. Aung San is the father of Aung San Suu Kyi, and many people accept him as the country's founding father. The NLD's initiative of building statues of Aung San in cities and towns throughout Myanmar in recent years has been counter-productive, which leads to displeasure among ethnic population and sometime outright opposition.

establishment of a federal union. Instead, these moves raise doubts about the political will of government leaders to promote ethnic equality and proposed federalism reforms.

For worse, at end of 2019, the NLD initiated a process for amending the constitution in parliament (Hluttaw), departing from the process through the negotiated agreements from Union Peace Conference to amend the constitution. But the NLD attempt of constitutional didn't fulfilled. The NLD initiative to constitutional reform fails to link with the achieved Union Accords and other reforms, such as local governance reform, decentralization, and broader democratization. The move also led to greater misunderstanding among the ethnic groups.

Many observers have noted that the government lacks leadership in the peace process. For this reason, the military exerts undue influence over many key issues. The leading bodies established by the NCA – such as the UPDJC and the JMC – are joint-ventures with members from both EAOs and the Tatmadaw. However, the Tatmadaw representatives dominate the decision-making process for these organizations, as the government allows greater composition of military officers in the key positions of the peace team. The Tatmadaw has also blocked efforts by EAOs and other ethnic political groups to meet to develop a common political framework and, in other cases, imposed restrictions on their meetings.<sup>19</sup> Far worse, the Myanmar government officially designated the Arakan Army (AA) as a terrorist organization on March 23, 2020, during the COVID-19 crisis.<sup>20</sup>

Temporary ceasefires can bring short-term relief from the day-to-day plights of war and can deescalate the level of violence significantly. Beyond that, it is possible that a temporary ceasefire could build trust among warring parties. Accordingly, this could lead towards a permanent peace. But for ceasefires in Myanmar, which first began in 1989, the participants have muddle through more than three decades and become 'protracted ceasefires'. They hold significant policy implications—such as preparation of next war and recruitment, extracting 'taxes' and smuggling of precious stones including jade, timber, illicit drugs, and weapons for their survival, which leads to war economy and making Myanmar a fragile state. (Aung Naing Oo, 2019). And a recent International Crisis Group report estimated that in Shan State alone the drug economy was worth USD 40 billion annually.<sup>21</sup>

In other cases, an interesting paradox is that while EAOs have entered into ceasefires with the government, military clashes and inter-communal

19 Reportedly, the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS) and Arakan Liberation Party (ALP) were blocked from holding national-level political consultation meetings in their respective areas by the military. A Shan ethnic meeting in Chiang Mai was also prohibited through diplomatic censure to Thailand.

20 Thet Nai and Rikar Hussein, (March 24, 2020). More Violence Feared as Myanmar Names Arakan Army a Terrorist Organization. VOA News. Retrieved from <https://www.voanews.com/extremism-watch/more-violence-feared-myanmar-names-arakan-army-terrorist-organization>

21 International Crisis Group. (January 8, 2019). Fire and Ice: Conflict and Drugs in Myanmar's Shan State. Asia Report No. 299. Retrieved from <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/myanmar/299-fire-and-ice-conflict-and-drugs-myanmars-shan-state>

backlashes have increased among ethnic armed groups. For instance, fighting erupted between area expanding forces of the RCSS and TNLA, the Arakan Army (AA) has encroached into communities in Chin State, ethnic tension between the KIA and Shan-Ni communities in Kachin State and recent clashes between the Karen (Karen) BGF forces and New Mon State Party (NMSP) have taken place. These inter-communal or inter-ethnic armed groups fighting certainly indicates that reconciliation efforts need to be not only vertical (between the state and communities), but also horizontal (between different ethnic and religious communities).

Several instances have damaging the trust among the ceasefire parties. Even after signing the NCA, the Tatmadaw occupied the headquarters of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang (KSCN-K) in January-February 2019. In December 2019, an army unit occupied a camp of the New Mon State Party (NMSP), which signed the NCA in 2018. Recently, the military attempted to build a strategic road in an area controlled by the KNU. The KNU and local population oppose the road project, but the military has insisted it is for developmental purposes. Later tensions led to skirmishes and the death of a Tatmadaw battalion commander from a landmine explosion.

Meanwhile, it is found the life tolls of the conflict is not decreasing, but intensifying, which loses incentive to keep the signatory of EAOs in the process and let alone to bring non-signatory EAOs to join on board. According to one estimate, in 2019, "at least 1,083 fighting occurred between the Tatmadaw and EAOs and between 934 and 1,711 combatants were killed during armed incidents across the nation. Between 800 and 1,500 combatants died during fighting between the Arakan Army (AA) and state security forces, while 80 to 120 died during fighting between the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and state security forces." Of the 151 civilians who lost their lives as a direct result of armed conflict in 2019, the majority were killed in these two conflicts.<sup>22</sup>

Moreover, Commander-in-Chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing stated in a speech that he wanted to complete the peace process by 2020, which apparently suggested a timeline for the non-signatory EAOs to conclude a ceasefire. But later in the speech, he clarified that this was just a wish. This mixed messaging creates uncertainty and fuels suspicions among stakeholders about the inclusiveness of the peace process.<sup>23</sup>

EAOs' leaders have felt that many of their proposals are watered down or simply ignored in the Union Peace Conferences. There are many innovative ideas for the new Union, but they are not acknowledged. The

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22 Myanmar Institute for Peace and Security. (July 2020). "Annual Peace and Security Review 2020". p.12. Retrieved from Annual Peace & Security Review 2020 - Myanmar Institute for Peace and Security (mips-mm.org)

23 Senior General Min Aung Hlaing's Speech at at Retreat of Government and NCA Signatory Ethnic Armed Organizations at third anniversary of signing Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement-NCA. (October 16, 2020). Retrieved from <https://www.seniorgeneralminaunghlaing.com.mm/en/9638/opening-speech-delivered-commander-chief-defence-services-senior-general-min-aung-hlaing-retreat-government-nca-signatory-ethnic-armed-organizations-third-anniversary-signing/>

legitimacy of the whole peace process is now at risk. Many stakeholders, including the government and Tatmadaw consider a thorough review of the NCA as well as the peace process itself. After five years of the NCA and nine years of bilateral ceasefire agreements, the EAOs and ethnic political parties have demanded a 'credible commitment' to peace and federalism from the government and the military. The government-led peace agencies focus on the continuation of the peace negotiation process, but the current agreements are not executed effectively. Some stakeholders have criticized the NCA for becoming a trap rather than helping to build peace. In response to government delayed execution, ethnic parties, including EAOs, have sought "assurance mechanisms" to prolong ceasefire and reaching to long lasting peace.

After the NCA signing in 2015, many EAOs feel that they have been divided into two types of groups: signatory and non-signatory EAOs, as the process can no longer be considered inclusive. Moreover, some EAOs – such as the United Wa State Army (UWSA) and the National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA) – may not be interested in joining the NCA, as they already enjoy de facto autonomy and self-rule. The UWSA, and the main leader of the Federal Peace Negotiation and Consultative Committee (FPNCC), showed up development of the region and military might in '30th anniversary event of peace' with Myanmar central government. Later leaders of Arakan Army (AA) made assertion that their aspiration is similar to 'Wa' model, a confederation state.

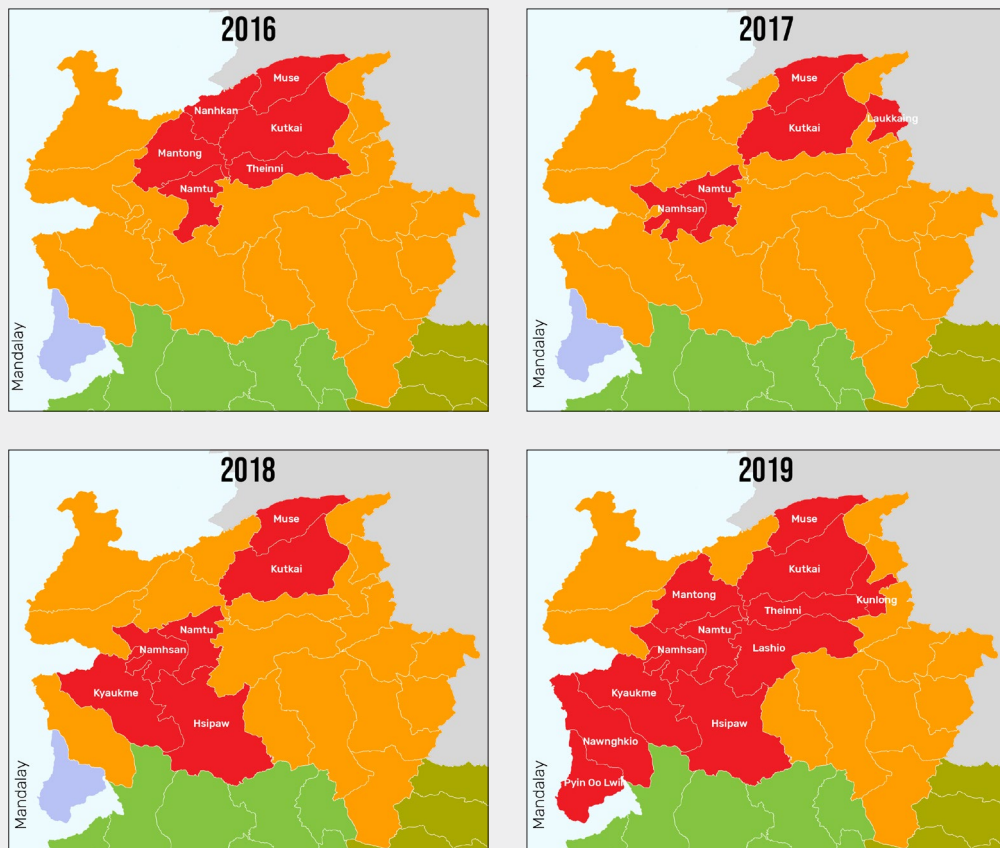
Three groups from Northern Alliance attacked Myanmar military's Defence Services Technological Academy (DSTA) in Pyin Oo Lwin, a military garrison town close to Mandalay in August 2019 and obstructed highway trading to China. Later, Chinese officials exerted pressure against the three ethnic groups. Chinese Special Envoy met with the FPNCC members, including the three groups from Northern Alliance in Kunming, Yunnan province of China and asked to cease fighting. Chinese ambassador to Myanmar met with Myanmar C-in-C in Nay Pyi Taw. As a result, it is observed the battles are moving inward of the country, Kye (2019) discussed in her article posted in ISP-Myanmar China Desk website.<sup>24</sup>

In 2019, the NRPC imposed restrictions on EAOs receiving development assistance from UN agencies and INGOs without prior approval. The Myanmar government explained that the move was aimed to improve overall aid coordination. But the shift sowed confusion among international aid agencies and raised ethnic groups' concerns about a violation of the "joint-venture" principle. Many aid agencies proposed that aid flow directly to ethnic health providers by suggesting that the restriction imposed upon humanitarian assistance to EAOs should be relaxed during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>25</sup> Meanwhile, many international actors consider

24 Kye, K. (September 25, 2019). Myanmar Conflict Tends to Avoid China's Interest Red Line. (in Burmese). Retrieved from [https://ispmyanmar.chinadesk.com/dialogue/china-peace-myanmar-war/?fbclid=IwAR2\\_Gl5TaY\\_Ql\\_1RckFJlaWHkiSGCnN-0Kc4DJfkJjvowV5lpZD\\_X0yQjrM](https://ispmyanmar.chinadesk.com/dialogue/china-peace-myanmar-war/?fbclid=IwAR2_Gl5TaY_Ql_1RckFJlaWHkiSGCnN-0Kc4DJfkJjvowV5lpZD_X0yQjrM)

25 International Crisis Group. (May 19, 2020). Conflict, Health Cooperation and Covid-19 in Myanmar. p.10. Retrieved from <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/myanmar/b161-conflict-health-cooperation-and-covid-19-myanmar>

## Clashes of northern Shan state (2016-2019)



Source : Local News agencies

the Myanmar government as “the main driver” of the peace process. However, the rationale for ‘state centrality’ should be reviewed, as the government has demonstrated incompetent leadership and also failed to build a respectful partnership with other stakeholders. Among these are EAOs and international donors supporting peace, development and even the provision of essential services to local communities.

### *External Actors to War and Peace*

In a study of the role of international actor in internal conflicts, Stephen Stedman (1999: p. 5) notes that “Almost every internal war has an external element. Some effects are purposive; external actors aid and abet internal factions and governments. In addition, governments and rebels need arms, ammunitions, sanctuary, and supply routes.”

In the case of Myanmar, conflict in Myanmar broke out by ideological conflict and ethnic groups calling for greater autonomy just after its independence. But successive Myanmar governments blame the causes of so-called “multi-colored insurrection” by divide-rule policy of former

colonial rulers and later by foreign conspiracy. Later in 1950s, defeated Chinese nationalist troops of Kuomintang (KMT) based in Shan State and attempted several unsuccessful invasions to Communist China, which also complicated the ethnic politics of Shan State, and Myanmar generally, major power had supported weapons and funding to the KMT forces and the KMT forces had started lucrative business of opium trade in the region.<sup>26</sup>

In late 1960s, the Chinese government supported a communist insurgency in the country as part of an ideologically motivated alliance and ended in the late 1970s. It was the heyday of Communist Party of Burma (CPB) as which launched a major political and military offensives against the central government, from the strongholds based at the Sino-Myanmar border. China then shifted to supporting Myanmar's military junta in the 1990s by selling them with arms and by providing political support that involved defending Myanmar's poor human rights record at the United Nations. Presently, China appears to have taken a more assertive role in its efforts to broker peace in the restive areas of northeastern Myanmar.

Similarly, Thailand pursued a buffer zone policy as part of its defense policy aimed to mitigate threats from its traditional rival Myanmar as well as communist insurgency in the Indochina region during the Cold War. Thailand tacitly permitted EAOs from Myanmar to access Thailand for shelter and securing supplies. In the 1990s, Thailand replaced its buffer zone approach by supporting economic zones in its border region. It may be hasty to conclude that these two countries are 'bad neighbors' but sharing a border with a great power, like China, may be casting disruptive influence on a small country. India adopts "Act East policy" to advance its interest in the region, but it seems limited in Myanmar, with little initiative and mostly focusing on security at its border with Myanmar.

Geopolitics could be another reason for war and peace of a country, as good or bad neighbor could play differently upon a local conflict of it. Many EAOs were previously active in areas adjacent to the Thai-Myanmar border, when Manerplaw – the headquarters of the Karen National Union (KNU) – served as a center for Myanmar's democratic and ethnic opposition movement. In 1990s, the border situation changed. At present, almost all EAOs operating on Myanmar's border with Thailand, except for the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), are NCA signatories. By contrast, the EAOs in areas bordering with China continue to fight with the central government, despite China's concerns about conflict in areas nears its border and its vested interest in stability for economic investments.

The successive governments of Myanmar, both military and civilian, have launched several peace initiatives—almost without any involvement of

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26 Later the KMT forces were evacuated to Taiwan, after the Myanmar government submitted a formal complaint to the United Nations in March 1953. The KMT crisis was an event of having a significant impact on Myanmar's history.

international actors. Their limited participation likely reflects that earlier conflicts in Myanmar were low-intensity and the Cold War system restricted the UN from peace-building activities. Additionally, Myanmar officials feared foreign intervention and often have a mindset in which foreigners are to blame for the country's chronic problems. A report by the International Crisis Group (ICG) notes that "during four decades of military rule, Myanmar's leaders have grown increasingly inward-looking and alienated. They are driven by an obsession with national sovereignty to seek almost total autonomy from international influences" (ICG 2001: p. i).

Until recently, Myanmar was widely considered a hermit state. The isolationist foreign policy of the military government restricted international aid and encountered international condemnation for its human rights records and authoritarian practices. However, the situation changed dramatically after the political and economic transition in 2011.

Due to this opening, the international community managed to engage Myanmar and expand its roles through the provision of developmental aid as well as involvement in the peace process. Of course, the nature of its involvement remains to be facilitative, financial and technically supportive.

### *International Approaches for Peace-Building*

Internationally, the notion of peacebuilding is not new. External assistance for post-war rebuilding dates back to the reconstruction of Western Europe and Japan after World War II. Since 1948, the United Nations has coordinated several peace-keeping operations. By 2009, the number of UN peacekeeping operations had reached 63 of which 13 are ongoing in 2020. These multilateral international efforts have prevented, mitigated, resolved, or managed internal conflicts in many countries.<sup>27</sup>

The term "peace-building" was introduced by Johan Galtung (1975) as "the creation of peacebuilding structures to promote sustainable peace by addressing 'root causes' of violent conflict and supporting indigenous capacities for peace management and conflict resolution" (Bijaoui, 2014, p. 4). In 1992, when UN Secretary General Boutros-Ghali authored *An Agenda for Peace*, peacebuilding entered mainstream policy discussions. Peacebuilding has become an important topic in the fields of international politics, peace and conflict research and development studies (Lederach, 1997, p. 20). *An Agenda for Peace* (Boutros-Ghali 1992) mentions that peacebuilding is an "action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict" and the proposal included four major areas of activity: preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peacekeeping and post-conflict peace building.

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27 UNSC statement. SC/ 13475. (August 29, 2018). United Nations Must Be 'Bold and Creative' in Using Mediation to Broker Peace, Secretary-General Tells Security Council. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/sc13475.doc.htm>

The framework suggests that “at different times and in diverse contexts a variety of sequential response mechanisms and functions are needed to promote the resolution of conflict and sustenance of peace.” (Lederach, 1997, p. 20) One other issue is U.N. role in mediation. Mediation is a growing industry within the U.N. as it is extremely cheaper than placing international peace-keeping forces in conflict-affected countries.

Later on, in a report by the UN Secretary-General on post-conflict peacebuilding published in 2009, Mr. Ban Ki-Moon extended the notion further by introducing a “problem-solving approach”. The report argues that “international assistance should mobilize existing capacities and not undermine them”. It recognized that “local and traditional authorities as well as civil society actors, including marginalized groups, have a role to play in bringing multiple voices to the table for early priority-setting and to broaden the sense of ownership around a common vision for the country’s future’, including women ‘as victims of conflict and drivers of recovery” (UNSG 2009). Moreover, a report on “post-conflict economic recovery” commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) proposes a “Build Back Better” approach that has come to dominate the peacebuilding industry (UNDP, 2008).

Drawing on these insights, the section below discusses and compares two different approaches to peacebuilding.

### *Liberal Peacebuilding Approach*

Liberal peace building ostensibly guides efforts of Western governments, the United Nations and many other international agencies. According to liberal peace theory, the probability of war between any two states is considerably low, the absence of war among liberal democracies across the world.<sup>28</sup>

With the goal of reducing and preventing conflicts, the liberal peacebuilding model has “sought to build state institutions that adhere to the key tenets of the ‘liberal peace’: democracy, the rule of law and human rights, and which provide the conditions for capitalist market economies to flourish” (Wallis. 2018 p. 83).

Edward Newman discusses liberal peacebuilding activities, which include a wide range of functions. Among these are “supporting ceasefires and peace processes; demobilization and disarmament of former combatants and reintegrating them into society<sup>29</sup>; stabilizing the economy; employment creation and economic development; repatriation (or resettlement) of refugees and internally displaced persons; responding to food insecur-

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28 Müller, Harald; Wolff, Jonas (2004). "Dyadic Democratic Peace Strikes Back" . Paper Prepared for Presentation at the 5<sup>th</sup> Pan-European International Relations Conference the Hague, September 9-11, 2004.

29 Stakeholders in Myanmar acknowledge Security Sector Reform (SSR) and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) are key issues to the peace process, but they can't initiate dialogue on these subjects.

ity; responding to acute health concerns; strengthening law and order; promoting and facilitating democratic practices; strengthening institutions of justice and legislation; resuming and strengthening public service delivery; promoting human rights and reconciliation; addressing land reform claims; and sometimes constitutional drafting or amendments (Newman 2013, p. 312).

Nevertheless, some scholars have characterized the liberal peacebuilding model as “the top-down promotion of democracy, market-based economic reforms and a range of other institutions associated with ‘modern’ states as a driving force for building peace”. Additionally, the approach is noted for being “deeply affected by the overarching neoliberalism of corporate governance and development” (Pugh. 2013. p 15) and its implementation through. ‘strategic partnerships’ of UN, NATO, the EU and the World Bank “reinforces integrated, centralized and unaccountable bases of finance, firepower, knowledge and industry well beyond the reach of those most affected” (Newman 2013. p 312).

### *Economic Peacebuilding Approach*

Another approach to liberal peace building draws on an economic peace theory. According to Ilan (2014. p 4) the ‘economic peace theory’ is premised on the assumption that “economic interdependence promotes peace and prevents conflicts. Economic interdependence is conducive to peace because economic cooperation between private actors may generate national economic interest”.

A critical concern for Myanmar’s peace process is whether the government prefers a ‘development first, and peace later’ model as the current peace process is effectively stalled. China offers a development model with ‘China characteristic’ that fits with the government’s current approach as it offers substantial investments along the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC), which passes through conflict areas of Myanmar. Chinese investments could offer an alternative option for Myanmar government to pacify the border areas and to revitalize post-COVID-19 economic restoration by a substantial amount of spending in local infrastructure building.

If the CMEC project moves forward, economic development and its distributional effects are likely to present further complications to the peace process. Beijing may bid to gain influence upon the government through its diplomatic help in Rohingya crisis and larger business investment under CMEC scheme, while its influence upon the EAOs in Northeastern Myanmar allows China to hold sway in Sino-Myanmar relations.

But Kyee (2019) highlights the limits of the ‘development first approach’, noting that the CMEC will likely lead to further militarization in ethnic

areas and the accompanying land grabbing, forced relocation of communities, and impingements on local livelihood will deepen grievances. The infrastructure development projects under CMEC could also trigger more control of ethnic minorities living at the border areas by central government and worsening marginalization of ethnic minority.

ASEAN countries and regional powers, such as China, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand, signed a free trade pact, namely, Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) on November 15, 2020. The Free Trade Pact covers almost 30% of world population and worth of 30% of world GDP. The new 15 member free trade agreement that includes China and Myanmar could be possible to impact on already existing China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) and could transform the dynamic of conflict in Myanmar. It is possible conflict arising out new form of conflict for ethnic minority communities in Myanmar from these bilateral and international cooperation involving China.

By observation, however, Myanmar government seemingly shifts its focus from "liberal peace building model" to "economic peace model" in recent years, but it hasn't officially made clarification on such issues in regards to the peace process. For the moment, the World Bank proposed a USD 200 million "Peaceful and Prosperous Communities Project" (PPCP) in South-Eastern Myanmar, designed to improve basic infrastructure and increase economic opportunities for rural communities in conflict-affected areas of Myanmar.<sup>30</sup> The project is still in discussion with local partners, but local ethnic communities showed their concerns that the project may inflict more harm than good, as it will be implemented in conflict areas.

If Myanmar government selects bias to such economic peace approach, it is worrisome as players will be acting on their interest, by short-sightedness of temporary truce rather than sustainable peace, and the process will effectively lack the idea of building state institutions, strengthening of peace process architecture, and adherence of normative standards that are key to the tenets of the 'liberal peace'. Furthermore, it could be accompanied with human rights abuses, such as land grabbing, forced relocation of communities, and encroaching of local livelihoods. These could lead to different forms of conflict in ethnic areas.

Basically, the two different approaches to peace is so diverge. For instance, Chinese approach to Myanmar peace process appears to focus on attempts to influence and engage conflict parties, particularly the guerrillas, and create favorable conditions for its leverage while the international approach (i.e. Western donors) tends to focus on institutions building, strengthening peace architecture, and promoting global norms.

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30 World Bank. (December 2, 2019). Statement: "World Bank Response to KPSN Statement on Peaceful and Prosperous Communities Project". Retrieved from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/statement/2019/12/02/world-bank-response-to-kpsn-statement-on-peaceful-and-prosperous-communities-project>

## MAPPING INTERNATIONAL ACTORS

In the case of Myanmar, members of the international community have contributed significant support to advance Myanmar's reforms and its development. The focus of this study emphasizes their involvement in Myanmar's peace process with the aims of "preventing the resumption of armed conflict" and "promoting the consolidation of peace."

According to a report by the Asia Foundation (2018), funding by international actors for the peace process has continually expanded so that it reached US\$ 116 million in 2015. By November 2016, the amount of money pledged by the internationals had reached US\$ 272 million, of which US\$ 100 million had been disbursed. In a broader sense, international actors have also support democratization, the strengthening of state institutions, good governance, judicial and legislative reforms, and other programs important for Myanmar. These initiatives are beyond the scope of this study.

It is difficult to disaggregate international funding to Myanmar's peace process, as some goes to government agencies for official peace process and major funding goes to non-governmental sector. for instance, the Joint Coordinating Body for Peace Process Funding (JCB)'s 2017 February meeting decided the funding proposal to the NRPC was USD 2.5 million, USD 4.7 million to EAOs, USD 6.5 million to joint body like JMC. The JCB meeting also estimated to support some funding to national-level political dialogues. The other international funding goes to the INGOs. After the NLD government, it formed JCB on December 20, 2016, chaired by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi to manage funding for the peace process to be fair and to request local donations from local business community. The JCB formed with 8 representatives from the government and another 8 representatives from the EAOs. The funds for peace provided by international donors are dissected for four sectors: the Ceasefire Sector, the Negotiation and Dialogue Sector, the Peace Supporting Development Sector and Peace making process of the National Reconciliation and Peace Centre-NRPC Sector. For some reason, The JCB stopped after two meetings.<sup>31</sup>

International interventions in conflict-prone and post-conflict societies involve two main objectives – "preventing the resumption of armed conflict" and "promoting the consolidation of peace". These efforts involve a number of activities in the social, political and economic sectors, as well as building stability and security of a conflict-torn country. This section examines international actors in Myanmar's peace process and their roles and forms of support.

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31 *Global New Light of Myanmar*. (December 28, 2016). JCB for Peace Process Funding needs to ensure transparency, accountability, Retrieved from <https://www.gnlm.com.mm/jcb-for-peace-process-funding-needs-to-ensure-transparency-accountability/>

The section below lists key international actors and briefly describes their position in Myanmar. Some countries prefer unilateral involvement tailored to their interests, while other actors act through a multilateral platform.

### *United Nations*

The United Nations organs and agencies are widely associated with international peacebuilding efforts and international mediation. But the UN is less visible in Myanmar's peace process. Nevertheless, U.N. and international dignitaries and diplomats witnessed the signing ceremony of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement. U.N. Secretary General Mr. Ban Ki-Moon attended and delivered opening speech at the first UPC-21CPC in August 2016. One possible reason for the limited involvement by the UN is that the government of Myanmar assumes that it does not need international mediations, as it can manage its home-grown process. However, many key UN agencies play important supporting roles in the peace and other reform processes.

The UN appointed Mrs. Christine Schraner Burgener as a Special Envoy of the Secretary-General in April 2018.<sup>32</sup> But her efforts appear to be unpopular with the Myanmar government as she is critical of the treatment of Rohingyas in Northern Rakhine by the government and security forces. During the first phase of peace process under U Thein Sein, U.N. Special Envoy of Secretary General, Mr. Vijay Nambiar could involve in the process as an "observer" and Myanmar government appreciate positively to his efforts. The NLD government keeps different approach as it is facing more international pressure on Rakhine crisis.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) implements a wide range of projects, which are contributing to the peace process and reconciliation generally. Their projects support strengthening governance, improving, promoting sustainable peace, and encouraging inclusive growth, all inspired by the '2030 Agenda' and the UN's '17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)'. The UNDP, the Commissioner for Refugees, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Food and Agriculture Organization, the World Food Programme also provide humanitarian assistance not only to refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), but also to vulnerable communities. Additionally, UNDP assisted funding to JMC for two years.

UN Women and Norway cooperate to support the peace process through their implementation of 'UN Security Council Resolution 1325'. The resolution states that the promotion of roles for women in the peace process and security. The effort is based upon the premise that peace and security are more sustainable when women are equal partners in

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32 Previously, she served as the Swiss Confederation's Ambassador to Germany.

efforts to prevent violent conflict, to deliver relief and recovery efforts, and to forge a lasting peace.<sup>33</sup>

UN agencies generally monitor political developments in Myanmar, and the UN Security Council has held several briefings and meetings, especially on the plight of Rohingya refugees.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, in March 2017, the UN Human Rights Council established an Independent International Fact-Finding Mission (IIFMM)<sup>35</sup> to verify alleged human rights violations by Myanmar security forces, producing a report in September 2018.

When the last UPC-21CPC was organized in August 2020, it is noticed the three special envoy, including Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mrs. Christine Schraner Burgener, were not invited to observe the proceeding. The reason could be because COVID-19 pandemic and difficult mobility, but if she were visiting to Myanmar, she could be outspoken to other crucial issues, such as on country's human rights records and the plight of Rohingya refugees.

### *Association of Southeast Asian Nations*

ASEAN recognizes that Myanmar's peace process is home-grown. The organization plays a limited role, which reflects ASEAN's non-interference principle. Some ASEAN members, such as Thailand, have direct interests in Myanmar's peace process, particularly with regard to the issue of refugee resettlement. At present, there are at least 100,000 displaced persons from Myanmar in Thailand, many of whom have fled fighting. Indonesia and Malaysia also face the problems of refugees, mainly from Rohingya communities. But ASEAN members show restraint when dealing with the peace process in Myanmar.

The regional association has indicated its support for the peace process, by demonstrating plans for regional investment and economic integration. Among these proposed plans are new industrial zones along the Thai-Myanmar border and an ASEAN highway. Both are expected to create jobs and encourage economic growth in conflict affected regions. Moreover, ASEAN countries have experiences in conflict resolution. For example, Indonesia invited a Myanmar peace delegation to study the Acehese peace process. Indonesia and the Philippines government and armed forces also hosted study trips and workshops on how to manage political transitions, and resolving civil conflicts to EAOs leaders and Myanmar officials.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, Thailand assisted a modest amount of funding to JMC.

33 UN Women (Asia Pacific). (March 11, 2019). UN Women and Norway cooperate to support peace process in Myanmar through the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325. Retrieved from <http://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2019/04/un-women-and-norway-cooperate-to-support-peace-process-in-myanmar>

34 UN. Security Council Reports on Myanmar. Retrieved from <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/chronology/myanmar.php>

35 UN Human Rights Council. (September 2019). Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/hrc/myanmarffm/pages/index.aspx>

36 Vitikiotis, Michael. (August 8, 2017). Myanmar's peace process contributes to ASEAN stability. Retrieved from. <https://www.mmtimes.com/asean-focus/27160-myanmar-s-peace-process-contributes-to-asean-stability.html>;

With regard to the Rohingya crisis, countries keep different approaches. Thailand and Indonesia have supported through the construction of infrastructure in the under-developed Rakhine State, while others show support to Myanmar government's initiatives.

### *United States*

Generally, the United States supports a peaceful, prosperous, and democratic Myanmar (Burma) that respects the human rights of all its people. When US ambassador Scot Marciel met with students from Dagon University on March 26, 2019, he explained two components of US policy to Myanmar. The first is based on engagement with the broader Indo-Pacific region, which involves support for democracy, peace and prosperity in ASEAN countries. Secondly, the US acknowledges the strategic importance of Myanmar.<sup>37</sup>

For a time, the early successes in Myanmar's transition made it a poster child for US foreign policy during the Obama administration. President Barack Obama visited the country twice in 2012 and 2014, which constituted a vote of confidence for the political liberalization taking place in the country. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visit Myanmar in 2011. Then the US played a key role by supporting re-engagement with Myanmar. In 2016, the US no longer considered that the country faced a national emergency which had led to the imposition of economic and financial sanctions since 1997. But President Trump's administration has shown limited interest. The US describes its "Indo-Pacific Strategy" as "an ironclad and enduring commitment to" the ASEAN region, but it is unclear where Myanmar fits in this.

Since 2012, the US has provided over US\$ 1.5 billion in support for Myanmar's democratic transition and economic transformation. The assistance aims to advance the peace process, to improve the lives of millions (including assisting communities affected by violence), and to combat hate speech and communal violence (State Department, 2020 January).

In FY 2017 and FY 2018, according to a USAID report, about US\$ 158.6 million went to help address the humanitarian needs of refugees seeking shelter along the Thai-Myanmar border area and vulnerable communities in Rakhine, Chin, and Shan States (USAID. December 2017).

USAID has provided assistance for projects that support democratic transitions, the rule of law, economic growth, health and the resilience of vulnerable communities. With regard to peace building and national reconciliation, USAID has supported efforts to promote political dialogue,

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37 Oo, A. N. (June 4, 2019). "EAOs Should Separate Their Strategies on Ceasefires and Political Dialogue". Retrieved from <https://www.irrawaddy.com/opinion/guest-column/eaos-separate-strategies-ceasefires-political-dialogue.html>

raise general population's awareness on peace and conflict, and assist peace building by providing technical support for conflict mitigation and the peace process. USAID also promotes a constituency for peace by supporting the establishment of economic relations between ethnic and religious groups and between communities. It is also working to increase women's access to the peace process and their ability to take on leadership roles.<sup>38-39</sup>

Another important American institution is the US Institute of Peace (USIP), which supports research aimed to fill knowledge gaps regarding peace and conflict for the government, the military, EAOs, political parties, civil society, and other vital stakeholders. USIP also provides training aimed to enhance the facilitation, negotiation, and mediation skills of stakeholders in the peace process through a series of dialogues. USIP, a non-partisan organization, also supports efforts to transform and build harmony among different religions and groups through dialogue as a step for comprehensive peace.

Regardless of the strong support for democratization and peace by US institutions, the administration has usually taken an uncompromising position on human rights violations. A 2018 report by the US State Department on human rights practices sharply criticized the Myanmar government and its Defense Services for the mistreatment of Rohingya (US Department of State, 2018).<sup>40</sup> Since 2017, massive Rohingya exodus, the US determined that the actions by the military constituted 'ethnic cleansing' of Rohingya people and imposed targeted visa restrictions and financial sanctions for perpetrators. In December 2019, Commander-in-Chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and his deputy Vice-General Soe Win were added to the sanction lists. Prior to that, a US Senate Foreign Relation Committee unanimously voted in 2018 to approve a bill (The Senate Bill S. 2060) to impose targeted sanctions and travel restrictions on military leaders who committed atrocities against Rohingya (Myanmar Peace Monitor. 2019. p. 110).

During COVID-19 pandemic, U.S. has extended its assistance to Myanmar supporting for COVID-19 response to \$7.3 million since February, 2020. The USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance has provided \$3 million in humanitarian assistance for water and sanitation supplies including soap and handwashing stations, and additional water supplies to IDP camps.<sup>41</sup>

As an interesting case, Thomas Laszlo Vajda, a career diplomat with expertise on South and Central Asian affairs, is assigned to a new U.S.

38 The Irrawaddy. (March 26, 2019). A Conversation with US Ambassador Scot Marciel. Retrieved from <https://www.irrawaddy.com/in-person/interview/conversation-us-ambassador-scot-marciel.html>

39 USAID's website. Burma: Peace and Reconciliation. Retrieved from <https://www.usaid.gov/burma/our-work/peace-and-reconciliation>

40 US Department of State. (January 21, 2020). U.S. Relationship with Burma. Retrieved from <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-burma/>

41 US Department of State. Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.state.gov/country-reports-on-human-rights-practices-for-2018/>

ambassador to Myanmar along with other top diplomatic positions. Answering to Senate Committee on Foreign Relation's hearing, he said "U.S. engagement with Myanmar is "essential" in order to advance the Southeast Asian country's reforms and help defend the country against "malign influences". However, he didn't mention what exactly is "malign influences".<sup>42</sup> Many observers believe his appointment could be to counter China's influence.

Before that, it is unusual in July, the exchange of accusations between China and the U.S. embassies in Myanmar social media broke out in regards to the South China Sea. It is reported that recent a statement on Facebook from the U.S. Embassy in Yangon was part of an ASEAN-wide initiative about negative Chinese activity in that country to demonstrate the breadth of growing Chinese pressure on Southeast Asia. Nonetheless, only Chinese embassy in Yangon responded upon the statement and quite fiercely.

### *European Union*

The European Union (EU) is one of the few parties that both witnessed and signed the NCA. The organization adopted a Comprehensive Framework for its engagement with Myanmar in July 2013, which stated: "peace is a precondition for consolidating democracy, promoting development and protecting human rights." The EU views itself as having a responsibility to help and formulate a set of priorities for engagement with the Myanmar government (EU Council, 2013).

On June 20, 2016, the EU Council – a collective body of the heads of EU states and the chairpersons of the EU Council and EU Commission that defines the European Union's overall political direction and priorities – concluded a new strategy for Myanmar. The statement indicates that the EU will

"expand its engagement with all stakeholders, including the military, to support Myanmar/Burma and its new civilian government on its path to become a vibrant democracy with full respect for the rule of law and fundamental human rights. Building effective democratic institutions, including an independent and impartial judiciary and a strong civil society, and the promotion of good governance will require particular attention to achieve this objective" (EU Council, 2016).

Myanmar is reportedly the second largest recipient of bilateral development assistance in Asia with € 668 million in assistance from the EU, a "multiannual indicative allocation" of €688 million under the Multi-

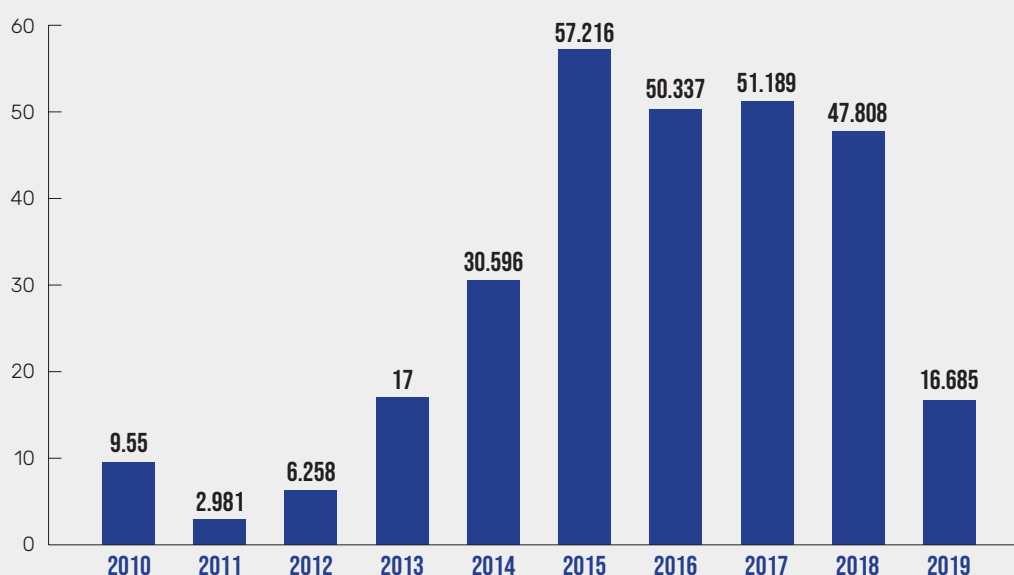
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42 U.S. Embassy in Burma. (April 28, 2020). The United States Provides \$7.3 million in Assistance to Respond to COVID-19 in Myanmar. Retrieved from <https://mm.usembassy.gov/the-united-states-provides-7-3-million-in-assistance-to-respond-to-covid-19-in-myanmar/>

annual Indicative Programme 2014-2020. In terms of support for the peace process, the EU's approach tends to be multilateral. From 2014 to 2020, the EU earmarked in the indicative allocation of € 103 million out of € 668 million for the peace purpose. As for other sectors, EU assistance for rural development, agriculture and food and nutrition security is €241 million) is earmarked for 2014-2020. The EU also appropriated €241 million for education projects. For governance, rule of law, state capacity building programs the EU has provided €96 million.<sup>43</sup>

From the allocation of € 103 million for peace-related efforts (2014-2020), the EU provided €8.7 million to the Myanmar Peace Centre during previous government and € 58 million to the EU Peace and Conflict resolution package for Myanmar, which aims to promote stability, peace, and bilateral development cooperation as well as for thematic programs. The EU also contributed €5.4 million to EAOs for projects focusing on reconciliation, conflict transformation, peacebuilding and implementation of ceasefires and civilian ceasefire monitoring. The funding also include assistance to local journalists on capacity training of ethical, conflict sensitive reporting, to facilitate understanding of Myanmar's conflicts and peace process.<sup>44</sup>

## Assistance on Conflict, Peace, and Security to Myanmar (Total Official Development Assistance from DAC (Development Assistance Committee) Countries) (USD million in 2018 Value)



Source: OECD Creditor Reporting System Aid Activity Database

43 Tha, K. P. (August 7, 2020). Nominee US Ambassador to Myanmar Hints at Need to Counter China's Influence in Senate Testimony. The Irrawaddy. Retrieved from <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/nominee-us-ambassador-myanmar-hints-need-counter-chinas-influence-senate-testimony.html>

44 EU Headquarters Homepage. (June 25, 2018). EU-Myanmar Relations. Retrieved from [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage\\_en/4004/EU-Myanmar%20relations](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/4004/EU-Myanmar%20relations)

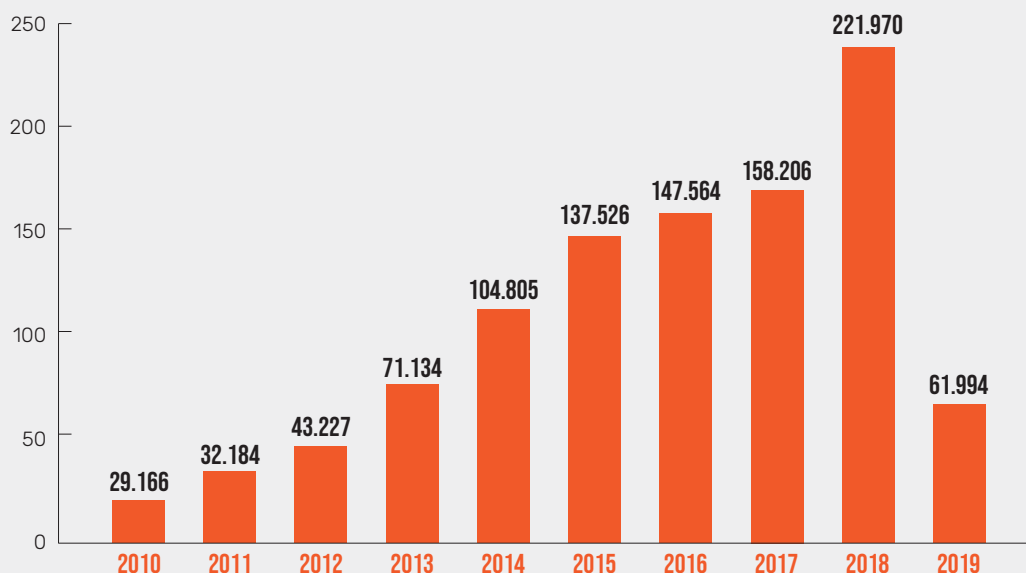
As for multilateral projects, the EU also provides financial assistance to the Joint Peace Fund (JPF), which is an organization funded by a consortium of donors that distributes grant to support Myanmar's peace process. The ten donors pool funds to offer an array of support to parties in the peace process. Among these are the provision of financial, technical and advisory assistance. Currently, the ten international donors that support the JPF are as follows: Australia, Canada, Denmark, the European Union, Finland, Italy, Norway, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States.<sup>45</sup> The JPF is set to run until at least 2021, and the EU has pledged to substantial support as much as US\$ 100 million.

In response to the Rohingya humanitarian crisis, the EU committed € 40 millions of assistance in May 2018, and, in December 2018, it mobilized an additional € 5 million to provide humanitarian emergency assistance to vulnerable communities in Rakhine.<sup>46</sup>

## India

India's engagement with the peace process reflects its concerns about border security and economic development of its Northeastern region

### Assistance on Government and Civil Society to Myanmar (Total) (USD million in 2018 Value)



Source: OECD Creditor Reporting System Aid Activity Database

45 The European Commission. (October 15, 2015). Myanmar: EU Support for the peace process. Retrieved from <https://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/myanmar-eu-support-peace-process>

46 Germany and Japan briefly joined to the JPF, later they left the consortium for policy conflict.

that borders Myanmar. During a state visit by Indian President Shri Ram Nath Kovind to Myanmar in December 2018, he stated that “peace and stability in Myanmar are equally in India’s own interest.”<sup>47</sup> India’s National Security Advisor to the Prime Minister also witnessed the signing ceremonies for the NCA in 2015 and 2018.

A spokesperson for India’s Ministry of External Affairs stated that comprehensive peace and national reconciliation in Myanmar will also be conducive for the peace and prosperity of India’s Northeastern states.<sup>48</sup> But India’s interest in the peace process may also extend to its broader regional agenda, namely India’s “Act East Policy,” which includes India-Myanmar-Thailand Asian Trilateral Highway, the Kaladan multi-modal project and cooperation in the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) (Harsh V Pant, 2017).<sup>49</sup>

During a state visit by India’s Prime Minister to Myanmar in September 2017, a joint statement was released by both countries mentioned that, “India condemned the recent terrorist attacks in northern Rakhine State, wherein several members of the Myanmar security forces lost their lives” and called for greater efforts to combat terrorism.<sup>50</sup>

India’s assistance to Myanmar is bilateral and limited. The Indian embassy in Yangon donated ten TATA vehicles to Myanmar’s Joint Monitoring Commission (JMC) in 2018. But India’s government has allowed trips by Myanmar EAO leaders to India to study the Mizo Accord (1986) in 2015 and other missions to study the Indian model of federalism.

In a recent speech by Myanmar’s Commander-in-Chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing on the 4<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the NCA, he stated the Tatmadaw made a wider study on federal systems noting that India federal system may be suitable for Myanmar.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, the Myanmar and India militaries maintain close ties and cooperation.

Amid of COVID-19 pandemic, in October 4–5, Chief of the Army Staff Gen. Manoj Naravane and Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla of India visited Myanmar, as a crucial outreach and India offers the possibility of building a petroleum refinery in an industrial zone near Yangon.<sup>52</sup> India visiting minister also assist a package of 3,000 vials of the antiviral Remdesivir,

47 The European Commission. (December 10, 2018). Additional EU aid reaches Bangladesh for the Rohingya crisis. Retrieved from [https://ec.europa.eu/echo/news/additional-eu-aid-reaches-bangladesh-rohingya-crisis\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/echo/news/additional-eu-aid-reaches-bangladesh-rohingya-crisis_en)

48 Myanmar President Office. “Myanmar-India Joint Statement issued on the occasion of the State Visit of His Excellency Shri Ram Nath Kovind, President of the Republic of India, to the Republic of the Union of Myanmar”. Retrieved from <http://www.president-office.gov.mm/en/?q=briefing-room/news/2018/12/14/id-9176>

49 Ministry of External Affairs. Government of India. (February 13, 2018). “Official Spokesperson’s response to a query on India’s presence at the signing of National Ceasefire Agreement in Myanmar”. Retrieved from <https://www.mea.gov.in/media-briefings.htm?dtl/29482/official+spokespersons+response+to+a+query+on+indias+presence+at+the+signing+of+national+ceasefire+agreement+in+myanmar>

50 BIMSTEC is a regional cooperation mechanism that includes Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Nepal and Bhutan as its members.

51 Minister of External Affairs, Government of India. India-Myanmar Joint Statement on the Occasion of the State Visit of Prime Minister of India to Myanmar. (September 6, 2017). Retrieved from [https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/28924/IndiaMyanmar\\_Joint\\_Statement\\_issued\\_on\\_the\\_occasion\\_of\\_the\\_State\\_Visit\\_of\\_Prime\\_Minister\\_of\\_India\\_to\\_Myanmar\\_September\\_57\\_2017](https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/28924/IndiaMyanmar_Joint_Statement_issued_on_the_occasion_of_the_State_Visit_of_Prime_Minister_of_India_to_Myanmar_September_57_2017)

52 *The Global New Light of Myanmar*. (October 29, 2019). “Speech delivered by C-in-C of Defence Services at 4<sup>th</sup> anniversary of NCA”. Retrieved from <http://www.myanmar.digitalnewspaper.com/en/speech-delivered-c-c-defence-services-4th-anniversary-nca>

shared talks on border security, in support of a safe, sustainable and speedy return of Rohingya refugees, operationalization of the crucial Sittwe port in Myanmar's Rakhine state by March 2021.<sup>53</sup> Many observers believe it is a counter push against Chinese influence in Myanmar.

## *China*

China witnessed the signing of the NCA in 2015 and appointed Mr. Sun Guoxiang, a senior diplomat holding the position of Special Envoy for Asian Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, to an additional position as Special Envoy for Myanmar's Peace Process in 2015.

China began active more in Myanmar's peace process not long after the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP-led government suspended the Myitsone Dam project in late 2011.

Since 2016, China has played an increasingly proactive role in the Rohingya crisis, and also significantly expanded its role in Myanmar. As a matter of fact, the EAOs bordering China are yet outside of the NCA. Given this situation, China is increasingly playing a critical role in Myanmar peace process. Though China offers a constructive role in Myanmar peace process, many concern Chinese active and undue influence on ethnic groups bordering it as proxies. It is worth noted that China may prefer functional stability in Myanmar so long as it secures its security and economic interests but it makes Myanmar dependent on Beijing for support including politics, economics, diplomatic and security. Myanmar's vulnerable situation of internal politics and Western diplomatic pressure by the Rohingya crisis give Beijing geopolitical and economic advantages vis-à-vis India, Japan and the Western countries. At the same time, China seems more assertive with its mega-projects, associated under the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC).

When it comes to Kachin State, China is very keen to maintain its exclusive influence over the local political and military situation there. Chinese officials have stymied plans by the Kachin Independence Organization to invite international witnesses to the peace process. Also, several EAOs operating in Northern Myanmar – such as the United Wa State Army (UWSA), the Restoration Council of the Shan State (RCSS), and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) – have openly called for China's involvement in their negotiations with the Myanmar government.

## *China Fund and support*

Recently, on November 8, 2019, the Chinese government gave US\$ 1 million to help fund the peace process during a visit by Special Envoy Mr.

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53 Prashar, S. (October 6, 2020). To Counter China, India Offers Myanmar a \$6Bn Oil Refinery", The Times of India. Retrieved from <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/india-looks-to-build-6-billion-refinery-in-energy-rich-myanmar/articleshow/78499837.cms>

Sun Guoxiang. The Chinese assistance will be spread out across several projects with US\$ 400,000 allocated to the Myanmar National Reconciliation and Peace Centre NRPC and US\$ 300,000 slated for both the PC and the JMC. This is reportedly China's fourth round of donation to Myanmar's peace process.<sup>54</sup>

In August 2016, China provided US\$ 3 million to support the peace process through a UN channel.<sup>55</sup> In December 2017, the Chinese provided US\$ 500,000 to the JMC program.<sup>56</sup> And on December 20, 2017, China donated US\$ 1 million to the NRPC. In terms of vehicle donations, the Chinese embassy in Yangon donated 10 cars to the JMC in 2018 and 5 additional cars to the Peace Commission in 2019.<sup>57</sup>

It is obvious that at first China donated through UN organizations. But later on, China seems adopting a unilateral approach when providing assistance to the peace process. The reason going to unilateral approach is unidentified, but Chinese special envoy Sun Guoxing mentioned that his government is supporting the peace process in Myanmar as much as it can be based on the friendship between the two countries.<sup>58</sup> However, it is seemingly China seems more confident of their role in the peace process, as most of the fighting are occurred with ethnic armed groups bordering with China and it wants to play more assertive with own initiatives. Additionally, another possible reason could be China wants exerting more influence in the process, as it keeps vested interest in large investments under the CMEC. One thing that is clear is that the Chinese Special Envoy is very active. So are the Chinese ambassadors in Myanmar peace process.

### *Infringement on Myanmar sovereignty*

Chinese authorities have openly stated their opposition to the internationalization of the armed conflicts in areas of Myanmar near its border. According to a report by the Stimson Center, during peace negotiation in 2013, the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) called for the involvement of international actors as monitors/negotiators/guarantors, but China's Special Envoy Ambassador Wang Yingfan strongly opposed this proposal.<sup>59</sup>

In the Stimson report, Yun Sen quotes a Chinese analyst, "For Washington to seek to play any role in a region right on Chinese border is a grave

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- 54 Roy, S. (October 6, 2020). "India gives Myanmar Remdesivir drug, talks security along border", The India Express. Retrieved from <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-gives-myanmar-remdesivir-drug-talks-security-along-border-6704437/>
- 55 *The Irrawaddy*. (November 8, 2019). China Gives \$1 Million to Myanmar for Peace Process. Retrieved from <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/china-gives-1-million-myanmar-peace-process.html>
- 56 *TIN in the News*. (August 25, 2016). China provide support for the Myanmar peace process. Retrieved from <https://www.internationaltin.org/china-provide-support-for-the-myanmar-peace-process/>
- 57 NRPC. (December 2017). Chinese government donates USD 500,000 to JMC-U. Retrieved from <http://www.nrpc.gov.mm/en/node/145> and Myanmar Times, December 20, 2019. China gives \$1 million for peace process <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/china-gives-1-million-peace-process.html>
- 58 *Xinhua*. (May 3, 2019). China Donates Vehicles to Myanmar for Peace Undertaking. Retrieved from [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-05/03/c\\_138031822.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-05/03/c_138031822.htm)
- 59 Htwe, Z. Z. (November 8, 2019). China gives \$1 Million to Myanmar for Peace Process. The Irrawaddy Online. Retrieved from <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/china-gives-1-million-myanmar-peace-process.html>

aggravation of the US encirclement of China to meddle with affairs with direct impact over Chinese national security" (Yun Sen, 2014, p. 10). Moreover, when the Chinese ambassador openly warned Kachin political parties' leaders in 2018 that when "the West" enters Kachin State there will be more problems.<sup>60</sup> In several news reports, China has openly opposed any role by Western nations and Japan as observers in peace initiatives involving the EAOs operating in areas close to China's borders as well as their receipt of assistance from these countries.<sup>61</sup>

In one case, Chinese authority provided leaders of EAOs with air transport to Nay Pyi Taw so that they could observe the 2<sup>nd</sup> UPC- 21CPC in May 2017. Some stakeholders in Myanmar's peace process have suggested that Chinese involvement in the peace process might constitute an infringement on Myanmar's sovereignty. But Chinese leaders have denied any interference in the internal affairs of Myanmar.

An interesting development is China has been constructing a fence in 2,000 Km long border with Myanmar.<sup>62</sup> The wall is constructing without informing Myanmar authorities and for that reason, Myanmar has been complaining against it. China told it is built to protect COVID-19 infections and illegal crossing of people and goods. The high-tech wall is reportedly built until 659 Kilometers.

### *Degree of Chinese influence on the EAOs*

Mostly, the EAOs in Northeast Myanmar have indicated their support for China's involvement in the peace process, which differs from the position held by EAOs in Southeast Myanmar. The Federal Political Negotiation and Consultative Committee (FNPCC), a powerful, political alliance of EAOs in Northern and Eastern Myanmar, usually invites Chinese involvement in the peace process (Inkey, 2018). The Arakan Army (AA), based its headquarters in the KIO-controlled which maintains close ties with other EAOs in northern Myanmar also views China as a key broker between the Myanmar government and the EAOs in the North. In return, most of Northern and Eastern EAOs have issued statements that welcome China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and have promised not to obstruct Chinese investments in Myanmar.

The degree of Chinese influence on the EAOs could be misconstruing and overstating. During the visit by President Xi to Myanmar in early 2020, he rejected the accusation that China has supplied weapons to EAOs in Myanmar and made a promise to the country's military chief that the Chinese government will address the problem of arms smuggling from China to Myanmar.<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, there are possible personal ties, and

60 He was the Special Envoy before Mr. Sun Guoxiang.

61 *Radio Free Asia*. (December 31, 2018). Kachin Political Leaders Discuss Myanmar Peace, Dam Project with Chinese Ambassador. Retrieved from <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/kachin-political-leaders-discuss-myanmar-peace-12312018150823.html>

62 Sui-lee, W. (October 9, 2015). Myanmar official accuses China of meddling in rebel peace talks. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-myanmar-china/myanmar-official-accuses-china-of-meddling-in-rebel-peace-talks-idUSKCN0S22VT20151008>

63 Strangio, S. (December 17, 2020). China Building Massive Myanmar Border Wall: Reports, *The Diplomat*. Retrieved from <https://thediplomat.com/2020/12/china-building-massive-myanmar-border-wall-reports/>

ethnic and business links between local authorities in China border and EAOs from Myanmar. Many local Shan, Jingphaw, and Kokant ethnic officials operating at the local level government keep personal and ethnic ties with ethnic groups of Myanmar at the border and Chinese local authorities acknowledge leaders from ethnic controlled areas, such as Wa region and Mongla as de facto local leaders. Moreover, Chinese local government leaders operating areas adjacent to China's border with Myanmar sometimes act independently when engaging with Myanmar. (Kye, 2019).

Fingers are pointed to the Chinese arms inflow to Myanmar via Bangladesh in support of the Arakan army (AA). Given the increasing tempo of the fighting between the AA and Tatmadaw, Chinese have been accused of using AA as proxy to scuttle India's presence in Rakhine State.<sup>64</sup>

### *China's Leader visit during COVID-19 Pandemic and Vaccine Diplomacy*

Chinese Senior official Yang Jiechi, a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and director of the Office of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the CPC Central Committee visited Myanmar in early September, 2020 on the way to Spain and Greece. Many observers believe that Mr. Yang visit is to drive the implementation of key Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) infrastructure projects.<sup>65</sup> The Agreed China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) project proposes to build key infrastructure projects such as overland network of highways, railways, pipelines, and industrial zones to link China's Yunnan province to Myanmar's coast to India Ocean. On the trip, China announced a 200-million-yuan (approx. 30 million USD) grant for livelihoods of people in Rakhine State.<sup>66</sup> Mr. Yang also promised Myanmar will be in countries of priority sharing COVID-19 vaccine when it is developed.<sup>67</sup> The analysts claimed the move as "vaccine diplomacy" and the influence will shape post-COVID-19 diplomatic relation.

### *Japan*

Japan also was a witness to the signing of the NCA in 2015 and the Nippon Foundation, in collaboration with the Myanmar government and signatories EAOs, has provided humanitarian support for populations living in conflict-affected areas. The assistance includes both critical food and non-food supplies (e.g., medicine, mosquito nets, and solar lanterns). The Nippon Foundation has also provided support for infrastructure, such

64 Zaw, H. N. (January 20, 2020). Chinese President's claim that Beijing not arming EAOs met with skepticism in Myanmar, The Irrawaddy Online. Retrieved from <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/chinese-presidents-claim-beijing-not-arming-eaos-met-skepticism-myanmar.html>

65 The Irrawaddy. (July 3, 2020). Myanmar's Generals Aren't Happy With China—and It's No Longer a Secret. Editorial. Retrieved from <https://www.irrawaddy.com/opinion/editorial/myanmars-generals-arent-happy-china-no-longer-secret.html>

66 Strangio, S. (September 3, 2020). "China's Top Diplomat Checks in on Myanmar Projects", *The Diplomat*, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/09/chinas-top-diplomat-checks-in-on-myanmar-projects/>

67 The Irrawaddy. (September 9, 2020). "During High-Level Visit, China Takes Note of Myanmar's 'High Standards' on BRI Projects", Retrieved from <https://www.irrawaddy.com/opinion/analysis/high-level-visit-china-takes-note-myanmars-high-standards-bri-projects.html>

as homes, schools, and health centers since early 2016 (Myanmar Peace Monitor, 2019, pp. 104-105).

Japan tends to abstain from multilateral initiatives and instead promotes bilateral relations with Myanmar with an emphasis on developmental projects. The Japanese government also appointed Mr. Yohei Sasakawa, the Chairperson of the Nippon foundation, to the position of Special Envoy for Myanmar's peace process in 2013.<sup>68</sup> Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga stated that "this appointment was to facilitate the process of reconciliation between Myanmar's government and ethnic minorities."<sup>69</sup>

Japan's support for the Myanmar peace process is linked to its bigger agenda – maintaining peace and stability across the region under its Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy. Japan's Foreign Minister Mr. Toro Kono disclosed in an interview with *The Global New Light of Myanmar* that "attaining peace and national reconciliation in Myanmar will be extremely important for the peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region".<sup>70</sup>

According to an Asia Foundation report published in 2018, Japanese governmental assistance to the peace process includes funding for the Nippon Foundation that is committed to over US\$ 100 million for next five years.<sup>71</sup> In 2016, Japan pledged to contribute Japanese Yen 800 billion (US\$ 7.73 billion) for peace, reconciliation and economic development for the five years. However, the fund is primarily geared towards economic development.<sup>72</sup>

The Nippon Foundation's support for conflict-affected people in Myanmar started in 2014. This project has benefitted around half a million people from Shan State, Kayah State, Karen State, Mon State, Rakhine State, Chin State, Sagaing Region, Tanintharyi Region, and Bago Region.<sup>73</sup> Japan's support helps meet the short term needs of conflict affected communities, but it falls short in finding a long-term solution.

Additionally, Japan's Self-Defense Force maintains close defense ties with the Tatmadaw and the close ties between the Chairman of the Nippon Foundation and the Commander-in-Chief of the Tatmadaw likely assist this. On the other hand, because of its provision of humanitarian assistance to conflict-affected communities in Southern Myanmar, the

68 *CGTN News*. (September 2, 2020). "China vows to prioritize Myanmar in Sharing COVID 19 vaccine", Retrieved from <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-09-02/China-vows-to-prioritize-Myanmar-in-sharing-COVID-19-vaccine-TsEetlqmAw/index.html>

69 Profile of Mr. Yohei Sasakawa. The official title of the Special Envoy is "Special Envoy of the Government of Japan for National Reconciliation in the Republic of Myanmar". retrieved from <https://www.nippon-foundation.or.jp/en/who/message/profile>

70 The Nippon Foundation's Press Release, (February 20, 2013). "The Nippon Foundation Chairman Sasakawa Named Japanese Government's Special Envoy to Help Achieve Reconciliation in Myanmar", Retrieved from <https://www.newswire.ca/news-releases/the-nippon-foundation-chairman-sasakawa-named-japanese-governments-special-envoy-to-help-achieve-reconciliation-in-myanmar-511972361.html>

71 *The Global New Light of Myanmar*. (January 13, 2019). "Japan will support the peace building efforts in Myanmar to the best of its abilities: Mr. Toro Kono", Retrieved from <https://www.gnlm.com.mm/japan-will-support-peace-building-efforts-myanmar-best-abilities-mr-toro-kono/>

72 Carr, T. (2018). *Supporting the Transition: Understanding Aid to Myanmar Since 2011*. The Asia Foundation.

73 *The Global New Light of Myanmar*. (2019, January 13). "Japan will support the peace building efforts in Myanmar to the best of its abilities: Mr. Toro Kono". Retrieved from <https://www.gnlm.com.mm/japan-will-support-peace-building-efforts-myanmar-best-abilities-mr-toro-kono/>

Nippon Foundation has already maintained build good relationship with EAOs in Southern Myanmar.

It is evident that Japan prefers bilateral arrangements to multilateral platforms for peace assistance, as it was a member of the Joint Peace Fund (JPF) and later left the JPF as having of its policy conflict.<sup>74</sup> The government of Japan also financially supported the construction of a building at MPC, (later renamed to NRPC) in 2013 which has become the main venue for countless peace and ceasefire negotiation.

During amid of COVID-19 pandemic, Japanese Foreign Minister Motegi Toshimitsu visited to Myanmar as a first higher-level diplomat, on August 24, 2020. He assured Japan will provide technical assistance in regards to response to virus fight donated some anti-viral Avigan tablets, and medical supply and equipment assistance equivalent to over US\$ 30 million to Myanmar. Japan also decided to provide an additional 30 billion yen in emergency budget support and 15 billion yen in Official Development Assistance (ODA) loans to support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Myanmar. Japan assured full support to Myanmar's own efforts to improve the situation in regards to the Rakhine crisis, including the Independent Commission of Enquiry (ICoE) and implementation of its recommendations.

In regards to the Myanmar peace process, Japanese foreign minister pledged to continue to support Myanmar's peace process, including to ethnic communities, together with leadership of Special Envoy Sasakawa Yohei. Japan dispatched an election observer mission led by Mr. Sasakawa, to be held on November 8.<sup>75</sup> Mr. Sasakawa has played a crucial facilitation role in Myanmar's peace process. His most critical success is the role he played in halting the hostilities between the Arakan Army (AA) and Tatmadaw in November 2020 using the context of the constituencies where the elections could not be held on November 8. Although local facilitators tried to work on a ceasefire, they failed but when Sasakawa intervened and played a shuttle diplomacy, the fighting was stopped.<sup>76</sup>

Japan and Myanmar also agreed to reopen borders to each other for residents as soon as early September.<sup>77</sup> Recently, Myanmar government and Japanese businessmen organized a "Myanmar-Japan investment dialogue" on economic recovery after the pandemic on July 29, 2020, with over 1,000 Japanese business persons in attendance through video conference. At the meeting, Myanmar Government unveiled two new major infrastructure projects, namely; West Yangon Industrial Park and

74 The Nippon Foundation. (March 2, 2016). The Nippon Foundation's Support for Conflict-Affected People in Myanmar. Retrieved from <https://www.nippon-foundation.or.jp/en/news/articles/2016/20160302-20990.html>

75 *The Myanmar Times*. (November 18, 2019). "The price of peace: Western governments pledge millions". Retrieved from <https://www.mmtimes.com/national-news/19664-the-price-of-peace-western-governments-pledge-millions.html>

76 Japan Foreign Ministry Website. (August 24, 2020). "Japan- Myanmar Relations: Foreign Minister Motegi Visits Myanmar". Retrieved from [https://www.mofa.go.jp/s\\_sa/sea1/page4e\\_001081.html#section1](https://www.mofa.go.jp/s_sa/sea1/page4e_001081.html#section1)

77 Strangio, S. (December 7, 2020). Ceasefire Raises Hopes of Elections in Myanmar's Rakhine State, The Diplomat. Retrieved from <https://thediplomat.com/2020/12/ceasefire-raises-hopes-of-elections-in-myanmars-rakhine-state/>

Special Economic Zone in Mon State.<sup>78</sup>

## *Norway*

Since 1991, Norway has actively supported democratization efforts in Myanmar. Presently, its approach is both unilateral through its NGOs as well as multilateral through other platforms. Myanmar is one of four countries in Asia receiving developmental assistance from Norway. Bilateral Norwegian development aid to Myanmar reached NOK 243 million (Approx. 28.45 million in terms of US\$ value) in 2018.<sup>79</sup>

Norway's support for Myanmar peace process is mostly on multilateral ground through the Joint Peace Fund, to Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee (JMC) through United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) managed project, and to the Paung Sie Facility (PSF) and UN Women which is focusing on role of women in the peace process, particularly for implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and related Resolutions.

The Norway's assistance also provides funding to local foundation, such as Mon National Education Committee, working for ethnic language education in Mon State and to Shalom Foundation, working for local peace support.

Some Norwegian INGO's intervention is particularly interesting to. Norwegian People's Aid (NPA), assisted a pilot program in some post-conflict areas for their recovery efforts. In Kyauk Kyi area in Bago Region, the NPA carried out the project in cooperation with local civil society organizations, providing displaced people with much-needed assistance – such as issuing national identity (ID) cards, conducting needs assessments, mine action, and other forms of humanitarian assistance.<sup>80</sup>

## *Other countries*

Other Nordic countries such as Sweden, Denmark and Finland have also provided technical and financial assistance to various organizations working on peace in Myanmar. Currently, CMI (Crisis Management Initiative, an institution founded by former President Martti Ahtissari of Finland) is an official international adviser to the technical secretariat of the JMC.

Korea also assisted a vehicle, generators and laptop computers to the JMC.

78 *Nikkei Asia*. (August 24, 2020). Japan and Myanmar to reopen borders to each other for residents.

Retrieved from <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Japan-and-Myanmar-to-reopen-borders-to-each-other-for-residents>

79 *The Global New Light of Myanmar*. (July 30, 2020). Myanmar-Japan Investment Dialogue on Economic Recovery After COVID-19 and New Investment Opportunities. Retrieved from <https://www.gnlm.com.mm/myanmar-japan-investment-dialogue-on-economic-recovery-after-covid-19-and-new-investment-opportunities/>

80 Royal Norwegian Embassy in Yangon. (March 3, 2017). Norway and Myanmar: Bilateral Relations.

Retrieved from <https://www.norway.no/en/myanmar/norway-myanmar/bilateral-relations/#BilateralRelations>

### *Multilateral Platform for Peace Support*

Generally, European countries offers support through multilateral platforms. In the peace process, the United Nations, the World Bank and two other consortiums are important actors.

### *Joint Peace Fund (JPF)* <sup>81</sup>

Apart from bilateral assistance to the peace process, international donors have also collaborated in supporting assistance through the JPF. Currently, there are ten international donors: Australia, Canada, Denmark, the European Union, Finland, Italy, Norway, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States.<sup>82</sup> Plans for the fund are for its operation until at least 2021. The JPF is the primary grant-giving agency for the peace process and works with a wide range of stakeholders on projects at all levels of society. The European Union has pledged as much as US\$ 100 million.

The JPF has offered financial, technical and advisory assistance to parties in the peace process. The JPF aims to build an enabling environment for peace. The JPF's stated goal is to provide neutral support to all sides. However, U.S. provides noticeably a few amounts of funding to this multilateral body and seems like buying a seat. Yet China shows no interest to join the JPF. Japan and Germany joined the JPF briefly, but left the consortium because of policy conflict.

### *The Paung Sie Facility (PSF)* <sup>83</sup>

The Peace Support Fund was established in March 2014 with support from the United Kingdom's Department for International Development, the Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Government of Sweden. The consortium has supported activities to strengthen the peace process and foster greater communal harmony. In early 2015, the PSF's focus shifted to projects that supported to intercommunal harmony and social cohesion. Later, the PSF changed its name to the Paung Sie Facility. 'Paung Sie' means cohesion or living and working together in harmony in Myanmar.

Total funding made available through the PSF is currently US\$ 6 million. The fund has indicated its willingness to accommodate additional donors. PSF provides funding to more than 260 organizations to build an environment more conducive to dialogue, tolerance, and create safer communities by supporting local, catalytic initiatives that enhance social cohesion in Myanmar.

81 Norwegian People's Aid. Retrieved from <https://www.npaid.org/News/News-archive/2013/Norwegian-People-s-Aid-Involvement-in-Myanmar-Peace-Process-The-KyaukKyi-Pilot-Project> <https://www.jointpeacefund.org/en>

82 Japan was a member of international donors group for Myanmar peace, Joint Peace Fund (JPF), later it resigned from JPF because of policy difference.

83 <http://www.paungsiefacility.org/home.html>

## *International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs)*

Normally International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) have engaged in peacebuilding activities through UN-lead peace efforts and other post-conflict countries and areas, but the case in Myanmar is very different to those. Among these INGOs, many are commonly seen in post-conflict peace-building efforts internationally. They are; CARE International, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, Saferworld, International Alert, Berghof Conflict Research, International Crisis Group, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Rescue Committee, Swiss Peace Center for Peacebuilding, World Vision International, Search for Common Ground, Médecins Sans Frontières, Oxfam, Save the Children, Folke Bernadotte Academy (Sweden), Norwegian and Danish demining NGOs, Hope and Humanitarian dialogue, and many others.

Several of these INGOs have also operating and implementing different projects in Myanmar. These include projects that have provided medical and humanitarian assistance, assisted displaced and vulnerable communities, facilitated community peacebuilding and reconciliation, supported local infrastructural reconstruction and encouraged the development of local civil society. Individual experts also contribute on an individual basis as well as with support from INGOs and academic institutions.

## **NATURE OF INTERNATIONAL SUPPORTS IN MYANMAR PEACE PROCESS**

### *No international mediation*

In many other conflict theatres, foreign mediation plays a central role in the course and conclusion of peace negotiations. Generally, UN agencies, regional organizations and international dignitaries have played the pivotal role of mediators.

But in Myanmar, the government and the military have taken the stance that there will be no foreign mediation. The reason for this position likely reflects their view that local actors are capable of addressing the issues and possibly by the traditional policy of “non-interference” to other country's affairs by ASEAN and which Myanmar holds since Non-aligned movement in 1955 Bandung principles. Local stakeholders have proudly reiterated that the peace process is “homegrown” and a “joint venture” since the beginning in 2012.

Apart from that, the Tatmadaw doesn't accept there is a civil war in Myanmar, but it holds a view that the conflict in the country is “low-intensity warfare” and “localized”. The war with EAOs is just a counter-insurgency campaign and not a widespread phenomenon of the country.

Additionally, government officials fear internationalization of conflict in Myanmar, which then invites foreign intervention. Many statements from Myanmar government officials and Tatmadaw have portrayed that foreigners are to blame for the country's chronic problems.

Nonetheless, the non-signatory EAOs in Northeastern Myanmar, particularly members of the FPNCC have occasionally called for China's deeper involvement – such as acting as a mediator – in the peace process.

### *Special Envoys*

Appointing a Special Envoy demonstrates the strategic interest that a country represents for another and assures that more time, energy, and resources will be used to leverage its diplomatic power to end a conflict or to gain a strategic position. Currently, the UN, China, and Japan appoint Special Envoy respectively, to work on peace process of Myanmar. But the mandate of UN Special Envoy can be furthermore, as she is also engaging on human rights and issues of Rohingya in Northern Rakhine. Neither the United States nor the European Union (EU) has appointed a Special Envoy to Myanmar.

### *Facilitation in the process*

The government and the Tatmadaw permit a role for international actors in facilitation, particularly facilitating the peace process. But their roles are limited. For example, the Chinese envoy and other Chinese authorities have played a role in convincing EAOs located near China's border with Myanmar to enter into dialogue with the government and to be a signatory of NCA. But these efforts are largely unproductive. Nonetheless, negotiations continue between the Peace Commission (PC) and the Northeastern EAOs.

In May 2017, Chinese authorities persuaded EAO leaders to travel by plane from China to Nay Pyi Taw to observe the second UPC-21CPC. Since then, China seems more assertive and proactive in Myanmar peace process. Other international agencies have also played roles in facilitating the peace process by inviting government officials, Tatmadaw officers and EAOs leaders to take study tours in other countries that have faced challenges related to conflict resolution. The sponsorship of study tours aims to create a space where the leaders can talk in an open and relaxed atmosphere.

Inter Mediate is a UK-based organization specializing in conflict mediation, which maintains close ties with the NLD government.<sup>84</sup> The State Councilor has occasionally invited delegates from Inter Mediate to attend consultations about the peace process. The group is founded and led by

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84 <http://www.inter-mediate.org/> The website for Inter mediate describes its mission as promoting and facilitating dialogue, providing support to peace process, operating back channel communications and offering training. The webpage does not mention any information related to Myanmar.

Jonathan Powell, who served as Prime Minister Tony Blair's Chief of Staff from 1997 to 2007. Intermediate has organized study tours for delegates from the government, Tatmadaw and EAOs in Northern Ireland, Colombia, Guatemala and South Africa.

The government of Switzerland has also invited government and ethnic leaders to Switzerland to study how federalism works. Recently, Finland's Crisis Management Initiative (CMI)<sup>85</sup> also invited delegates from key stakeholders working on the JMC to visit Finland and provided a venue for sharing their concerns. Critics claim that these organizations are burning tax payers' money in the name of supporting the "peace process".<sup>86</sup>

Some analysts and practitioners, however, see positive results from foreign supported initiatives. It is reported that the negotiators from the government and EAOs, political leaders, government bureaucrats, and civil society representatives can meet in a less tense and informal setting such as in Thailand, Nepal, South Africa, Switzerland, Germany, Norway, and Finland, while attending a conference or workshop. These initiatives could possibly contribute to trust building among parties. But many of attendants to those meeting said, the informal meeting results cannot be realized into practical actions, and dashed in paper reports while submitting to top decision-making leaders. This shows that such interactions are critical for the peace process and that the missing link is how the lessons from overseas and results from joint international travels can be communicated to the top leadership so that they can make right decisions.

### *Humanitarian assistance*

International governments, agencies, and INGOs have given assistance to refugees, IDPs, and conflict-affected communities. Until now, there are approximately 100,000 refugees in the camps at Thai-Burma border, but international funding to them is shrinking. Many international governments and agencies pay urgent attention to provide emergency support to Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh's camps, as it is in emergency and scale of their plight grab international attention.

According to United Nations Office for the coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), there are approximately "241,000 displaced people (77 per cent are women and children) remain in camps or camp-like situations in Kachin, Karen, Shan and Rakhine states." Among them, about 129,000 people in Rakhine, including those who were displaced as a result of the communal violence in 2012. Many displacements in Myanmar are prolong and extremely vulnerable to natural disasters and external shocks.<sup>87</sup> Many

85 <http://cmi.fi/>

86 Lintner, Bertil. (October 11, 2016). Burma's misguided peace process needs a fresh start. *The Irrawaddy*. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/opinion/commentary/burmas-misguided-peace-process-needs-a-fresh-start.html>

87 UN OCHA. About OCHA Myanmar. Retrieved from <https://www.unocha.org/myanmar/about-ocha-myanmar>

international humanitarian agencies are working to mitigate the vulnerability of IDPs and communities emerging from conflict.

In FY 2017 and FY 2018, according to a USAID report, about US\$ 158.6 million went to help address the humanitarian needs of refugees seeking shelter in the Thai-Myanmar border area and vulnerable communities in Rakhine, Chin, and Shan States (USAID, December 2017).

In response to the Rohingya humanitarian crisis, the EU committed € 40 million assistance in May 2018, and in December of 2018, it also mobilized an additional € 5 million to provide humanitarian emergency assistance to vulnerable communities in Kachin, Rakhine, and Shan States.<sup>88</sup>

The Japanese government has committed assistance to the peace process that includes funding of US\$ 100 million for next five year for the Nippon Foundation. In 2016, Japan pledged to contribute Yen 800 billion Yen (US\$ 7.73 Billion) for peace, reconciliation and economic development for the five years, but the major portion of the fund is aimed towards economic development.<sup>89</sup> The Nippon Foundation provided humanitarian support to populations in conflict-affected areas with critical food and non-food assistance (medicine, mosquito nets, and solar lanterns). The Nippon Foundation has also supported key infrastructure, such as homes, schools, health centers, etc. to communities since early 2016 (Myanmar Peace Monitor 2019, pp. 104-105).

The Chinese government is assisting to Myanmar peace process, including humanitarian assistance, but most of them go through official channel. Other international development agencies including UN are also providing emergency and livelihood assistance through various programs.

### *Technical assistance*

Foreign governments, INGOs and other agencies assist Myanmar's peace process through the offering of technical assistance, ranging from provisions of facilitation and negotiation skills, to training on federalism to conducting research to study nature, causes, prospects, and gap in the peace process, etc. Individual experts also provide technical assistance on an individual basis or through the support of their institutions. A broad category of technical assistance provision has taken place.

These include exposure study trips for local stakeholders in foreign countries, trainings and workshops on different topics, capacity building training, demining education, assistance from experts, and recommendations on matters involving the process, such as the

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88 European Commission. (December 10, 2018.) Additional EU aid reaches Bangladesh for the Rohingya crisis. [https://ec.europa.eu/echo/news/additional-eu-aid-reaches-bangladesh-rohingya-crisis\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/echo/news/additional-eu-aid-reaches-bangladesh-rohingya-crisis_en)

89 The Global New Light of Myanmar. (January 13, 2019). "Japan will support the peace building efforts in Myanmar to the best of its abilities: Mr. Toru Kono". Retrieved from <https://www.gnlm.com.mm/japan-will-support-peace-building-efforts-myanmar-best-abilities-mr-toru-kono/>

sequencing of steps and models for conflict resolution. Finally, assistance has included the creation of space for stakeholders to share their feelings, concerns and thoughts. Crisis Management Initiative (CMI) from Finland is currently working as official technical advisor to JMC.

Many organizations and groups provide technical assistance and expertise to the peace process in one way or another. Among these are the Euro-Burma Office (EBO)<sup>90</sup>, the Switzerland-based Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD)<sup>91</sup>, Swisspeace<sup>92</sup>, the Peace Support Group (PSG), and the Cambodia-based Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPCS)<sup>93</sup> and others. At the same time, some organizations support peace-building efforts through local institutions, such as U Thant House<sup>94</sup>, the Centre for Peace and Reconciliation (CPR)<sup>95</sup>, the Center for Diversity and National Harmony (CDNH)<sup>96</sup>, the Myanmar Institute for Peace and Security (MIPS)<sup>97</sup>, Pyidaungsu Institute (PI)<sup>98</sup>, Nyein (Shalom) Foundation<sup>99</sup> and Metta Development Foundation<sup>100</sup>.

Organizations, such as the US Institute of Peace (USIP), the Asia Foundation, the Joint Peace Fund (JPF), the Forum of Federations (FoF), Saferworld, and various academic institutions, have helped fill the knowledge gap on issues related to peacebuilding by producing innovative research and studying different aspect of peace development in Myanmar. Some institutions have provided dialogues for stakeholders to enhance their capacities for facilitation, negotiation, and mediation. Some agencies provide their expertise in policy negotiations and policy development. Some agencies – such as EBO – assist negotiation partners by providing liaison offices and communication facilities that facilitate better communication and access.

## *Funding*

Some international organizations provide direct funding to finance peace process-related activities. According to a report by the Asia Foundation, the international community has expanded funding for the peace and security sector since its beginning in 2011, reaching “US\$ 116 million in 2015. In November 2016, US\$ 272 million of commitments were open in the sector [the peace sector], of which US\$ 100 million had been disbursed” (Carr, 2018). These estimates exclude funding assistance from China, India and neighboring countries as it is difficult to verify data about their funding.

90 <http://www.euro-burma.eu/>

91 <https://www.hdcentre.org/>

92 <https://www.swisspeace.ch/>

93 <https://www.centrepeaceconflictstudies.org/>

94 <https://www.uthanthouse.org/>

95 <https://www.facebook.com/cprmyanmar/>

96 <https://www.cdnh.org/>

97 <http://mips-mm.org/>

98 <https://www.pyidaungsinstitute.org/>

99 <https://www.nyeinfoundation.org/>

100 <http://www.metta-myanmar.org/>

Many of international actors, such as the EU and member states supporting the JPF, distribute their funding as part of a multi-donor approach that employs multilateral platforms. But China, Japan, and even the US prefer unilateral approaches while funding peace related programs in Myanmar.

### *Crisis management*

Preventing the recurrence of violence is vital for the de-escalation of conflict as well as building sustainable peace. Preventive diplomacy is also an important role that international actors can support. The JMC is useful for achieving these goals. The JMC was formed in accordance with the guidelines of the NCA with the membership are from three groups: the Tatmadaw, EAOs and civil society organizations (CSOs).

The estimated international funding for the JMC during the period from 2016 to 2018 is roughly US\$ 23 million.<sup>101</sup> Later JBC re-estimate the JMC budget to USD 21 million. Finally the agreed budget for the JMC is USD 6.5 million, but the JMC could not spend the budget because of delayed implementation. During the last five year, the JMC has spent around USD 9 to 10 million and roughly around USD 2 million a year. The JMC budget for 2018-19 is reportedly spending USD 4.4 million and China, Norway, and other UN agencies provided funding to JMC.<sup>102</sup>

Nevertheless, a joint body is slow in action and unequal-power of CSOs in comparing with the Tatmadaw, EAOs makes them just a token member. Additionally, increasing tension between the parties after the 'Ten plus Ten Summit' in 2018 and RCSS decided to withdraw its cooperation from the JMC in November 2018 until December 2019. And there are military tension and standoff occasionally in Karen State, because the Tatmadaw is pursuing a strategic road passing through KNU's controlled areas.

Many international agencies have assisted joint monitoring efforts through direct funding, supplying vehicles, organizing study tours and providing technical expertise on the development of a ceasefire monitoring system. The JMC can perform well in information sharing, verification, reporting, and ceasefire monitoring. Nevertheless, the local networks are still weak to work on an early warning system-- which monitor and report if a case of tension arises in an area for earlier settlement, as the role of CSOs in the JMC is yet well acknowledged and not empowered enough. For 2018-2019, the JMC budget was US\$ 4.4 million with contributions from China, Norway and UN organizations.<sup>103</sup>

101 Aung, T. T. (February 25, 2016). Donors offer USD 75,000 lifeline to peace process. *Myanmar Times*.

Retrieved from <https://www.mmtimes.com/national-news/yanon/19164-donors-offer-us-75-000-lifeline-to-peace-process.html>

102 Ministry of Information, Government of Myanmar. (November 11, 2018). PRC donates peace fund to JMC, seeks signing NCA by northern EAOs. Retrieved from <https://www.moi.gov.mm/moi:eng/?q=news/11/11/2018/id-15550> JMC's 2017 budget was 6.5 million USD and the amount reduced to 4.4 million USD in 2018-19. Reduced by 2.1 million USD.

103 Ministry of Information, Government of Myanmar. (November 11, 2018). PRC donates peace fund to JMC, seeks signing NCA by northern EAOs. <https://www.moi.gov.mm/moi:eng/?q=news/11/11/2018/id-15550> JMC's 2017 budget was 6.5 million USD and the amount reduced to 4.4 million USD in 2018-19. Reduced by 2.1 million USD.

International agencies can provide many expertise including support to de-mining and demilitarization efforts as well. But in Myanmar, the programs yet to develop and local consensus on the de-mining issue has not yet 'ripened'.

### ***Strengthening communities, Social cohesion program and women empowerment***

Many international actors strive to build a harmonious society inclusive of different religions and ethnicities through dialogue and inter-faith activities as a part of a program preparing for a comprehensive peace. The Paung Sie Facility (PSF) is a multi-donor consortium supporting projects that aim to build an environment more conducive to dialogue and tolerance and to create safer communities by supporting local initiatives that enhance social cohesion. UN Women and several other women alliance groups also promote a greater leadership role for women in the peace process. Their efforts are in line with UN Security Council Resolution 1325, which follows the view that peace and security are "more sustainable when women are equal partners in the prevention of violent conflict, the delivery of relief and recovery efforts and in the forging of lasting peace."

The Alliance for Gender Inclusion in the Peace Process (AGIPP) is a group of organizations that run programs that support greater gender inclusivity in the peace process through international collaboration. Their activities involve strategic networking, capacity building, and efforts to change perceptions and encourage a greater role for women in public life. The alliance also calls for the implementation of guidelines that adhere to international standards and norms.<sup>104</sup>

In another example, Nyein (Shalom) Foundation, a local NGO, assisted by international donors, is working on an inter-linked strategy to stop violence, to build trust, to empower people through education programs and to develop an inclusive system as a means to promote the equality of marginalized people.

## **RECENT DEVELOPMENT AND MYANMAR'S PEACE PROCESS**

The COVID-19 pandemic presents an overwhelming threat to the world and Myanmar. The virus has contributed to further delays in the already stalled peace process. Despite the risks of infection, the Myanmar government, Tatmadaw, and signatory EAOs reconvened a meeting of the UPC-21CPC in August with reduced participants. The conference reached a few agreements about how to proceed after the 2020 election. Coordination among the government, the Tatmadaw, and EAOs coordinated for COVID-19 prevention, control, and treatment appears limited.

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104 <https://www.agipp.org/>

In response to the pandemic, the Myanmar government set up a coordination committee on April 17, 2020 to cooperate with EAOs on COVID-19 prevention, control and treatment. While the government has professed a “no one left behind” approach, the coordination committee’s actual mechanisms and its resource mobilization remain vague and unsettled.

A series of bilateral and multilateral meetings between the committee and signatory EAOs were held in May. But collaborative mechanisms for addressing substantive issues such as the reception of international aid and cash transfers to poor households were not addressed. Moreover, the committee’s cooperation with the Tatmadaw is still vague as the latter has undertaken its own parallel engagement with major EAOs – both signatory and non-signatory – for the provision of medical support.

The Commander-in-Chief and other senior Tatmadaw generals met EAO leaders including those from the UWSA, NDAA, KIA and KNU and provided them with assistance. Increasing engagement of this nature signals that it could lead to military-to-military relations that leaves pandemic emergency aid largely at their disposals, while depriving a role for civic groups.

The Myanmar government adopted COVID-19 Economic Relief Plan (CERP), later amended to the Myanmar Economic Recovery and Reform Plan (MERRP) in October 2020. But many local stakeholders and international actors have raised concerns regarding the lack of conflict sensitivity in the plan.

The response to the COVID-19 pandemic situation has also raised concerns about the interim arrangements and whether or not the terms of the NCA will hinder efforts to address the risks posed by the virus to vulnerable communities in conflict-affected regions. Generally, travel and logistics are restricted, and ethnic areas continue to face limited public health provision.

Collaboration between EAOs and the Tatmadaw/ the government under the NCA arrangement offers a potential trust-building opportunity that could open up a new space for all stakeholders to reimagine the peace process, redesign the peace architecture and reorient priorities towards human security goals. If the government does not handle good relationship with signatories EAOs, as well as non-signatories of the NCA during the pandemic, it risks the further erosion of trust between the state and non-state actors.

For instance, the KIA returned COVID-19 assistance given by Kachin State Government because the KIA viewed the latter’s intention as political manipulation.<sup>105</sup> A paper published by the Asia Foundation examined tensions between state and non-state actors from their efforts to enhance their political legitimacy by launching pandemic relief programs.

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105 Asia Foundation. (October, 2020). “How COVID-19 and Conflict Intersect in Kachin State”. COVID-19 and Conflict in Myanmar, Briefing Paper Series No. 2

Given the political competition among actors, collaboration between the parties has experienced difficulties, and relations have been tense.<sup>106</sup>

Amid the COVID-19 crisis, the opportunities have opened up not only for humanitarian assistance but also in ceasefire prospect. On May 9, 2020, the Tatmadaw announced a unilateral ceasefire from May 10 to August 31 with the state aim of effectively and rapidly carrying out the containment, prevention, and treatment of the virus and restoring eternal peace. The latter goal was an apparent response to the UN Secretary-General's call for ceasefire during the pandemic. Although the unilateral ceasefire excludes areas where the AA operates, as Myanmar government officially designated the AA as a terrorist organization on March 23, 2020 during the COVID-19 crisis.<sup>107</sup> However, senior military officials said that they would not object to the government's resumption of peace talks with the Northern Alliance members that includes the AA.<sup>108</sup> Nevertheless, Myanmar military officials held a meeting with AA officials in the Wa region in December 2020, after the general elections. An AA official told the *Irrawaddy* that the meeting was centered on "peace and election affairs and to ensure the bilateral ceasefire".<sup>109</sup>

The NLD's landslide electoral victory is a significant development as it the party is slated to preside over another five-year term. The NLD candidates won 920 out of 1,117 total seats in the local (state/regional) parliaments. As for the national level parliaments, the party won 82.36% of the seats. Ethnic political parties felling short of many people's expectations. The election results could lead to further ethnic tension and polarization, as ethnic identity politics are important issues and there was fierce competition among political parties in the elections. The Union Election Commission did not hold elections in several townships because of security reason.<sup>110</sup> Many ethnic political parties feel like they are operating on an uneven playing fields because of the first-past-the-post voting system. For instance, ethnic Karen represents 6.7% of Myanmar's total population, but Karen parties won only a seat (a candidate from Karen People Party). Different ethnic population makes 27.66% of the nation's population, but ethnic political parties can make only 9.9% of seats in 2020 general elections out of 664 representatives in Union parliament. The situation could lead to anti-system sentiment and ethnic tension.

Moreover, the Tatmadaw has raised concerns about voting irregularities, which is an unusual development in civil-military relations.<sup>111</sup> A landslide

106 *Ibid.*

107 Thet Nai and Rikar Hussein, (March 24, 2020). More Violence Feared as Myanmar Names Arakan Army a Terrorist Organization. *VOA News*. Retrieved from <https://www.voanews.com/extremism-watch/more-violence-feared-myanmar-names-arakan-army-terrorist-organization>

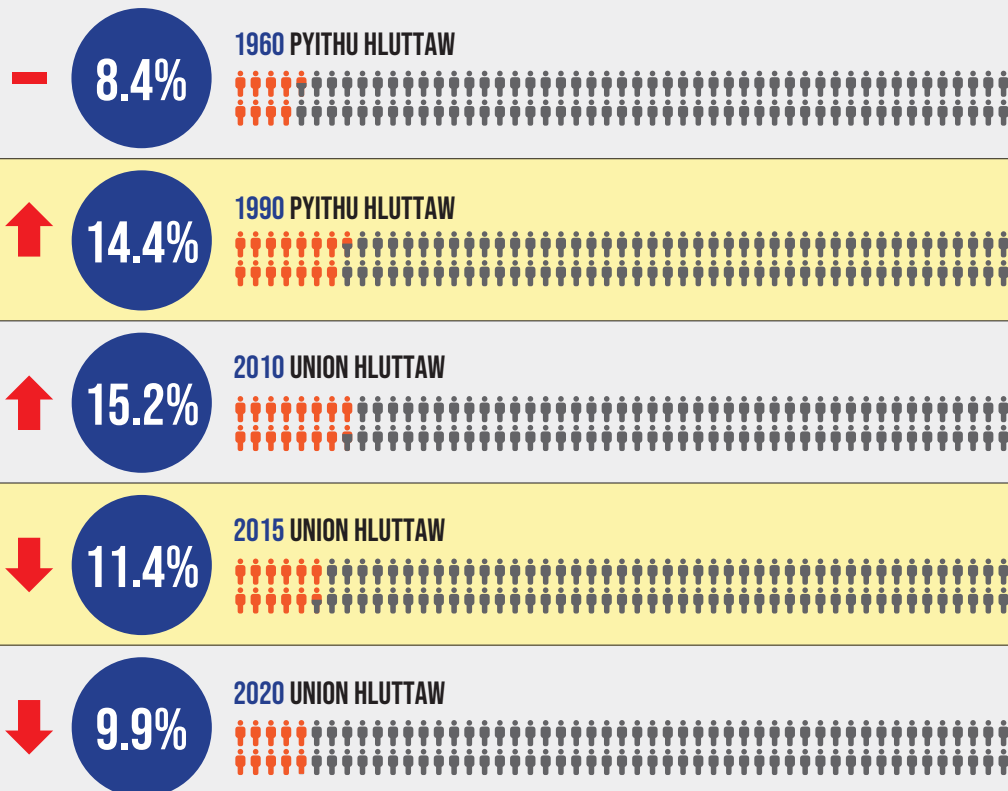
108 Personal interview with senior military official on May 20 and 22, 2020.

109 *The Irrawaddy*. (December 10, 2020). Myanmar Military Holds Meeting With Arakan Army Officials in Wa Region. Retrieved online from <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-military-holds-meeting-arakan-army-officials-wa-region.html>

110 The 2020 General elections cannot be held in 15 whole townships in Rakhine and Shan states for security reason. The Union Election Commission also cancelled elections in part of 42 townships in Karen, Mon, Shan, Rakhine, Chin states and Bago region, covering 1.5 million population from 675 wards and village-tracts. Refugees from borders, internal displaced persons (IDPs) and Rohingya refugees could not participate in the elections.

111 Zin, M. (November 23, 2020). Myanmar Still Loves Aung San Suu Kyi, but Not for the Reasons You Think, *The New York Times*, Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/23/opinion/myanmar-election.html>

## Percentage of Seats in National Parliament Occupied by Ethnic Political Parties in Elections since 1960s



Source 1) ISP-Myanmar 2) Transnational Institute. (September 2020). Myanmar: Ethnic Politics and 2020 General Election. Myanmar Policy Briefing No.23.

victory for a national party means super-majoritarian rule, weak checks-and-balances, and a political disincentive for ethnic political parties to engage in parliamentary politics. This development is unlikely to have a positive impact on the peace process.

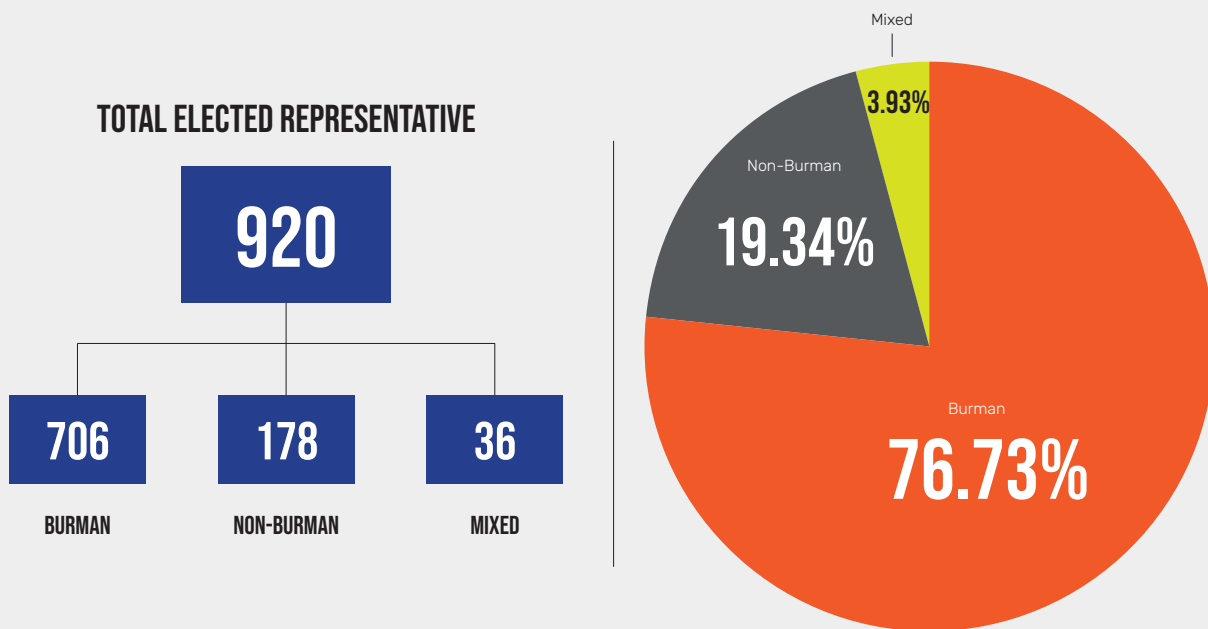
In regards of international assistance, some major countries have cut international aid because of recent economic downturn.<sup>112</sup> At the same time, many international INGOs have refocused their aid to support COVID-19 public health responses. A report from Development Initiatives stated that the crises in donor countries caused by the pandemic are likely to drive reductions in global aid levels at a time when global aid flows have seen very limited growth since 2016.<sup>113</sup>

A briefing by the Asia Foundation (August 2020) noted that “many international funders in Myanmar, who ordinarily target a variety of issues

112 *BBC News*. (July 23, 2020). Coronavirus: UK foreign aid spending cut by £2.9bn amid economic downturn Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-53508933>

113 Development Initiatives, (April 17, 2020). Coronavirus and aid data: What the latest DAC data tells us Retrieved from <https://devinit.org/resources/coronavirus-and-aid-data-what-latest-dac-data-tells-us/>

## Ethnic Nationalities Composition of the Elected Representative of the National League for Democracy (NLD) in 2020 General Elections



Source : mVoter 2020, Voter Education App <https://mvoterapp.com/>

including peacebuilding, have pivoted toward public health and humanitarian support.”<sup>114</sup> Mitigating the impacts of damaging COVID-19 pandemic and humanitarian assistance to those in need is crucial. However, the peace building efforts in Myanmar must not be lost attention at the time of pandemic.

### ANALYSIS: STEPS TO IMPROVE

The current peace process has lost its vigor, and any vestige of optimism is difficult to muster given that the process has effectively stalled. Even though the government and negotiating parties aimed to hold a session of the UPC-21CPC every six months<sup>115</sup>, only four have been convened since 2016. The last was held in August 2020, prior to 2020 General Elections. The meeting appears to have served as a face-saving measure

114 Asia Foundation. (August 2020). “How Has Myanmar’s Conflict Has Been Affected by Covid-19 and What Should Be Done About It?”. Covid-19 and Conflict Briefing Paper Series No. 1.

Retrieved from [https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Covid-19-and-Conflict-in-Myanmar-Brief\\_En.pdf](https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Covid-19-and-Conflict-in-Myanmar-Brief_En.pdf)

115 State Counsellor Office, Myanmar. (August 15, 2016). “Union peace conference to be held every six months”.

Retrieved from <https://www.statecounsellor.gov.mm/en/node/188>

for the parties who hope for a return of dialogue after the elections. The peace process in Myanmar has never been inclusive.

The troubling civil –military relation makes the current peace process with no common understanding and pursued policy between the civilian government and the military. Likewise, the peace process should be expanded to be more inclusive by engaging with more women, youth, and civil society organizations, rather than maintain its focus on ‘elites’. In a USIP brief, Johanson (2017) noted that participants in the peace process “tend to be largely male, older, military, and city –based. An end to fighting is the immediate goal, and that means that the armed actors who have fought each other dominate the initial conversation.” Meanwhile, the peace dialogues are ended meetings after meetings in hotel rooms and foreign meeting venues between the leaders, commanders, and elites, while the public seems de –activated from the peace process.

International support is essential to be continued in future. There are many achievements from international assistance. The diplomats, international aid agencies, and international INGOs have served as special envoys and process facilitators, while providing technical and humanitarian assistance to Myanmar. Recently, Mr. Sasakawa Yohei effectively brokered an end to hostilities between the military and the AA, at least temporarily, in Rakhine state. He also facilitated the holding of elections in the disenfranchised nine townships of Rakhine, but left reason during November 8 elections for security reasons. He reportedly felt discouraged by the lack of response from the government leadership.<sup>116</sup>

International support can offer several benefits, as conflicting parties can at least maintain ceasefire under a watchful international eye. International assistance can strengthen communities in several ways. One, they can support the raising of awareness about conflict and peace.

The connection between the first sentences of the paragraph and the one below is not clear. It’s not clear if its awareness raising that leads to more participation in the peace process or if it is international assistance. I suggest make the causal connection more clearly.

As more people participate in the process in various ways, the voices of women, youth and communities can be heard through many fora. More diverse issues can be heard and discussed across different segments of society apart rather than during elite negotiating held in hotels. Social cohesion programs can produce a snowball effect in which develops tolerance and builds trust among communities.

The support from international actors has played a role in the acceptance

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116 Lwin, N. (December 4, 2020). Interview: I Can See the UEC Does Not Want Elections’ in Rakhine, Japanese Envoy to Myanmar Says, *The Irrawaddy*. Retrieved from <https://www.irrawaddy.com/in-person/interview/i-can-see-the-uec-does-not-want-elections-in-rakhine-japanese-envoy-to-myanmar-says.html>

of gender –sensitivity as an important component of peace negotiations. In Part II of the Union Accord from the 2018 meeting of the UPC-21CPC, parties agreed that ‘gender equality’ was a basic principle of a future democratic union and committed to take steps so that there was “a minimum of 30 percent involvement of women in each (public) sector” of the UPC-21CPC process. Moreover, the issue of child soldiers and child protection in which international actors have contributed meaningfully. The stakeholders in the peace process are well aware of ‘child soldiers’ issue’ and immense danger of the ‘six grave violations’ to children affected in armed conflict.<sup>117</sup>

Nevertheless, engagement by international actors has yet to focus on the centrality of the government – the state partner – in the peace process. Recognizing the concept of “national ownership first” is not wrong, as this arrangement is commonly accepted as a strategy for supporting in development projects.<sup>118</sup> When the state fails to provide leadership in the process, collaboration breaks down and the process can stall. Many key stakeholders feel that the current peace process is top-down, centralized, and rigid and that under the leadership of the current government, the peace process is a ship without a rudder. Many ethnic actors and members of the government-formed Peace Commission have expressed disappointment with the government for its lack of leadership.<sup>119</sup>

There are several sources of frustration with the government: One, the difficulties of access to the government leadership. Two, the government’s imposition of greater restrictions on non-state actors. For instance, the Peace Commission sent a letter to the NCA signatory EAOs in which they were prohibited from communicating with the UN, foreign embassies, and INGOs about assistance for their humanitarian needs and local development agenda.<sup>120</sup>

While many Western governments, the United Nations and international organizations take the liberal peacebuilding model as a guide for their engagement in the peace process, they usually seek to build state institutions, strengthen governance, and promote the key tenets of the ‘liberal peace’: democracy, the rule of law and human rights, and finally a favorable environment for the development of a market economy. In Myanmar, the government requires international organizations to agree to a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). The terms of the agreement vary. But the government has used MoUs to limit the operational activities

117 The UNGA in 1999 adopted a resolution in order to collect information for the plight of children in armed conflict. They are;

- Killing and maiming of children;
- Recruitment or use of children as soldiers;
- Sexual violence against children;
- Abduction of children;
- Attacks against schools or hospitals;
- Denial of humanitarian access for children.

118 Many international development agencies adhere to the principles of the “Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness”, which emphasizes the local state party putting in the driver seat and acknowledges national ownership.

119 Personal interview with a senior officer.

120 *Mon News Agency*. (September 13, 2019). Government tells NCA-signatory groups not to communicate with the UN, Embassies, INGOs. Retrieved from <https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/govt-tells-nca-signatory-groups-not-communicate-un-embassies-ingos>

of organizations and restrict their access to conflict areas. Many areas in Rakhine State and IDP sites in Rakhine State and elsewhere can only be accessed with permission from the government.

Nevertheless, Myanmar's human rights record has yet to improve. Instead, it has taken a turn for the worse. By consequence, the government faces an international tribunal for the large-scale violence and human rights abuses against Rohingya. The international community should seek accountability and transparency from the Myanmar government and Tatmadaw as well.

When the political approach to the peace process is not working well, another tendency is an upsurge in support for an "economic peace" approach. The government may now prefer a 'development first, and peace later' model as the massive investment under the CMEC could arguably enhance a 'development model', as the corridor passes through conflict areas. However, this model also generates further complications to the peace process, as the CMEC and other investment projects could lead to further militarization, more land grabbing, forced relocations, human rights abuses, and the destruction of local livelihoods.

Many key stakeholders have expressed interest in order to review the peace process and the NCA itself. But revising the NCA could be difficult, as the parties agreed upon this document and later it became a binding document, as the Union parliament endorsed it. Instead, it is time for the NLD government and the Tatmadaw to show a 'credible commitment' to peace and federalism. Therefore, the agreements previously attained should be implemented effectively and should build "assurance mechanisms" that ethnic people's aspirations will be met. This step holds the promise of moving the processes towards a long-lasting peace. However, a question to be answered is whether the peace process review can be conducted individually or collectively.

Effective collaboration is always a problem when working with various donors and international organizations. Many international actors follow their own interests and agendas while working for peace in Myanmar. Some donors and organizations explicitly mention their agenda and values on democracy, human rights, and a free market. However, some actors, especially China, set ground rules for Burmese actors, which bar the "Western" actors from operating in areas of Myanmar, which China considers to be its backyard. Efforts by a group of actors holding diverse agendas can come up with a common vision will likely amount to a false dawn. However, the coordination of assistance and interventions that are holistic, work in synergy, and pay attention to local needs is an ideal goal.

As the peace process has not achieved much success, there are signs of fatigue from donors and the beneficiaries of the aid. For donors and the international community, the widespread coverage of the Rohingya issue

in the international media coverage and the absence of few success stories in the "mainstream NCA-driven peace process" are disheartening. Many beneficiaries experience "expert fatigue" as a result of being overwhelmed by experts and their opinions. Local actors complain that many organization members and individuals come to see them for discussions about irrelevant issues, often based upon a misreading of the current situation and bereft of its full complexity. Workshops, trainings, and exposure trips target members of parties directly involved in the peace process. But a key drawback is there is yet to be a mechanism for collective learning about how these lessons apply to the situation in Myanmar.

A persistent challenge for international interventions is providing assistance that is regular and reaches all communities. There are sometimes gaps in the distribution of aid. Some analysts and key stakeholders point out that a shortage of resources limits their ability to assist the Kachin, Rakhine, and Shan states, which experience persistent and violent armed conflicts. Dependency on international aid is another related challenge, as many programs cannot be sustained locally and would likely fold without external aid.

Last, but not least, international legal actions that involve the condemnation of extreme violence and human rights abuses targeting Rohingya in Northern Rakhine sends a confusing message to Myanmar's population, the government, and the Tatmadaw. Steps taken by the international community to hold perpetrators accountable involve the International Criminal Court (ICC), International Court of Justice (ICJ), UN Independent Fact-Finding Mission and UN roundtables. While these steps are not directly related to the peace process, they do send alarming messages to the Myanmar government and the Tatmadaw, which raises their suspicion about cooperation with the international community.

## CONCLUSION

Although the peace process has experienced difficulties and setbacks, international support is more crucial at this stage than in the past, and it should be increased. Firstly, international actors should not provide 'a blank check' to stakeholders. Instead, they should seek greater accountability and transparency from the Myanmar government and the Tatmadaw as well as other key stakeholders. The assistance should come with realistic baselines for actual meaningful implementation, prioritize process-driven benchmarks, and ensure responsible spending by the Myanmar government on peace process by international donors.

Secondly, in order to move forward, the peace process needs to become more inclusive by allowing for greater public participation to be a "community peace"—what means building resiliency for the people of

Myanmar, including conflict-affected communities as well as marginalized ethnic minorities. The peace process itself should be expanded to include more engagement with stakeholders and take steps to decentralized control over the process by delegating more sharing power to dialogue partners. If the process becomes more of a joint venture among various actors, the greater collaboration can lead to innovative ideas and promote more effective leadership.

Thirdly, peace process should follow the broader democratization process in Myanmar. Presently the two processes are not connected, instead of complementing each other. Holding regular elections are inadequate for building peaceful and prosperous nation in a divided and diverse society like Myanmar. The NLD won a super-majority in the recent election. However, in many ethnic-minority areas, including in Rakhine State, there is growing disillusionment with electoral democracy that could fuel escalating violence. The peace process offers an additional incentive for participating in electoral politics that can potentially curtail long running animosities among different groups. There are many experiences globally that a nation striving for better governance, keeping a conflict prevention and war termination processes, allowing greater freedom and rights are vital for a sustained peace, which can be strengthened by international cooperation and multilateralism.

For the government and the Tatmadaw, 'protracted ceasefire' without political solutions will not benefit the country. In turn, continuation of this situation of negative peace makes the country more vulnerable and leads to the "mal-development" of the society as a whole. For these reasons, fourthly, the NLD government and the Tatmadaw must show a "credible commitment" to peace and federalism by implementing the Union Accords, thereby creating an "assurance mechanisms" that fulfill ethnic aspirations. Addressing the issue of land and IDPs must be undertaken immediately.

Fifthly, the Myanmar government must have better coordination with the Tatmadaw in order to offer a credible commitment to other parties. In turn, this can put a halt to the discussion of confederation demanded by some ethnic groups. For the international community, they should seek a holistic approach and reconsider their "state-centric approach". As inability of some actors to lead home-grown approach and lack of political will to resolve the conflict, it is clear that it is time to deal with holistic approach.

Last, but not least, the COVID-19 pandemic has opened up opportunities for the international community. If these opportunities are coordinated and necessary to seize among stakeholders including the government, Tatmadaw, EAOs, local CSOs and international actors. International support is vital in this regard. For the meantime, there are foreseeable factors leading to intensifying conflict between the center and periphery,

and between Burman and non-Burman groups, if the government cannot manage COVID-19 vaccination efficiently and fairly.

Although international actors have key differences ranging from organizational structures to interests in helping secure peace in Myanmar, international collaboration remains crucial for the success of the peace process in this country. The international efforts can be successful, if actors take a long-term approach by adding specific benchmarks to their respective organizational agendas, which are complementary to one another, as well as, avoiding redundancy in projects. International actors can assist by perhaps "facilitating broader public discussion about peace and encouraging best practices to provide society with a peace dividend.

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