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Analysis paper on the ceasefire process between the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) and the Burmese government in the last six months

At the start of the current peace negotiation process between the KNPP and the Government of Burma the Karenni Civil Societies Network (KCSN)¹ released a statement welcoming the talks, and is continuing to monitor closely the peace process between the two parties.

KCSN believes that only through negotiation between both parties to seek solutions to the problems in Karenni State, as agreed during the State Level and Union Level talks, can genuine and permanent peace be achieved. To reach sustainable peace, there must be mutual respect, mutual trust building, and cooperation in implementing the ceasefire agreements, not only in words but through practical action.

During President Thein Sein's inaugural speech, he laid down plans for reform and stated that to establish lasting peace in the country, the three basic principles of peace, stability, and development must be accepted and established to pave the way for reform.

However, unless there is genuine peace that ensures long-term stability, development projects will bring no sustainable benefit to the people. In Kachin State, during 17 years of ceasefire, large numbers of development projects were set up in Kachin State, but after the breakdown of the ceasefire, a total of 25 bridges were destroyed, 100,000 refugees and IDPs had to flee from their homes, and more than 50 schools had to be closed down. Based on the Kachin people's experience, it can be concluded that without political settlement that ensures equality for everyone, there can be no sustainable development for the people of Burma.

The ethnic nationalities believe that a genuine Federal Union of Burma with guarantees of equal rights for all ethnic people must be established. Thus, the ethnic nationalities adopted the following 10 basic principles for the future union of Burma.

1. Sovereign Power
2. Equality
3. Self-determination
4. Federal Principles
5. Minority Rights
6. Democracy, Human Rights and Gender Equality
7. Multi-Party Democracy System

¹ The Karenni Civil Societies Network is comprised of 9 civil society organizations based at the Thai-Burma border: the Karenni Documentation Centre, Karenni Education Committee, Karenni Evergreen, Karenni Mobile Health Committee, Karenni Social Welfare Development Centre, Karenni Students' Union, Karenni Teachers' Union, Karenni Youth Organisation, and Karenni Women's Organisation.

8. Secular State
9. Civilian Supremacy
10. New State

Moreover, the ethnic armed groups, ethnic political parties and civil society groups unanimously adopted the following 'Six-Point Ethnic Peace Road Map' to establish just and genuine peace, as follows:

1. Meeting of armed and civil society organizations, including ethnic armed groups, political parties, women and youth organizations, and all civil society to lay down points to be included in the 'Framework for Political Dialogue'
2. Meeting with government representatives and ethnic armed group representatives to establish the 'Framework for Political Dialogue' with an international watch group to justly implement and inform the public of the agreements formed during the discussion
3. After the finalization of 'The Framework for Political Dialogue,' hold conferences in all the states and regions to create a broader representation of ethnic peoples.
4. Hold a national conference with all ethnicities, including representatives from all ethnic armed groups, representatives of political parties, and representatives of women and youth organizations.
5. Hold a Panglong-style conference to allow an equal number of representatives from political parties, ethnic representatives, and government leaders to discuss how to establish a "genuine union" that guarantees the rights of all ethnic peoples.
6. Secure a precise timeframe for the peace process.

Without addressing the political demands of ethnic armed groups that have resulted in civil war for more than six decades and solving the root causes of the problems in Burma through political means, the three basic principles laid down by President Thein Sein during his inaugural speech -- peace, stability, and development -- will not lead to permanent and sustainable peace in the country.

The current situation in Karenni State

Until a political dialogue is held to establish a genuine Federal Union of Burma that will guarantee rights for every citizen, a ceasefire must be implemented as the first step. The KNPP has entered into a ceasefire agreement with the Government of Burma this year and KCSN released a statement to welcome the peace process between the two parties.

However, there are some factors that will likely weaken the ceasefire process. These issues are:

1) Unresolved military agreement on troop designation and military movement

During the State-level and Union-level talks, the KNPP demanded that the government withdraw some of its military camps that were inflicting burdens on the local people, but no concrete agreement was reached and both parties agreed to discuss and resolve the designation of troop encampments and areas of troop movement at the next Union-level talks.

However, during the ceasefire negotiations, some verbal agreements were made between both sides on military camp designation and troop movement. It was agreed that the KNPP army would stay in the areas where its troops normally operate, and the government army would move from camp to camp using only the main routes.

After the KNPP and the government peace delegates led by U Aung Min signed a ceasefire agreement consisting of 14 points on June 9 2012, a skirmish broke out on June 27 after government troops entered into the KNPP-controlled area without prior notice. It can be analyzed that this happened due to failure to respect the verbal agreement.

Although both sides are trying to deal with the problem patiently to maintain the ceasefire, if an accident like this happens again, this will weaken the mutual trust in building peace.

2) Construction of government's No.14 military training ground without heeding people's voices

The construction of the government's No.14 military training ground in Pruso started in 2011 and altogether 2,700-3,200 acres of farmland have been confiscated from local farmers. This issue was raised during the ceasefire talks between the KNPP and the Burmese government, and among the 14-point agreement between both parties, point no. 4 stated that "both parties agreed to form a state-level survey committee to assess the real will of local people regarding construction of military training facilities. The committee will submit a fact-finding report to the President on July 10, 2012 at the latest."

However, in practice, the survey committee formed after the agreement was made up mainly of staff from the Kayah State government. When their report was produced, the findings did not reflect the will of the people, but supported the continued construction of the military training ground. According to KNPP members who were part of this survey committee, during the field study, the authorities didn't allow the survey team to take pictures of the buildings and project site. This shows clearly that the government is not respecting the will of local people, and is failing to conform to its agreement. The army is also proceeding with construction of the military training ground. Thus, the agreement with the KNPP is only written on paper but not being followed.

In protest against the project, local villagers submitted their collective signatures to the state government and to President Thein Sein, demanding that construction of the military training ground be halted. However, no response was made by the government, despite the fact they are vowing to move toward democracy. Disillusioned with the government, the local villagers have begun to organize weekly prayer rallies to continue to express their protest against the project.

Despite this, military tanks have now been stationed at the project site, military buildings are being built and the voices of local people are ignored. From what is happening in Karenni state, it can be said that the Tatmadaw (army) is still practicing its slogan "The army is both the mother and father of the state."

On the one hand the government is neglecting the voices of the people, but on the other hand, it is wooing them with humanitarian aid. For example, on October 6, 2012, for the first time in decades, the government army began going around Karenni State providing free medical treatment and other basic supplies such as food, clothes, and kitchen materials to Karenni people living in Ma Kraw Shay village in Pruso, as well as in other townships. The government is evidently trying to delude people that it cares about their welfare, while in fact depriving them of their rights.

3) Despite the agreement to ensure transparency around planned mega-projects (including the Ywathit hydropower project), civil society groups are barred from gathering information.

In early 2011, the Burmese government and the state-owned Chinese Datang company signed a memorandum of understanding to construct three hydropower dams in Karenni State. The proposed dams are:

- (1) Salween River (Ywathit) – 600 MW
- (2) Pawn River (Saw Lon Hall Kan)- 130 MW
- (3) Thabet River (Shan-Karenni border)-110 MW

From the experience of the Lawpita hydropower project, thousands of people were forcibly displaced, farms and lands were submerged under water, people and animals were killed by landmines planted around the power-lines, and locals were used as forced labor and restricted from moving freely. Until today, only a few towns and villages in Karenni state have access to the electricity generated from Lawpita. The Karenni people don't want the same experience again.

In addition, if the mega-projects are constructed without local consultation, thousands of people will be displaced, ancestral lands will be lost and natural resources and forests will be destroyed. Even if there are no more war refugees in the future, there will surely be new refugees from these mega development projects. Moreover, in order to provide security for these projects, more army bases will be deployed and more landmines will be planted in Karenni State.

The KNPP raised the people's concerns about this during the ceasefire talks, and in the Union level talks, both parties signed the 14-point agreement, which included point no. 6: "to ensure transparency around the planned mega-projects (including the Ywathit Hydropower Project), both parties agree to provide information to the public and to allow the local people and community-based organizations to seek information."

However, in the last week of September 2012, some members from a civil society group who were going to visit the project area were stopped from entering the Ywathit project site. This shows that the government is not sincere about following the agreement.

On October 2, 2012, representatives of Karenni civil society groups held a press conference in City Star Hotel in Rangoon to highlight this issue and the negative impacts of mega development projects that can weaken the peace process.

Also, the group recommended that both parties should adhere to the 14- point agreement that was signed during the Union level talks on June 9, 2012.

Like the jatropha biofuel program, which former junta leader General Than Shwe ordered to be implemented throughout the country in 2005, the current Ywathit project is being carried out under the direct orders of the central government without consulting local people.

4) From civil war refugees to mega-development project refugees

The above facts show that the government is not seriously following the ceasefire agreement signed during the Union-level talks. This failure to respect the agreement will weaken the mutual trust between both parties and pour oil on the flames of civil war which are not yet extinguished.

Various parties are now taking advantage of the current fragile peace process in order to set up? special economic development zones, dig up and sell natural resources, and implement mega hydropower projects, cement factory projects, and logging projects which will cause more livelihood hardships for locals, and will create new refugees, fleeing not from civil war, but from these development projects.

One example is the Mawchi mine in Karenni State, which was the largest tin-tungsten mine in Burma before World War II. In August of this year, the government Mining Minister, U Thein Htike, announced that the government and foreign companies will renovate the Mawchi mine and install modern technology to expand the mining operations. The local villagers are now concerned that Lo Ka Lo and other villages in the Mawchi area will be permanently displaced and the locals will become refugees from this development project. .

Because of this situation, there is no life security and livelihood guarantee for the refugees who have been taking shelter in Thailand for more than 20 years, for migrants, and for the IDPs in Karenni State to return to their villages and resettle there.

Therefore, in order that the people will not have to flee from their homes again in the future, the KCSN makes the following recommendations;

- To immediately halt the military offensive in Kachin State and to announce a nationwide ceasefire throughout the country as soon as possible for the benefit of the people in Burma.
- To call on both parties to implement Agreement 13 which stated, “Both parties agree to hold nation-wide political dialogue as soon as possible with political parties, ethnic organizations and ethnic armed groups that have already signed cease-fire agreements with Government.”
- To call on the international community, the inside opposition parties, ethnic political parties, the ceasefire ethnic groups and government officials who are reformists to give pressure to the government to hold political dialogue with the ethnic nationalities for the emergence of a genuine federal union of Burma.
- In accordance with the agreement reached with the KNPP on the No. 14 military training ground, there must be consultation with local people to assess their will regarding implementation of this project. Likewise, as agreed by both parties on mega-development projects, including the Ywathit Dam project, the government and companies must consult with local people and allow them and community based organizations to freely seek information.
- As agreed between the KNPP and the Burmese government, the planned mega development projects must be transparent and the local villagers must participate freely in decision making. There must be Free, Prior and Informed Consent in order for these mega development projects to proceed.
- The companies and businesses engaged in mega development projects must be transparent and provide relevant information to local communities in accordance with the basic principles of democracy. This will help to promote mutual trust between the government and the people.

- Only when there is genuine peace and the political problems in Burma are solved, ensuring that the lives of the people are secure, can repatriation of the refugees along the Thai-Burma border take place.