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WLB urges new NLD-led government, and donors, to start afresh with the peace process

The Women's League of Burma (WLB) is gravely concerned at the recent fighting in northern Shan State between the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS) and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), which has displaced over 5,000 civilians and is cleaving ethnic rifts among communities which have co-existed peacefully for generations.

It is no coincidence that this fighting broke out shortly after the signing of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) in October 2015. RCSS was one of only eight groups which signed. Most did not sign because of the non-inclusive nature of the agreement. The TNLA was one of the groups which Naypyidaw refused to accept as a signatory.

Naypyidaw's insistence on excluding certain armed groups from the NCA was a patent divide and rule strategy, which is now playing itself out in northern Shan State.

In fact, the non-inclusive nature of the NCA had doomed it to failure from the outset. Yet, with the support of the international community, Naypyidaw has been allowed to continue with the charade of its "peace process", which has served no one's interests except its own.

It is time for the charade to stop. Now that a new NLD-led government is about to take office, it must begin afresh with the peace process.

A first step to building trust must be for the Tatmadaw to immediately stop its military offensives and pull back its troops from conflict areas. After that, all armed resistance groups, without exception, must be included in talks.

The new government should also recognize that Naypyidaw's pillaging of the resources in the ethnic areas is fuelling conflict. It must impose a moratorium on large-scale extraction projects, including hydropower dams, until there is genuine federal reform, allowing ethnic communities decision-making over resources in their areas.

Finally, we urge international donors not to cling onto the failed NCA, but to start afresh in supporting a new peace-building model that does not simply serve the one-sided interests of the Tatmadaw and their cronies in Burma.

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