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Ceasefire and Peace Talk Progress Report

22nd February 2012

In order to achieve genuine peace and an end to the ongoing civil war in Burma, the Karen National Union (KNU) believes that the underlying political conflict must be solved by political means, beginning with active and genuine dialogue.

Between 1949 and 1963, the KNU met on three separate occasions with Burmese governments of the time: in 1949, 1960, and jointly with the New Mon State Party and Karenni National Progressive Party in 1963. Between 1995 and 2005, the KNU met another two times with successive Burmese governments to discuss the possibility of genuine ceasefire and peace talks. However, during these past discussions, none of the Burmese governments acknowledged the need to deal with the underlying political crisis driving the conflict, namely addressing the political aspirations of the ethnic nationalities for peace based on national equality and the right to self-determination. Instead, the focus was on the KNU and the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) surrendering its weapons and “returning to the legal fold,” without the political crisis being addressed or resolved. Ceasefire and peace talks during this time were therefore unsuccessful. According to the organization's policy, the KNU is always open to political dialogue with the Burmese government.

Following the 2010 elections and the formation of a new government led by President Thein Sein, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi sent an open letter on 28th July 2011, addressed to the President, the KNU, the Kachin Independence Organization, the New Mon State Party and the Shan State Army. In this open letter, she stated, “for the sole purpose of promoting the well-being of all nationalities, I call for immediate cease-fire and the peaceful resolution of the conflict.”

In Announcement Number 1/2011 on 18th August 2011, President Thein Sein invited ethnic armed groups to hold peace talks with the government.

In response, the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC) sent a letter to President Thein Sein on 22nd August 2011, calling for a nationwide temporary ceasefire and for active dialogue to resolve political and military issues. The letter called on the government to conduct ceasefire and peace talks with the UNFC as the representative of ethnic armed groups.

However, the Burmese government has indicated a preference to discuss ceasefires on a group-by-group basis, rather than through the UNFC. Because the government has not accepted the UNFC's call for a nationwide ceasefire, members of the UNFC have met with

Burmese government representatives individually for ceasefire negotiations. Political dialogue, however, must be conducted with the Burmese government through the umbrella of the UNFC.

On 9th October 2011, the first preliminary meeting took place between the KNU and the Burmese government representative where they discussed the possibility for official dialogue with the UNFC to resolve the political problem in Burma.

On 8th November 2011, the KNU Emergency Standing Committee Meeting therefore formed a seven member KNU Committee for the Emergence of Peace. Starting from this date, the KNU Committee for the Emergence of Peace and Burmese government representatives, led by U Aung Min, met informally on three occasions in Thailand for the purpose of ceasefire and peace talks. A 19-member KNU Peace Delegation was formed, including members of the KNU Committee for the Emergence of Peace, and met with Burmese government representatives in Pa-an in Karen State in order to reach an initial ceasefire agreement on 12th January 2012.

To build trust on both sides and reach a durable ceasefire, the KNU is continually negotiating and talking with representatives of the new civilian Burmese government. In this respect, the KNU first calls upon the Burmese government to withdraw all troops in close proximity to villages in KNU-administered regions. Secondly, the KNU calls upon the Burmese government to reduce troop levels and cease sending additional troops and supplies. Thirdly, the KNU calls upon the Burmese government to release all KNU and Karen community members who are still being held as political prisoners in Burma. Fourthly, the KNU calls upon the Burmese government to cease military operations in all active war zones, including Kachin areas. After the development of trust through these concrete measures, it will be possible to begin an initial political dialogue with the government.

The KNU has established a four-step roadmap outlining essential steps in order to achieve genuine and sustainable peace:

1. Preliminary ceasefire stage
2. Durable ceasefire stage
3. Initial political dialogue, resolution of underlying political problems and national reconciliation
4. Political participation

KNU believes that the political stages of the four-step roadmap (Steps 3 to 4) will enable the involvement of the UNFC, which includes the representatives of the different ethnic nationalities.

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