

From War to Peace in Kayah (Karenni) State

A Land at the Crossroads in Myanmar





AUTHORS:

Tom Kramer
Oliver Russell
Martin Smith

DESIGN:

Guido Jelsma - www.guidojelsma.nl

PHOTO CREDITS:

Tom Kramer (TK)
Oliver Russell (OR)
Martin Smith (MS)
Free Burma Rangers (FBR)
Kantarawaddy Times (KT)
Karenni Social Welfare Development Committee (KSWDC)
The Border Consortium (TBC)
The Irrawaddy (IR)
Images courtesy of the James Henry Green Charitable Trust / Royal Pavilion & Museums,
Brighton & Hove (HG)

COVER PHOTO:

Kayah Woman in Shadaw Township

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

This publication was made possible through the financial support of Sweden. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of TNI and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the donor.

PUBLICATION DETAILS:

Contents of the report may be quoted or reproduced for non-commercial purposes, provided that the source of information is properly cited.

TRANSNATIONAL INSTITUTE (TNI)

De Wittenstraat 25, 1052 AK Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Tel: +31-20-6626608, Fax: +31-20-6757176
e-mail: Burma@tni.org
www.tni.org/en/myanmar-in-focus

Amsterdam, July 2018

Table of Contents

Map of Myanmar	5
Abbreviations	6
Karenni Timeline	8
1. Introduction	10
2. Ethnic Conflict and Changing Eras of Government	12
Karenni Territory and Kayah State	12
Karenni Independence and British Rule	13
Political Union and the Karenni State Anomaly	14
The Growth of Karenni Nationalism (1948–62)	15
The “Burmese Way to Socialism”, CPB and KNPP Split (1962–88)	18
■ What’s in a name? Kayah or Karenni State	18
The SLORC–SPDC era (1988–2011)	21
The Thein Sein Government and the NLD Revival	26
Karenni Conflict Map	27
The NLD Assumes Office	29
3. Karenni Ceasefire Negotiations	30
The SLORC–SPDC era: Views from the Ground	30
■ The Failed 1995 Ceasefire: the KNPP View	32
The 2012 KNPP Ceasefire	36
Impact of the 2012 KNPP Ceasefire	36
The 2015 Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement	40
■ The United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC)	40
4. Karenni Armed Organisations and National Peace	44
The 21st Century Panglong Conference	44
■ The “Eight Points” of the UNFC	45
The Second “Panglong-21” Meeting	48
■ Chart: Ethnic Armed Organisations, April 2018	50
Renewed Crises and Contemporary Impasse	51
5. Karenni Armed Organisations and Political Representation	54
A State of Deadlock	54
Ethnic-based Forces in the Field	55
Trading Arms for Business	56
Initiatives for Inter-Party Cooperation	58
■ Karenni Armed Organisations 2018	60
Communities, Representation and Governance	64

6. General Elections and Political Reform	66
The 1990 General Election and Political Suppression	66
The National Convention and the 2008 Constitution	67
■ Karenni “Vote No” Referendum Campaign	69
The 2010 General Election and Quasi-Civilian Government	70
The 2015 General Election	73
■ High Profile Candidates	77
The “Hybrid” NLD-Tatmadaw Government	78
■ “David versus Goliath”	83
The 2017 By-Elections	83
7. Communities in Transition	86
Testing the Limits	86
Conflict, Human Rights and Displacement	87
■ “Pya Ley Pya” Campaigns and “Su See” Villages	89
Land Grabbing	91
Service Provision	94
■ Karenni Customary Land Systems	94
Social Relations	97
Civil Society	97
Ethnic Identities in Transition	100
■ Karenni Ethnicity	101
■ Kayan Territory and Identity	108
8. Development Directions and Dilemmas	110
Ceasefires and Economic Transition	110
Karenni Natural Resources Map	113
Logging	114
Dams	115
■ Lawpita Blues: Risking My Life For Your Electricity	117
Mining	117
■ Mining in Mawchi: A Ceasefire in Microcosm	120
Infrastructure	121
Opium Cultivation	123
Tourism	125
International Aid	127
9. Conclusions	130
Appendix: Overview of Karenni Armed Organisations	134
Notes	136

Map of Myanmar

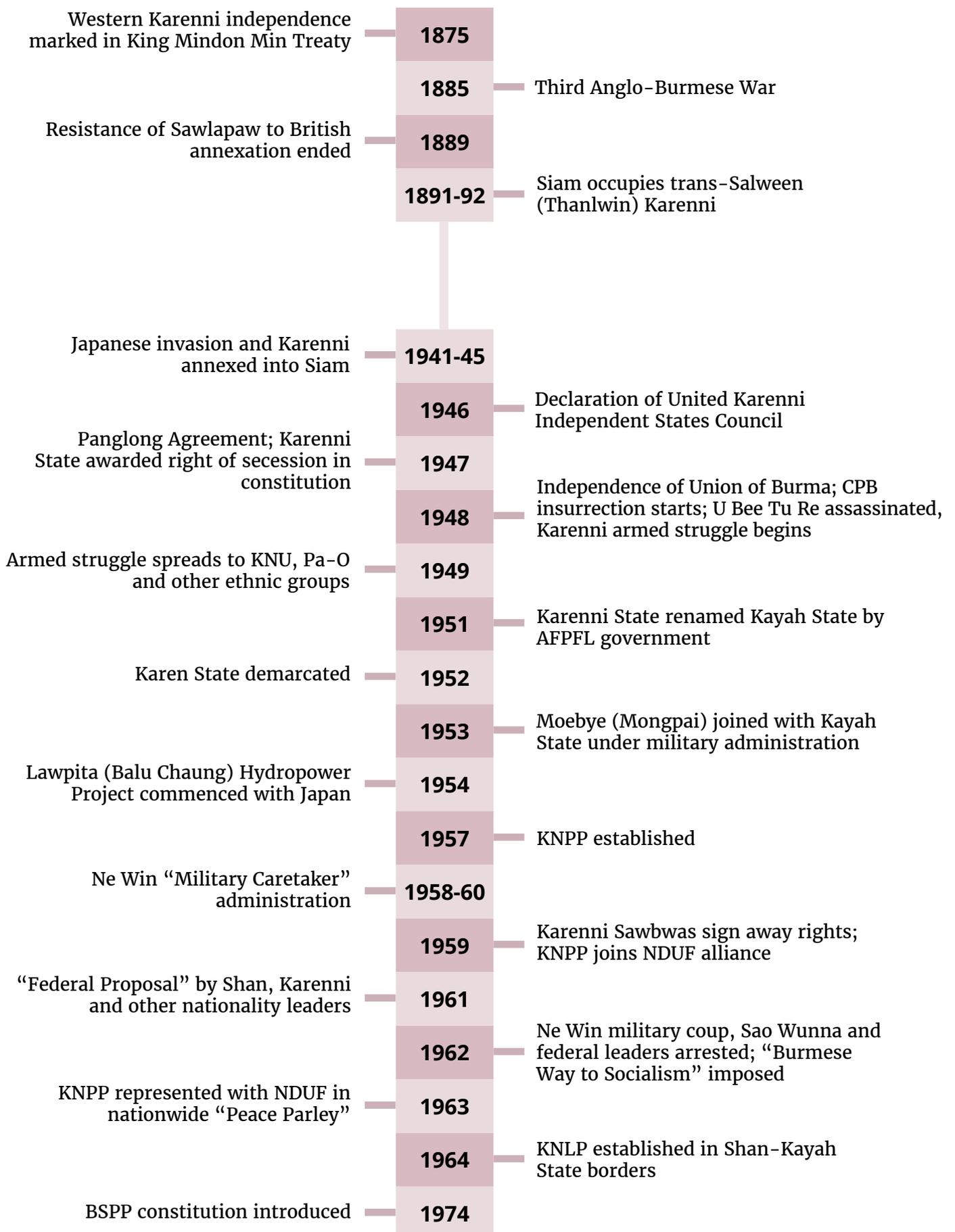


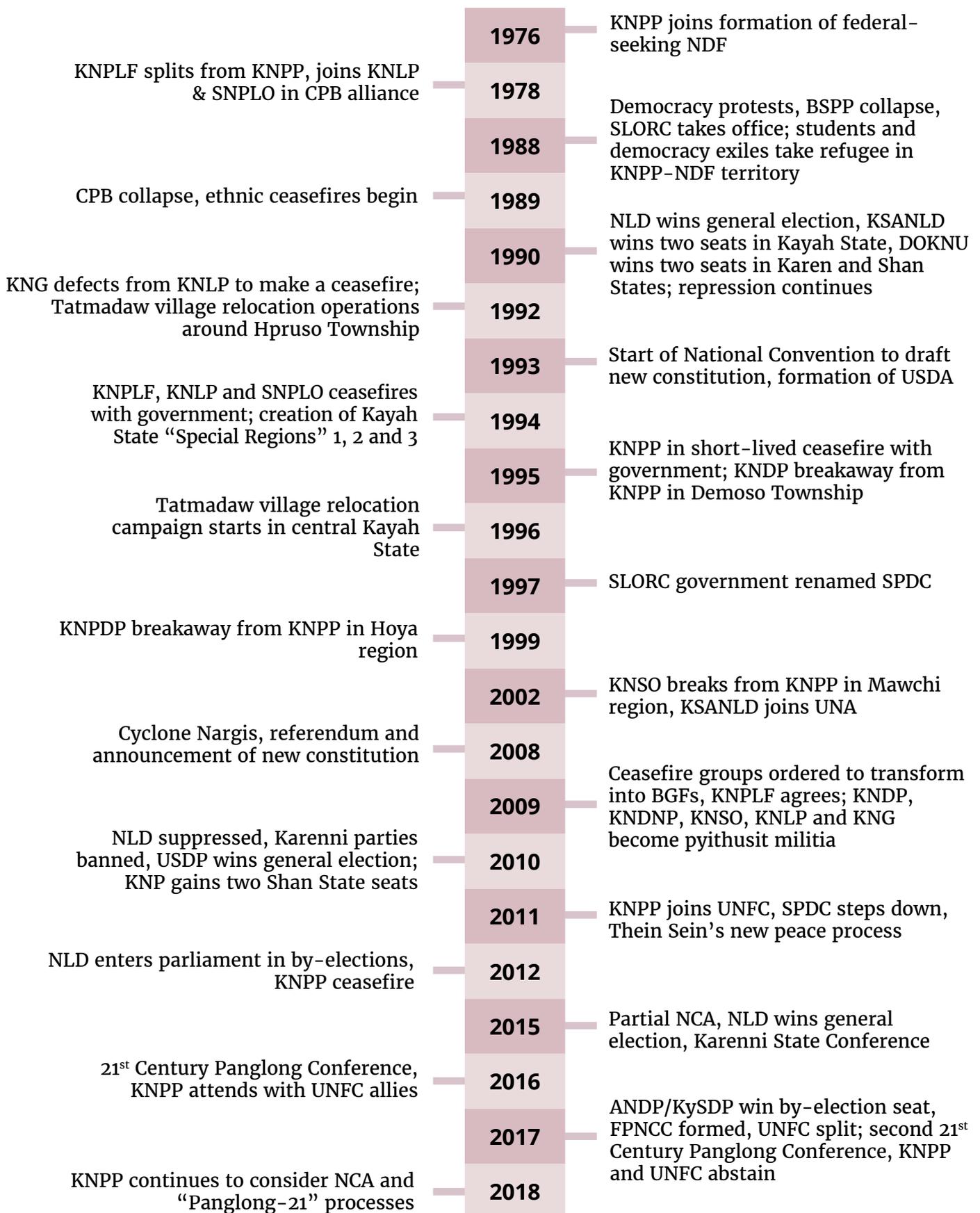
Abbreviations

AA	Arakan Army	IDP	internally-displaced person
ABSDF	All Burma Students Democratic Front	IFC	International Financial Cooperation
AFPFL	Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League	INGO	international non-governmental organisation
ALD	Arakan League for Democracy	KCSN	Karenni Civil Society Network
ANC	Arakan National Council	KEAN	Kayah Earthrights Action Network
ANDP	All Nationalities (Nationals) Democracy Party	KEG	Karenni Evergreen
ANUDP	All National Races Unity and Development Party	KIO	Kachin Independence Organisation
ARSA	Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army	KLPYC	Kayah Li Phu Youth Committee
BERG	Burma Ethnic Research Group	KMPC	Kayah State Mineral Production Company
BEWG	Burma Environmental Working Group	KMSS	Karuna Myanmar Social Services
BGF	Border Guard Force	KMT	Kuomintang
BIA	Burma Independence Army	KNDP	Karenni National Democratic Party
BRN	Burma Rivers Network	KnED	Karenni National Education Department
BSPP	Burma Socialist Programme Party	KNG	Kayan National Guard
CBO	community-based organisation	KNGY	Kayan New Generation Youth
CHDN	Civil Health and Development Network	KnHD	Karenni Health Department
CNF	Chin National Front	KNLP	Kayan New Land Party
CNVP	Chin National Vanguard Party	KnMHC	Karenni National Mobile Health Committee
CPB	Communist Party of Burma	KNO	Kachin National Organisation
CPT	Communist Party of Thailand	KNP	Kayan National Party
CRPP	Committee Representing the People's Parliament	KNPDP	Karenni National Peace and Development Party
CSO	civil society organisation	KNPLF	Karenni Nationalities People's Liberation Front
DAB	Democratic Alliance of Burma	KNPP	Karenni National Progressive Party
DOKNU	Democratic Organisation for Kayan National Unity	KnRC	Karenni Refugee Committee
EAO	ethnic armed organisation	KnRRRWG	Karenni Refugee Repatriation and Reconstruction Working Group
FPNCC	Federal Political Negotiation and Consultative Committee	KNSO	Karenni National Solidarity Organisation
GAD	General Administration Department	KNU	Karen National Union
HCKNU	Head Committee of Kayan National Unity	KNUJC	Karenni National United Joint Committee
		KNUP	Karen National United Party

KNWO	Karenni National Women's Organisation	PDP	Parliamentary Democracy Party
KPBA	Kayah Phyu Baptist Association	PNO	Pa-O National Organisation
KSANLD	Kayah State All Nationalities League for Democracy	SLORC	State Law and Order Restoration Council
KSCSN	Kayah State Civil Society Network	SNPLO	Shan Nationalities People's Liberation Organisation
KSFU	Karenni State Farmers Union	SPDC	State Peace and Development Council
KSJMC	Kayah State Joint Monitoring Committee	SPG	Square Power Group
KSPMN	Kayah State Peace Monitoring Network	SSA/RCSS	Shan State Army/Restoration Council of Shan State
KSWDC	Karenni Social Welfare Development Committee	SSA/SSPP	Shan State Army/Shan State Progressive Party
KUDP	Kayah Unity Democracy Party	TBC	The Border Consortium
KySDP	Kayah State Democratic Party	TNLA	Ta-ang National Liberation Army
LDU	Lahu Democratic Union	UKSY	Union of Karenni State Youth
LIOH	Land In Our Hands	UNA	United Nationalities Alliance
MDF	Metta Development Foundation	UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
MNDAA	Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (Kokang)	UNFC	United Nationalities Federal Council
MPC	Myanmar Peace Center	UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
NBF	Nationalities Brotherhood Federation	UNLD	United Nationalities League for Democracy
NCCT	Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team	UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
NCGUB	National Coalition Government Union of Burma	USDA	Union Solidarity and Development Association
NCUB	National Council Union of Burma	USDP	Union Solidarity and Development Party
NDAA	National Democratic Alliance Army (Mongla)	UWSA	United Wa State Army
NDF	National Democratic Front	WNO	Wa National Organisation
NDUF	National Democratic United Front		
NGO	non-governmental organisation		
NLD	National League for Democracy		
NMSP	New Mon State Party		
NSCK-K	National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang		
NUP	National Unity Party		

Karenni Timeline





1. Introduction

Conflict resolution has long been essential for peace and stability in Burma/Myanmar.¹ But for the country's non-Bamar (Burman) peoples, who constitute over a third of the population, the need is especially urgent. Over the decades, most fighting has taken place in ethnic minority borderlands, and the local populations have long suffered the most from state failure, political marginalisation and military rule.

Kayah State, historically known as “Karenni State”, is a resonant example of the reform dilemmas that the ethnic nationality peoples in Myanmar now face. Although the country's smallest state, it reflects many of the challenges in peace-building and socio-political transition that need resolution in Myanmar at large: political impasse, a multiplicity of conflict actors, contested natural resources, land grabbing, humanitarian suffering, and divided communities seeking to rebuild after more than six decades of civil war.

Kayah State also has uniquely distinct claims to political sovereignty that are yet to be resolved. Under colonial rule, the territory was never formally incorporated within British Burma and, at Myanmar's independence in 1948, the new state was granted the right of secession in recognition of its historic status. Conflict then broke out during the upheavals around the new Union of Burma's independence and continued, without real interruption, through successive eras of government until 2011 when a new system of quasi-civilian democracy was introduced under President Thein Sein.

Since this time, a national reform process and the spread of ceasefires with ethnic armed organisations (EAOs) have encouraged hopes that the cycles of conflict in Myanmar could soon come to an end. For the peoples of Kayah State, who are collectively known as “Karenni”, a watershed moment was the 2012 ceasefire between the Thein Sein government and Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), the leading EAO in the territory. Hopes of national reconciliation



Old photo of Kayan woman (HG)

and reform then accelerated with the advent to government of the National League for Democracy (NLD) in March 2016.

For the moment, however, neither the ceasefires by the Thein Sein government nor interventions by the NLD government have marked the end to conflict. An inclusive process of political dialogue and national reform is yet to begin. The new liberalisations and greater openness within the country during the past six years are not in doubt. But, as fighting continues in several borderland areas, the lack of tangible reform on the ground has brought a host of new challenges to local communities. After decades of displacement and socio-economic disadvantage, they feel vulnerable and highly uncertain about their futures. From ethnic equality and political autonomy to economic powers and land rights, the Karenni peoples are still waiting for the political freedoms that were promised at Myanmar's independence to be implemented and guaranteed. As in each era of new government since independence in 1948, new volatility is again occurring around the country, confounding hopes that political transformation will be nationwide and that it will be smooth.

This report seeks to analyse the challenges now facing Kayah State at a critical moment in the transition from military rule. As always in Myanmar, a balanced understanding of local perspectives and realities is vital in a territory that reflects different ethnic, religious and political perspectives. In the case of Kayah State, the difficulties are exacerbated by the territory's isolation from outside engagement during the long decades of civil war. This lack of access has resulted in a dearth of research and reporting on the political conflicts that have had a devastating impact on the ground. As initiatives continue to try and build a better future for the peoples of Myanmar, the impoverishment and socio-economic challenges facing many communities in Kayah State are little documented or understood.

The report will begin by assessing how claims of ethnic identity and political allegiance impact on Kayah State politics and society, how this has sustained nationality movements

over the years, and what this has meant for different communities on the front-line. It will then examine the diversity of challenges facing the population today. Key issues include conflict resolution, political reform, demilitarisation, ceasefire transition, refugees, internally-displaced persons (IDPs), economic rights, the right to land and natural resources, and the recent arrival of foreign investors and other outside actors into the territory.

The report will also highlight developments in Kayah nationality politics that are pertinent in Karenni affairs. Inhabiting territory in Kayah State, the adjoining Karen State, Shan State and former Mandalay Division, Kayah-related peoples are linked to both the Karenni struggle and the movement for autonomy and nationality rights in the country at large.

The pressures on Kayah State are presently immense. After more than six decades of conflict, the Karenni peoples are determined that their struggle for political and ethnic rights keeps pace with countrywide endeavours for national peace and democratic change. They have been too often forgotten in the past. But now, as transitional challenges deepen, there is a real risk of the emergence of a new generation of grievances that undermine peace and stability even before national reconciliation and political dialogue have truly begun.

Kayah State should not be considered an exceptional or peripheral land on a remote frontier in Asia but an integral example of the failures of post-colonial Myanmar. It is vital that, in the coming years, Kayah State becomes a model for informed and progressive change rather than a symbol for marginalisation and neglect in yet another era of divided and unrepresentative government.

2. Ethnic Conflict and Changing Eras of Government

Karenni Territory and Kayah State

With an area of 11,731 square kilometres, Kayah State is the smallest of the seven designated “ethnic” states on Myanmar’s current political map. A rugged territory of deep mountains, forested valleys and flowing rivers, the area has long played an important role on the crossroads between the Karen, Shan (Tai) and Bamar (Burman) peoples. The majority of the population living in this area identify as Karen-related peoples, including Kayah, Kayan, Kayaw/Pre, Kawyaw (Manu Manaw), Geba, Paku and Yintale. Historically known as Karenni (“Red Karen”), they take their collective name from the red-coloured clothing of the largest group, the Kayah (see Chapter 7). Today a majority are Christians, predominantly Baptist and Catholic.

The population in Kayah State is currently estimated to number approximately 300,000 persons living in seven townships and two districts.¹ Over 60,000 Kayans also live in adjoining territories, principally in the border areas with Shan State. They have often interacted over Karenni and Kayan issues, a trend that is increasing. Small Shan and Pa-O (another Karen-related people) populations also live in Kayah State, most of whom are Buddhists, as well as an increasing number of ethnic Bamars who mostly arrived after Myanmar’s independence in 1948.

As with other “hill peoples”, there are few records of the Karenni until the 19th century. Modern anthropological research has shown how the Karenni chiefs developed a political identity that was distinct from their more numerous Pwo and Sgaw Karen cousins. They did this by assimilating the Sawbwa (Saopha) system of the princely rulers in the Shan States to their north.² Over the decades, closer political affiliations among Karen-related peoples have been considered but a “pan-Karen” movement has never developed. In general, four main identities represent ethno-nationalist movements in contemporary politics among Karen-related peoples: Karen, Karenni, Kayan and Pa-O. All of these groups have had frequent inter-action during the struggles of the past century.



Karenni headman (MS)

Karenni Independence and British Rule

When the British arrived in the 19th century, there were five Karenni sub-states: Kantarawadi, Kyebogyi, Bawlakhe, Naungpale and Nammekon. These five were later reduced by amalgamation to just three (Kantarawadi, Kyebogyi, Bawlakhe), whose Sawbwa and Myosa rulers were granted rights similar to the maharajahs of India.³ The independent identity of “Western Karenni” was recognised by the British in an 1875 treaty with the Burmese King Mindon Min prior to the third Anglo-Burmese War.⁴ Despite 12 investigations into their political status, the Karenni States were never formally incorporated into British Burma.⁵ As the 1947 Frontier Areas Committee of Enquiry acknowledged: “The three Karenni States have never been annexed to the British Crown and have the status of feudatory states.”⁶ The 1875 treaty and its subsequent recognition have subsequently remained an important argument among Karenni (and some Karen) nationalists in their claims for ethnic sovereignty and the right to self-determination.

It would be inaccurate, however, to consider British rule as a halcyon period in Karenni politics. As with their Karen neighbours, Christianity (predominantly Baptist and Catholic) began to spread among the local population, bringing education and the first writings in Karen-Karenni dialects. But resistance against colonial rule initially continued under the Kantarawadi Myosa, Sawlapaw.⁷

Development, too, was for the most part neglected under the diarchic system of government imposed by the British authorities. This system divided British Burma into two territories: Ministerial Burma and the Frontier Area Administration. In Ministerial Burma, where the Bamar-majority mostly lived, a form of parliamentary “home-rule” was introduced. In the Frontier Areas Administration, local governance was largely left under the day-to-day rule of traditional leaders among such peoples as the Kachin, Chin and Shan.

The political and ethnic divisions did not end here. British Burma remained under the

British Indian Empire until 1937. This proved as much an impediment to the development of a “Burma” or “Myanmar” state as it did to the politics and society of the different peoples within its borders. Despite political objections, Karen-speaking peoples were divided into five territories, including the Karenni States and various districts of Ministerial Burma and the Frontier Areas.⁸ Rather, the principle motives during the colonial era were for security and profit. In the Karenni case, this was mostly characterised by the extraction of timber, tin and other natural resources. By the 1930s, the Mawchi Mines in the south of the territory were reputed to be the most important source of tin and tungsten (wolfram) in the world.

There were also detrimental repercussions in inter-community affairs. Little effort was made to develop the frontier areas or foster relations with Ministerial Burma and the political world outside. Most obviously, the British preferred to recruit Karen, Kachin and Chin “hill peoples” into the Burma Army rather than the Bamar majority. The degree of



Old postcard with photo of Karenni men (collection TK)



this separation then became apparent during the Second World War. While Aung San's Burma Independence Army (BIA) initially joined on the Japanese side, most Karenni people – like their Karen neighbours – remained loyal to the British. In consequence, the Karen-Karenni borderlands became an important centre for resistance in support of the Allied Forces, hastening Japan's defeat.⁹ At the war's end, departing officers of the British special operations Force 136 left behind a plaque in the Karenni hills commemorating the local volunteers who had lost their lives "in the fight against tyranny and aggression".¹⁰

With the British departure looming, Karenni leaders hoped that a just political settlement would be delivered. The calls for "national liberation" were growing as peoples around the world sought to rebuild from the devastation of war. Instead, foreign administration ended within just three years with the Karenni question – like so much else in British Burma – far from resolved.

Political Union and the Karenni State Anomaly

In the rush to independence, the anomaly of the Karenni State was never settled. Its special status was recognised by all sides. This included the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL: formed 1944), which was to become the future government, and the Karen National Union (KNU: formed 1947), the leading voice for ethnic rights at the time. In the Karenni States themselves, a United Karenni Independent States Council was formed in September 1946. Some nationalists believed that the Karenni States should join with Karen, Kayan and Pa-O majority areas to form a "pan-Karen State" that would seek independence or federation in a new "Union of Burma". Others argued that Karenni sovereignty should first be promoted. A combination of these views was presented at the 1947 Frontier Areas Committee of Enquiry by a joint Karenni-Mongpai delegation. They wanted not only the Shan sub-state of Mongpai (Moebye) to be included but also the

neighbouring Salween District and “all the Karens on the hills on the east of Sittang River to join into one Karenni State.”¹¹

All these were proposals that AFPFL leaders were determined to forestall. The result was a continuing marginalisation of the views of the Karenni and other non-Bamar peoples. Most evidently, Karenni representatives, along with their Karen cousins, were absent from the historic Panglong Conference in February 1947 where the principles of equality and autonomy for the future Union were drawn up.¹² At the same time, political opinion in ethnic nationality circles was hardly united. In the Karenni States there were differences between Sawbwa families,¹³ between Baptists and Catholics, and between Kayahs, Kayans and other nationality groups. A continuing challenge was whether the Shan sub-state of Mongpai, which is majority Kayan and largely Catholic, should join with the Karenni States or remain in Shan State.¹⁴ This still has resonance today. Although the Mongpai Sawbwaw were historically Shan, it was recognised that most of the population were ethnic Kayan.

A compromise solution was eventually promoted under the 1947 constitution.¹⁵ The three Karenni States were to be unified and join with the territories of the former British Burma as one of the four ethnic states in the new Union, along with Kachin, Shan and (subject to further negotiation) Karen (Article 2). The newly-constituted Karenni State was also granted the extraordinary right of secession after a 10-year trial period, along with Shan State, in respect of their historic independence (Articles 201-6). If citizens desired, allowance was also made for a future uniting of the Karen and Karenni States as well as the accession of the Mongpai (Moebye) sub-state to Karenni State. In a further anomaly, the traditional position of the Karenni and Shan Sawbwaw was also recognised. They would become representatives in the Chamber of Nationalities, a decision opposed by “anti-feudal” and left-wing politicians.¹⁶

The result was that, whether in Karenni State or the new “Union of Burma” at large, the 1947 constitution was far from what many citizens wanted. In the case of the Karenni

State, its special position in history had been recognised. Community leaders trusted that this would form the basis for national peace and inter-ethnic harmony in the future.

These hopes proved very short-lived. Within months of the British departure in January 1948, the dangerous scale of disagreement within the new Union was signified by political and ethnic conflicts that broke out in virtually every territory across the country.

The Growth of Karenni Nationalism (1948-62)

The 1947 constitution quickly proved a failure. Although federal in theory, it was not in the detail.¹⁷ In mid-1947, a nationalist faction under U Bee Tu Re declared the independence of Karenni State. Then, as political and ethnic violence swept the country, U Bee Tu Re was murdered in August 1948 in a pre-emptive strike by the Union Military Police. This shocking act caused widespread anger across the state, precipitating the beginning of armed struggle among the Karenni peoples that has continued through all eras of government since. In the following months, hundreds of Karenni villagers joined the Kyebogyi Sawbwa Saw Shwe (also known as “Sao Shwe”), a



Then KNPP leader Saw Maw Reh in 1982 (MS)

Force 136 veteran, in taking up arms against the AFPFL government. In commemoration of these events, 9 August has since been marked as “Karenni National Resistance Day” and 17 August as “Karenni Army Day”.

As central administration broke down, the wonder in many respects is that the AFPFL government survived. Fighting had already broken out in Arakan before the British departure, and in March 1948 the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) began armed struggle in central Myanmar. During the following months, the national armed forces (Tatmadaw) were wracked by mutinies. In January 1949, the KNU also resorted to arms along with a succession of other nationality forces, including Mon and Pa-O. The conflict landscape then further deteriorated later that year when remnant Kuomintang (KMT) forces invaded Shan State following Mao Zedong’s victory in China.¹⁸

In Karenni State, meanwhile, resentment deepened in 1951 when the AFPFL government renamed the territory “Kayah State” after

the name of the major ethnic sub-group in the territory: Kayah (see box: “What’s in a name? Kayah or Karenni State”). This was widely regarded as a crude attempt to remove an identity symbolic of historic independence and create a “divide and rule” division between the Kayah and other Karen peoples.¹⁹ At the time, Karenni forces were often indistinguishable from KNU units travelling through the hills from adjoining territories.²⁰

The following year a Karen (Kayin) State²¹ was demarcated in the neighbouring borderlands with Thailand. Incorporating perhaps a quarter of the Karen population in the country, its demarcation fell far short of meeting KNU demands and armed resistance continued. The Karenni leader Saw Shwe, who had been working closely with the KNU, was subsequently reported to have died from malaria. But on 2 May 1957 the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) was formally established by nationalists seeking to unify the Karenni cause. Since this time, the KNPP has remained the main proponent for Karenni rights and self-determination.



KNPP soldiers on the Pai River (MS)

Despite the scale of unrest, the newly-named “Kayah State” was generally a conflict backwater during the parliamentary era after independence. The central government maintained control of Loikaw, the state capital, and the important Mawchi Mines. The state administration was headed by Sao Wunna, another Force 136 veteran and son of the Kantarawadi Sawbwa. In 1950, the Lawpita (Balu Chaung) Hydropower Project was initiated under a bilateral war reparation agreement between Japan and the AFPFL government led by Prime Minister U Nu.²² In 1953 the Kayan-majority territory of Mongpai (Moebye) was also amalgamated with Kayah State under the military structures of administration.²³ In making this decision, security officials recognised the close inter-connections among the local peoples. The Karenni and Kayan “capitals” (Loikaw and Pekon) are only 25 kilometres apart.

Away from the towns, much of Kayah State remained under the control of nationalist forces. Following the KNPP’s 1957 formation, party leaders tried to broaden their political strategy, and in 1959 the KNPP joined the CPB and Karen, Mon and Chin nationality allies as founding members of the National Democratic United Front (NDUF).²⁴ But despite the government’s unpopularity, Karenni opposition groups never succeeded in gaining the political initiative during the parliamentary era, whether in the legislatures or in armed struggle. Instead, a very different political actor was growing in countrywide strength: the Tatmadaw.

During the late 1950s, the Tatmadaw Commander-in-Chief Gen. Ne Win moved carefully to prepare the way for military rule. Under a “Military Caretaker” administration in 1958–60, security operations were stepped up. During this time, the Karenni and Shan Sawbwas were persuaded to sign away their hereditary rights in a “Renunciation Treaty” in April 1959 as the 10-year time-limit on the right of secession became due. Following a general election in February 1960, parliamentary government was then restored to U Nu’s Pyidaungsu (Union) Party, as the “clean” faction of the AFPFL party was renamed.

Any hopes, however, of a return to democratic government were soon cut short. In March



Sao Wunna (standing) and his family (Sao Wunna Private Family Collection)

1962, as U Nu prepared to meet with nationality leaders to discuss a “Federal Proposal” for constitutional reform, Gen. Ne Win seized power in a military coup.²⁵ “Federalism is impossible: it will destroy the Union,” Ne Win said.²⁶ Over the following days, Prime Minister U Nu and most of his cabinet were arrested along with other leaders from other political and ethnic backgrounds. Many remained in jail without trial for several years. Sao Wunna, former head of Kayah State and the longest-serving AFPFL government minister, was accused of participating in a “feudalist conspiracy” to secede from the Union and spent six years in prison.²⁷ Meanwhile the Shan leader, former Union President and co-organiser of the Panglong Conference, Sao Shwe Thaik, died in custody in unexplained circumstances.

Fourteen years after the high hopes and aspirations of independence, the political crisis in the country was only deepening. Parliamentary government was at an end, and Ne Win was about to embark on a disastrous 26-year experiment with the “Burmese Way to Socialism”.

The “Burmese Way to Socialism”, CPB and KNPP Split (1962–88)

Under the “Burmese Way to Socialism”, Kayah State became entrapped in an impoverished time-warp as Gen. Ne Win sought to enforce Tatmadaw rule. Under the 1974 constitution, a semblance of ethnic symmetry was demarcated on the political map, with seven Bamar-majority divisions (today regions) and seven ethnic states, including “Kayah”. But there was little enjoyment of ethnic rights on the ground. Armed conflict spread into new regions of the country; the media and large sections of the

economy were nationalised; and the teaching of non-Bamar languages in schools was halted beyond fourth grade.

Before implementing the “Burmese Way to Socialism”, Gen. Ne Win’s Revolutionary Council did pause for a brief moment during a nationwide “Peace Parley” in Yangon during 1963–64. It was a rare occasion of face-to-face dialogue between the combatant sides.²⁸ The KNPP was represented in a joint NDU delegation during talks with government officials who met separately with all the main armed opposition parties. The talks, however, soon broke down after opposition

What’s in a name? Kayah or Karenni State

The debate over the use of the “Karenni” or “Kayah” names embodies the history and evolution of peoples living in the modern-day state. Until the 1951 name change by the AFPFL government, the collective name “Karenni” (“Red Karen”) was widely accepted internationally and by the different inhabitants of the territory, a majority of whom are Karen-related (see Chapter 7, box: “Karenni Ethnicity”). Karenni State had the right of secession under the 1947 constitution. The main intention of the AFPFL government was to separate the Karenni State from the nationalist movement of their more numerous Karen cousins in adjoining territories.²⁹ Replacing “Karenni” also removed a name symbolic of historic independence.

The imposition of the name of just one ethnic group for the state, Kayah, had divisive consequences in Karenni politics and society that remain unresolved. Some Kayah people appreciated the name change because they believe that this reflects their position as the majority ethnic group in the state. But “Kayah State” as an identity term has never been widely accepted by the different nationality forces, political parties and community-based organisations. Among Karenni nationalists, it is considered a “divide-and-rule” government term for political administration. Many inhabitants still prefer the former name of Karenni. They see this as a collective, and geographic, name for all groups in the state, who share the territory’s heritage and history.

For the Kayan, the choice of name for the state is also important (see Chapter 7, box: “Kayan Territory and Identity”). Under Kayah State governance or name, Kayan leaders worry about losing their identity as a people. There is a consensus that the Kayan are an integral part of a shared territory and history in the Karen-Karenni-Shan borderlands, but they do not want this to be diminished by coming under a “Kayah” identity. Rather, they see the Kayan as one of several peoples in “Karenni” politics, including Kayah, Kayan, Kayaw and Kawyaw.

In the modern-day state, inter-marriage can also blur ethnicity in local communities. There has also been increasing migration by ethnic Bamars and other nationality peoples into the territory since independence. But, after the upheavals of the past seventy years, there are no reliable figures for contemporary demographics.

leaders claimed they were told, in essence, that they should accept the “Burmese Way to Socialism” and surrender.³⁰

Following the “Peace Parley” failure, Gen. Ne Win went ahead with a two-fold strategy. First, he sought to build a centralised one-party state under the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP). Second, he launched military operations against armed opposition forces in the rural countryside. The centrepiece of these tactics was the controversial “Four Cuts” Campaign (Pya Lay Pya). This strategy began in the mid-1960s in the Ayeyarwady Delta and was subsequently rolled out to other conflict-zones across the country (see Chapter 7, box: “‘Pya Lay Pya’ Campaigns and ‘Su See’ Villages”).³¹ Using these tactics, the Tatmadaw operations had some military success in clearing armed opposition groups from central Myanmar and the Bamar-majority heartlands by the mid-1970s. But far from quelling opposition, militant resistance flared again in many new areas, including Kachin, Mon and Shan States.

The imposition of the “Burmese Way to Socialism” had an especial impact on the Shan-Karenni borders. Here Kayan villagers attacked a Tatmadaw outpost at Pekon in June 1964 following Gen. Ne Win’s demonetisation of the Burmese currency. Shortly afterwards, the Kayan New Land Party (KNLP) was formed, and since this time 4 June has marked “Kayan Armed Resistance Day”.³² Although there had been uprisings among the local Kayan population before, the KNLP was the first ethno-nationalist movement to seek territorial representation that was distinct from Karen, Karenni or Shan in political affairs (see Chapter 7, box: “Kayan Territory and Identity”).

A difficult time followed in Karenni politics. During the next quarter century, the KNPP was able to maintain “liberated zones” in a quasi mini-state of its own, bolstered by control of the lucrative cross-border trade with Thailand. Nationalist resentment continued as the only investment of economic significance since independence, the Lawpita hydropower project, did not supply electricity to the local peoples. All the electricity was instead sent to the centre of the country. As with the Mawchi Mines, there was little

benefit to the local peoples (see Chapter 8). The KNPP also received a popular boost in the BSPP era when a former director of culture in the Kayah State Government, Khu Hteh Bu Peh (Hte Buphe), joined the party at its Pai River headquarters. The inventor of a Karenni script³³ and from a leading Sawbwa family, he later became KNPP chairman. Other intellectuals and well-known figures also joined, including Abed Tweed and Rimond Htoo. They took the KNPP leadership into a new generation of nationalist struggle.

During the 1970s, however, the KNPP suffered a major split over political direction, with implications that are still felt today. The background is complex, but the catalyst for the KNPP split was over political relationships with the CPB, the country’s oldest political party. At the time, communist movements were still in an ascendancy in China and several neighbouring countries. In Myanmar, despite the loss of its bases in the centre of the country, the CPB was to remain a significant force in several borderland territories until the end of the Cold War.

The outcome of these ideological struggles was that, under Ne Win’s “Burmese Way to Socialism”, the divisions in national politics often took on a “three-cornered” character between the BSPP, CPB and ethnic-based forces. During 1963-64 the KNPP had taken part in the Yangon “Peace Parley” in a joint NDUF delegation that included the CPB. In subsequent years, however, the KNPP moved away from left-leaning alliances under its veteran leader, Saw Maw Reh, a former British army bombardier. The KNPP continued to support united fronts with other anti-government forces. But after the failure of the NDUF to make political progress, the KNPP became much more cautious about alliances with organisations that had Bamar-majority memberships or leaderships.

In the Ne Win era, the most important ethnic alliance was the nine-party National Democratic Front (NDF: formed 1976). The NDF included the KNPP and KNU (initially also the KNLP) and sought a federal union.³⁴ From this time, although the goal of “independence” was still sometimes voiced by Karenni nationalists, the KNPP generally embraced the political goal of federalism.

The party's headquarters served as the main base for the NDF's central command. From its strongholds east of the Thanlwin (Salween) river, KNPP officials were able to liaise with other nationality forces in the Karen and Shan State borderlands, especially the KNU and Pa-O National Organisation (PNO).

The KNPP was not alone in its opposition to the central government in Kayah State. Activists from other anti-BSPP parties also travelled to KNPP territories during the Ne Win era. In military terms, the two main organisations were the CPB and the Parliamentary Democracy Party (PDP) of the deposed Prime Minister U Nu. In an unexpected change in political alignments, U Nu briefly took up arms in the Thai borderlands following his release from detention in 1968. By the late 1970s, however, the PDP movement had ended in failure.³⁵ In contrast, the CPB remained a significant force in several ethnic borderlands, notably in Shan State. Here its "People's Army" was openly backed with arms and ammunition by China following anti-Chinese violence in Yangon in 1967. This led to a significant escalation of conflict along the Yunnan Province frontier.

From these new footholds, the CPB tried to rebuild during the 1970s by opening up military fronts deeper inside the country. One of the areas targeted was the Shan-Karenni borderlands. CPB strategists were keen to penetrate westwards toward the Pegu Yoma highlands in central Myanmar and also southwards through Kayah State to link up with their international ally, the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT). Inevitably, these efforts at infiltration by CPB cadres brought them into contact, and sometimes confrontation, with local nationality forces that stood in their way, including Kayan, Pa-O and Shan.

Until the present day, the reasons for the KNPP split are still disputed. At the time, the division appeared to be more about ideology than identity, with the CPB playing a "behind-the-scenes" role. To varying degrees, Kachin, Karen, Kokang, Pa-O, Shan, Wa and other nationality movements in Myanmar underwent similar divisions during the 1968-88 period. In the Shan and Kayah States, especially, the experiences cut very deep. Veteran KNPP leaders appeared to be caught completely unawares.

KNPLF office with portraits of its leaders at Hose in Mese Township (TK)



Events moved very quickly. The Kayan New Land Party had initially been close to the KNPP. But in 1977 the KNLP resigned from the NDF to join a left-wing faction of the Pa-O nationalist movement, the Shan Nationalities People's Liberation Organisation (SNPLO), in allying with the CPB across the border in Shan State. Then, as infighting broke out within the KNPP, a younger group of activists defected to set up what in 1978 became a rival party, the Karenni Nationalities People's Liberation Front (KNPLF).³⁶ Backed by the CPB, these three new allies were able to take control of a significant amount of territory along the Shan-Kayah-Karen State borders. By the early 1980s, KNPLF units were able to infiltrate down the west bank of the Thanlwin River to open up cross-border liaison with the CPT and Thailand in Mese Township.

For their part, KNPLF, KNLP and SNPLO leaders denied that they were ever "communists". The KNPLF leader Nya Maung Me claimed in 1990 that the KNPLF sought to represent all Kayah State peoples, including minority Shans, in a "federal union" rather than promote "Karenni independence".³⁷ The distinction, he argued, was that the KNPP pursued "national democracy", whereas the KNPLF espoused "people's democracy".³⁸ In choosing to ally with the CPB, the KNLP leader Shwe Aye also considered it important that the party was based across the country, with anti-government networks beyond the ethnic borderlands.³⁹ But whatever the reasons for disagreement, the split in the KNPP movement was highly damaging to Karenni unity. The KNPP-KNPLF separation sowed the seeds for division that still afflicts Kayah State politics today.

As these internal conflicts continued, there were no real winners in the country under Gen. Ne Win's rule. The ideological arguments in the borderlands often appeared as a sideshow. There was a desperate stalemate in which peoples from every nationality background suffered. All the time the economy was declining. Following another two demonetisations of the Burmese currency (in 1985 and 1987), Myanmar was classified with Least Developed Country status at the United Nations in 1987 as one of the world's ten poorest states. The following year, student-led protests for democracy broke out

across the country. This precipitated Ne Win's resignation and the BSPP's collapse.

Finally, after a quarter century of isolationist misrule, the "Burmese Way to Socialism" was coming to an end. The Karenni peoples watched closely to see what Tatmadaw leaders would do next.

The SLORC-SPDC era (1988-2011)

During the summer of 1988, national politics in Myanmar underwent their third major reorientation since independence as pro-democracy demonstrations swept towns across the country. Three critical events followed in quick succession. In September 1988 the military State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC: from 1997, State Peace and Development Council [SPDC]) assumed power. Then in 1989 the country's oldest political party, the CPB, collapsed due to ethnic mutinies from its 15,000-strong "People's Army". Finally, in 1990 the National League for Democracy led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi won Myanmar's first general election in three decades by a landslide. In the aftermath of the SLORC crackdown, up to ten thousand students and democracy activists fled into borderlands controlled by the KNPP, KNU and their NDF allies.

Any expectation that military rule was ending quickly proved wrong. The arrival of so many democracy supporters from the towns undoubtedly encouraged conviction among Karenni and other nationality forces about the correctness of their causes. The collapse of the two largest parties among the Bamar majority, the BSPP and CPB, further heightened hopes for countrywide change. But despite increased international recognition and humanitarian support, anti-government parties ultimately failed in their aim of ending Tatmadaw rule. For the next two decades, opposition movements were suppressed, and the SLORC-SPDC era was to last almost as long as its BSPP predecessor in leaving another mark of military government on the country.

During these years, the KNPP became an important source of support to democracy movement refugees and exiles in Kayah State. Pro-democracy demonstrations also

took place in Loikaw and other local towns during the 1988 protests. Subsequently, the All Burma Students Democratic Front (ABSDF), formed by activists from urban areas, was allowed to set up units in KNPP territory.⁴⁰ However, the KNPP continued to be cautious about joining united fronts that included Bamar-majority groups. As a result, the party generally remained outside the two main anti-government alliances established during the SLORC-SPDC era. These were the Democratic Alliance of Burma (DAB: formed 1988) and the National Council Union of Burma (NCUB: formed 1992). Both alliances had their headquarters in KNU territory at Manerplaw further downriver from Kayah State.

Against this backdrop, Karenni nationalists found themselves facing a new series of military and political pressures. The hermetic days of the “Burmese Way to Socialism” were over. First came the challenge of the 1990 general election. Although fighting continued in several areas, the polling still went ahead, with the SLORC government permitting new parties to form for the first time since 1962. Of the eight available seats in Kayah State, four were won by the NLD, two by the National Unity Party (NUP: the former BSPP) and two by the newly-formed Kayah State All Nationalities League for Democracy (KSANLD). In the adjoining Karen and Shan States, the Democratic Organisation for Kayan National Unity (DOKNU) also won two seats. For KNPP, KNPLF and KNLP leaders, who had long claimed to be the true representatives of the people, it was a highly frustrating experience as they watched political events unfold from their borderland strongholds.

The NLD victory, however, did not mean that democratic transition was beginning. The SLORC government never allowed a new parliament to sit, and the NLD, KSANLD, DOKNU and most other elected parties were repressed by the security services. During the following years, democracy activists – including MPs-elect – continued to join the exodus from the towns into KNPP territories along the Thailand border.⁴¹ Only with the 2010 general election did aboveground political parties revive (see Chapter 6).

As they struggled with this crisis, the KNPP and KNPLF then faced a second major

challenge when the Tatmadaw began a steady build-up of troops across the state.⁴² This was followed by military offensives, including “Four Cuts” operations on both the east and west banks of the Thanlwin River. The first major relocation of villagers occurred in 1992 when dozens of villages were ordered to relocate to Hpruso and other locations in the northwest of the state (see Chapter 7). Similarly intense operations were launched during the SLORC era in territories along the Thailand border controlled by the KNPP’s NDF allies, the KNU and the New Mon State Party (NMSP). It was clear that the new military government was determined to disrupt the DAB, NCUB and allied organisations supporting the pro-democracy cause.

Military operations were not the only cause of civilian dislocation under the SLORC government. During the same period, considerable displacement and loss of life were also reported to have occurred due to forced labour by the Tatmadaw during the construction of the Loikaw-Aung Ban railway between Kayah and Shan States. The state media admitted that over 300,000 people took part.⁴³ When questioned about the large number of Karenni deaths, a Tatmadaw colonel replied: “Everyday people are dying. It’s a normal thing.”⁴⁴

A third, and ultimately most divisive, crisis then developed in the mid-1990s when the SLORC government rolled out an offer of ceasefires to all ethnic armed organisations in the country. These were the first talks between the government and ethnic opposition forces on any real scale since the 1963–64 “Peace Parley” under Gen. Ne Win. The first peace offer was made in 1989 to ethnic mutineers from the CPB. These included the newly-formed (Kokang) Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), United Wa State Army (UWSA) and (Mongla) National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA). But after these groups accepted, similar offers were made to other EAOs around the country.

Initially, the change in government policy was widely regarded as a “divide and rule” strategy to win ethnic forces away from parties supporting the pro-democracy cause. Bamar-majority groups, such as the ABSDF

or National Coalition Government Union of Burma (NCGUB), were never invited to peace negotiations. The new military government also did not accept meetings with united fronts such as the DAB or NCUB.

The SLORC's "peace offensive", nevertheless, posed a real dilemma for ethnic nationality organisations. Across the country, there was widespread support for the NLD and new democracy movement. At the same time, after decades of conflict, communities in the front-line were desperate for peace. As a result, many ethnic leaders believed that, if there were to be peace talks with any Bamar-majority group, they should not be with the NLD or NCGUB exiles but with the Tatmadaw leaders who had been in control of the government for so many years.

These pressures were deeply felt in Kayah State. At first, there were hopes that the rift in Karenni politics might now be healed. Following the CPB's collapse, leaders from the KNPP, KNPLF, KNLP, KNU, PNO and SNPLO met together for first time in many years. All were Karen-related, and veteran nationalists among them saw parallels to the radical changes in the political landscapes during the late 1940s and early 1960s following the

two previous changes in central government. Expectations were especially high in July 1990 when the KNPLF, KNLP and SNPLO leaders travelled to the KNU headquarters at Manerplaw to apply to join the DAB united front.

No agreements, however, were reached and from this moment hopes for inter-party unity began to fall away. In 1991, a ceasefire was agreed with the government by the PNO, a long-time KNPP and NDF ally. This was followed in 1992 by a small breakaway faction from the KNLP, the Kayan National Guard (KNG), who accused the KNLP of being pro-CPB. Two years later, the SLORC agreed ceasefires with the KNPLF, KNLP and SNPLO, which had struggled to survive after the CPB's collapse (see Chapters 3 and 5).

After decades of entrenchment and impasse in Karenni politics, the SLORC ceasefires marked a significant change in the conflict landscape (see "Karenni Conflict Map"). In a little-noted anomaly at the time, while the KNPLF was awarded "Kayah State Special Region-2", the KNG and KNLP were designated "Kayah State Special Region-1" and "Kayah State Special Region-3" respectively. In part, this was reflection of socio-economic geography

NDF leaders Nai Non Lar (NMSF), Saw Maw Reh (KNPP) and Bo Mya (KNU)





and patterns of Kayan inhabitation in the Shan–Karenni borders. The designation also reflected Tatmadaw structures rather than constitutional thinking, with Kayah State and southern Shan State both coming under the Tatmadaw’s Eastern Command that is headquartered in Taunggyi. In the early 1990s, a Regional Operation Command was also set up under the Eastern Command in Loikaw. But whatever the Tatmadaw’s motive, these operational manoeuvres under the SLORC government had important impact on the Karenni status quo.

Suddenly isolated, the KNPP also agreed to a verbal ceasefire with the government in March 1995 in Loikaw.⁴⁵ Among pro-federal forces, the KNPP was not alone in making such a move. During the same period, the SLORC government began peace talks with several of the KNPP’s closest NDF allies, including the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO), NMSP and, eventually, KNU. In the case of the KIO and NMSP, this led to ceasefires in 1994 and 1995 respectively. In Kayah State, however, the KNPP ceasefire quickly broke down within weeks amidst accusations of illicit logging and military movements (see Chapter 3).⁴⁶ It was to be a further 17 years before another KNPP ceasefire was agreed.

In the interim, conflict and displacement escalated in many parts of the country, with over 20,000 Karenni refugees fleeing to Thailand and estimates of double that number of civilians internally displaced in the hills (see Chapter 7). Equally damaging, community division intensified as various defector groups broke away to make ceasefires with the military government. In Kayah State, the KNG was the first splinter militia during 1991–92 from the KNLP. The KNPP then suffered three defections following its ceasefire breakdown: the Karenni National Democratic Party (KNDP) in 1995, Karenni National Peace and Development Party (KNPDP) in 1999, and the Karenni National Solidarity Organisation (KNSO) in 2002 (see Chapters 3 and 5).

Against this backdrop, the SLORC–SPDC generals moved ahead cautiously with their plans for national transition. The main architect was the new Commander-in-Chief Snr-Gen. Than Shwe, who had replaced Snr-Gen. Saw Maung as government chairman in 1992. There were two main elements to the regime’s reform strategy. In 1993 a National Convention was established to draw up a new constitution. The same year a Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) was

also set up to become a mass organisation in support of the Tatmadaw in social and political change.

Following their truces, the KNPLF, KNLP and KNG were invited to join other ceasefire groups in attending the National Convention. Later the breakaway KNDP, KNPDP and KNSO also joined. Progress, however, was very slow, and the National Convention did not formally conclude until 2008. Meanwhile the USDA sought to spread its outreach across Kayah State as the only “civilian” organisation allowed to politically operate. Faith-based groups, especially Baptist and Catholic, remained active in many communities. But no other political movement was allowed. It was not until 2003 that “regime change” was signalled with the announcement of a seven-stage roadmap to “discipline-flourishing democracy” by the Prime Minister and Military Intelligence Chief, Gen. Khin Nyunt.⁴⁷

To take government transition forward, Snr-Gen. Than Shwe initiated two parallel paths: political and military. In political terms, the main element was a new constitution. This was passed by a government-controlled referendum in 2008 in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis in which over 130,000 people died (see Chapter 6, box: “Karenni ‘Vote No’ Referendum Campaign”). The new charter guaranteed the continued “leading role” of the Tatmadaw in national politics. This political supremacy is underpinned by an automatic 25 per cent of the seats in all national and regional legislatures and control over three key ministries: Defence, Home Affairs and Border Affairs. The constitution also stipulates that any change to the charter needs more than 75 per cent of the votes. This proviso effectively assures the right of the armed forces to veto any attempts to introduce amendments. The Tatmadaw also has strong economic powers through the control of large corporations, and the deciding vote on the National Security and Defence Council, the highest-level body for coordinating civil and military affairs in the country.⁴⁸

No territorial changes were demarcated for Kayah State, which continued as one of the seven ethnic states and seven regions (formerly divisions) under the new constitution. In one innovation, new “Self-

Administered Zones” were created for the Danu, Kokang, Pa-O and Ta-ang populations in Shan State and Naga in Sagaing Region, as well as a “self-administered division” for the Wa in Shan State. In addition, 29 electoral seats (for what became ethnic affairs ministers) were reserved for “national race” populations in states and regions where they form smaller minorities.⁴⁹ These included an ethnic Bamar seat for Kayah State and an ethnic Kayan seat for Shan State (see Chapter 6). This latter designation meant that, for the first time, the Kayan were politically recognised on the country’s constitutional map.

The referendum was then followed by the 2010 general election, the first since the NLD’s victory two decades before. In advance of the polls, the USDA was transformed into the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) as a registered political party. But with many opposition leaders still in prison or detention, the NLD and its ethnic allies from the 1990 general election took no part this time around. In Kayah State, this included the KSANLD which had been banned by the government in 1992.

The victory of the USDP thus appeared inevitable on election day, an outcome supported by polling fraud and the manipulation of advance voting. Led by former military officers, the USDP would now partner the Tatmadaw in forming the new government. Nevertheless a number of new nationality parties did come forward to contest the polls, several of which fared relatively well. Out of the 22 parties that won seats, 17 represented ethnic nationalities.⁵⁰ In pro-democracy circles, the new political system was widely derided as military-controlled rather than freely-elected. But after a break of half a century, ethnic diversity and multi-party politics appeared to be back on Myanmar’s parliamentary map (see Chapter 6).

In Kayah State, in contrast, domination by the Tatmadaw and USDP was complete (see Chapter 6). The only consolation among local activists occurred in the adjoining Shan State, where a newly-formed Kayan National Party (KNP) won two seats. Support for the KNP had been fuelled by resentment that

the Kayan had not been recognised by “self-administered” status in the new constitution. The KNP’s entry into the legislatures thus had special significance in Karenni-Shan politics. Since this time, advocacy has increased for an autonomous territory that includes Kayan-majority areas not only in Shan State but also the Kayah and Karen State borderlands as well (see Chapter 7, box: “Kayan Territory and Identity”).⁵¹

Meanwhile, as these political events unfolded, the SPDC generals focused their attention on the second key aspect of regime change: military transformation. By the first decade of the 21st century, the country was populated by an often-bewildering maze of ethnic forces and political alliances, including ceasefire and non-ceasefire groups as well as different kinds of militia (see Chapter 4, chart: “Ethnic Armed Organisations, April 2018”).

The SPDC’s first move was very unexpected: the announcement in April 2009 that all the ceasefire groups must transform into Border Guard Forces (BGFs) under Tatmadaw control (see Chapter 3). The stronger groups immediately refused, including the KIO, NMSP and UWSA, but the much weaker ceasefire groups in Kayah State were forced to become either BGFs or accept paramilitary status as government-backed “pyithusit” (“people’s militia”). This decision was hastened by a major offensive launched by the Tatmadaw in August 2009 in the Kokang region in Shan State where the MNDA split over the issue of BGF transformation.⁵²

As a result, there were few expectations of rapid or significant change as the new USDP government prepared to take office in March 2011. With the central government in flux, the conflict challenges of Kayah State represented only a microcosm of the complexity of politics in the country at large.

The Thein Sein Government and the NLD Revival

When President Thein Sein assumed office, criticisms were widespread both in Myanmar and abroad that the new Thein Sein administration was a “quasi-civilian” government. To all intents and purposes,

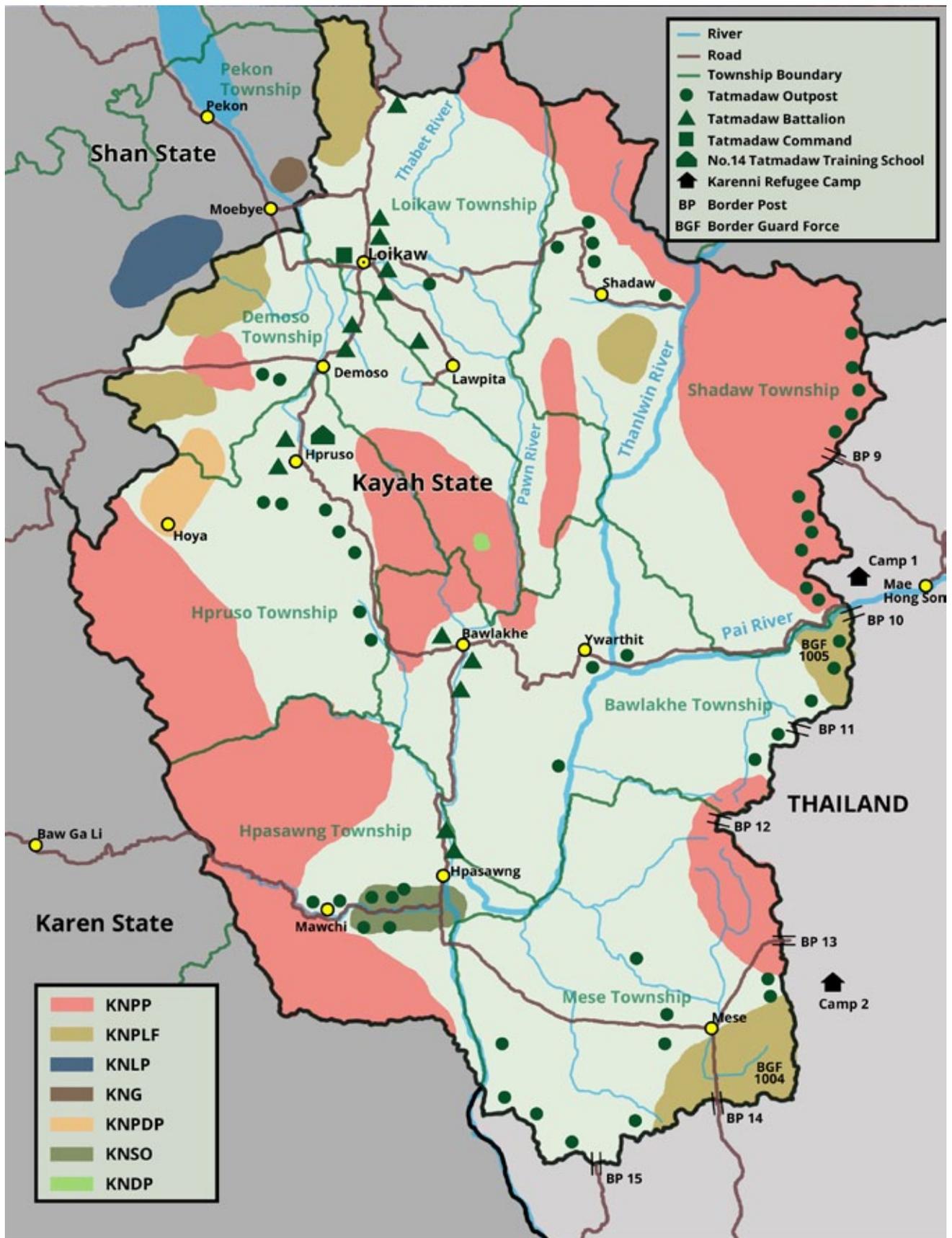
the country was still under military control. Compromise was therefore essential if President Thein Sein was to convince a sceptical world that a new political era was about to begin. Against this backdrop, the incoming administration surprised opponents over the following months by opening the doors to the most important changes in national politics since Ne Win’s “Burmese Way to Socialism” half a century earlier.

Amidst a number of policy changes, President Thein Sein introduced two key initiatives: political liberalisation and ethnic peace. First, he attempted to build bridges with Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD. Soon after taking office, political prisoners started to be released; many media restrictions were lifted; and international doors were opened. In response, the NLD agreed to take part in national politics under the terms of the 2008 constitution. The potential scale of transitional change was highlighted in by-elections in April 2012 when Aung San Suu Kyi and 42 other NLD representatives entered parliament in a near clean sweep of the polls. Tatmadaw dominance in government remained. But after decades of conflict impasse and security repression, the arrival of the NLD in the legislatures heralded a groundbreaking moment in national politics.

As political change gathered pace, President Thein Sein moved ahead with a second strategy: a new peace initiative. In August 2011 President Thein Sein announced a new peace process to reach out to all ethnic armed organisations in the country. “We have opened the door to peace,” he said in an address published in the state media, calling on “any anti-government armed groups” to hold talks “if they really favour peace”.⁵³ Three months later, the KNPP met in Thailand with Thein Sein’s chief peace negotiator U Aung Min, a former general and railway minister.

From these tentative beginnings, the new peace programme began to take shape. At the outset, EAO leaders noted that government officials were adopting a more conciliatory tone than their SPDC predecessors. Reports of the meetings were also published in the state media.⁵⁴ In discussions with EAOs, Aung Min asserted that: the previous ceasefires had not been successful because they did

Karenni Conflict Map



Source: This map is based on information from KCSN and TNI Research.
 This map is illustrative only and meant to give a general indication of Karenni armed organisations and their areas of influence.



not benefit the people; the government had dropped demands for armed groups to convert into BGFs; the government wanted to open up talks with all EAOs without an existing ceasefire; there would be no preconditions; there could be “national level” talks on socio-economic development; and there would be a new national conference “in the style of” the 1947 Panglong conference that had brought the “Union of Burma” into being.⁵⁵

All of these were promises that encouraged hopes among EAO leaders that, finally, solutions could be found to end decades of civil war in the country. In February 2012 the KNPP’s lead peace negotiator Khu Oo Reh voiced optimism: “It is a good first step. U Aung Min talked openly with us. We think we can trust him, and we believe that we can hold another meeting.”⁵⁶

To begin with, the Thein Sein government appeared to concentrate on reaffirming existing agreements with the UWSA and other ceasefire forces that had refused the BGF

order.⁵⁷ But indication that Thein Sein’s peace offer was making progress came in December 2011 when the Shan State Army/Restoration Council of Shan State (SSA/RCSS) signed a ceasefire in Taunggyi. With SSA/RCSS troops operating on the Thailand and Kayah State borders, the balance of conflict in southeast Myanmar was clearly changing.

For the KNPP, the defining moment came a month later in January 2012 with the agreement to a ceasefire by the KNU, the KNPP’s long-time ally since the earliest days of independence. Until this moment, the KNU had not reached a formal ceasefire of real duration with any government since it began armed struggle in January 1949. Amidst scenes of celebration, the KNPP followed suit on 7 March 2012 and signed a “State-level” peace accord in Loikaw in a delegation headed by its Vice-Chair Khu Oo Reh and Commander-in-Chief Bee Htoo. By the end of 2012, a majority of EAOs in the country had ceasefires with the government. Buoyed by optimism, President Thein Sein pledged to the international community that by the end of 2013 all the guns would “go silent” in Myanmar for the first time “in over sixty years”.⁵⁸

Critically, this was a promise that failed to come true. Despite the government rhetoric, conflict was by no means at an end. Rather, new ethno-political crises were emerging in several parts of the country that have since underpinned a new cycle of conflict and humanitarian emergency. The first warning sign came in June 2011 when the KIO ceasefire broke down in Kachin State after the Tatmadaw resumed military operations shortly after Thein Sein’s assumption of office.⁵⁹ Very under-reported at the time, this was a regressive action that saw conflicts spread across northeast Myanmar into Shan, Ta’ang and Kokang communities in northern Shan State. The following year, Buddhist-Muslim violence broke out in Rakhine State, a crisis that escalated in subsequent years to become one of the gravest refugee emergencies in the modern world.⁶⁰

As the years passed by, these revived conflicts in Myanmar’s borderlands proved a serious blight on Thein Sein’s record in office. In many respects, they held back the achievement of nationwide peace and reform,

contradicting a perception in international circles that Myanmar had turned a political corner. Many nationality leaders, however, never believed that the government's re-introduction of military-first tactics occurred by accident. Rather, they were regarded an integral part of the Tatmadaw's long-term strategies to increase national control. Whether the generals were endorsing constitutional reform, peace talks or military operations, they were all considered to have the same political and security goals.

For this reason, the majority of EAOs, including the KNPP, did not sign the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) of October 2015 that was promoted as the centrepiece of Thein Sein's peace initiative (see Chapter 3). The following month, the same lack of confidence in the government was reflected in the November general election that the NLD comprehensively won by a landslide (see Chapter 6).

The generally liberalising changes under Thein Sein's government were not in question. But as Thein Sein prepared to step down from office in March 2016, citizens across the country recognised that neither parliamentary politics nor the NCA process had delivered constitutional reform. After five years of USDP-Tatmadaw government, Myanmar's political future still appeared far from certain.

The NLD Assumes Office

Following the NLD's advent to government in March 2016, hopes were initially high that this would provide a positive impetus towards political dialogue and nationwide peace. On the election campaign trail, Aung San Suu Kyi had bolstered expectations of a new peace initiative when she called for a "Second Panglong Conference" in reference to the 1947 Panglong Agreement that her late father had signed.⁶¹ As she pledged on Independence Day in January 2016: "The peace process is the first thing the new government will work on. We will try for the all inclusive ceasefire agreement."⁶² Subsequently, Aung San Suu Kyi attended the first Union Peace Conference, organised by the outgoing government, where she called for a "real democratic federal union".⁶³ In a perceived criticism of Thein

Sein's NCA, she described the event as "just a token", declaring that "the real peace conference will have to be conducted by the next government".⁶⁴

All these words encouraged optimism that the new administration, under NLD leadership, understood the need for changing the peace process. According to the KNPP official Khu Nye Reh: "During the previous government there was conflict and fighting, even though they say we have already made peace. We hope with the new government this will be different and that there will be more chance to discuss these issues."⁶⁵

Ethnic nationality leaders recognised that the NLD faced many challenges. An early warning of looming difficulties came when Tatmadaw representatives used restrictions in the 2008 constitution to block Aung San Suu Kyi from becoming President (on the grounds of foreign relatives by marriage to a British citizen). Nevertheless, with Aung San Suu Kyi in the newly-created position of State Counsellor, there was expectation that the NLD would choose and navigate its own political path. The NLD represented the first democratically-elected government in the country in over half a century and, after many years of struggle, it was hoped that the party's election slogan of "time for change" would herald a new political era.

Once again, however, the path of Myanmar politics was to be far from smooth. For the Karenni peoples, a new cycle of challenges in national politics was just beginning. Seven decades after conflict began in Kayah State, nationwide peace and political reforms are yet to be achieved.

3. Karenni Ceasefire Negotiations

The SLORC-SPDC era: Views from the Ground

In 1963, the Karenni National Progressive Party took part in the unsuccessful “Peace Parley” with Gen. Ne Win’s Revolutionary Council. Somewhat remarkably, it was not until three decades later when the next round of national peace talks took place under the successor State Law and Order Restoration Council. Since this time, “ceasefires” and “truces” have become an integral part of the conflict landscape in Kayah State and the ethnic borderlands of Myanmar.

Until the present, the patterns in government ceasefires are complex. In 1989, the SLORC government first made ceasefires with breakaway ethnic forces from the Communist Party of Burma in the northeast borderlands. Subsequently, the SLORC leader, Snr-Gen. Than Shwe, stepped up the political momentum in 1993 by announcing a National Convention to draw up a new constitution and calling for peace talks with other ethnic armed organisations in the country. The first announcement was made by the Military Intelligence Chief Gen. Khin Nyunt during a visit to Kayah State on 17 November 1993,¹ and he later repeated the regime’s offer during visits to Mon State and Karen State. During his peace tours, which were broadcast on state television, Khin Nyunt stated:

“We invite armed organisations in the jungle to return quickly to the legal fold after considering the good of the government...We extend our invitation with genuine goodwill. We do not have any malicious thoughts...This is official. Please respond as soon as possible.”²

The government’s invitation had a quick response in the Karenni-Shan frontiers. Here a small Kayan breakaway group from the Kayan New Land Party, the Kayan National Guard, had already made a ceasefire in Loikaw on 27 February 1992. The KNG, headed by Gabriel Byan, was reported to have 80 members.³ This was followed on 9 May and 26 July 1994 by the Karenni Nationalities

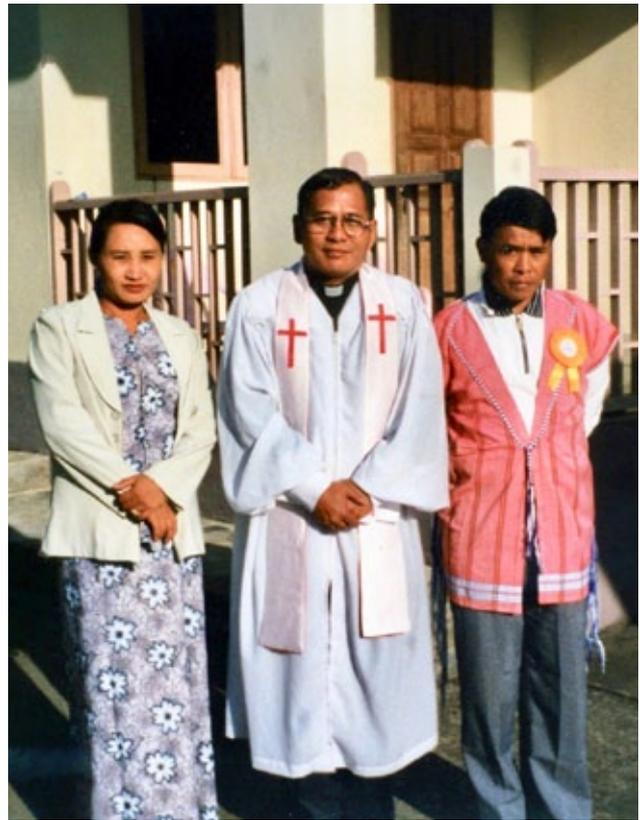


Peace mediator Catholic Bishop Sotero Phamo of Loikaw (TK)

People's Liberation Front and KNLP, both of which were facing increased military pressures without CPB support following the party's demise (see Chapter 2). According to the government, the KNPLF and KNLP claimed to have 1,619 and 1,496 armed supporters respectively.⁴ Mediation between the KNPLF, KNLP and Tatmadaw was carried out by the Catholic Bishop Sotero Phamo of Loikaw. With "Kayah State Special Regions 1, 2 and 3" designated for the three EAOs, this brought some respite from fighting for communities living in the affected areas. "Before the KNPLF ceasefire, fighting was taking place all over the place," Peter Gathui from the KNPLF youth remembers.⁵ Khun Myint Naing from Metta Development Foundation adds: "But after the ceasefire, the fighting was mostly in the eastern part of the state, east of the Thanlwin, in Shadaw Township."⁶

Community pressures for peace built fast in Kayah State following the KNPLF and KNLP ceasefires. The Tatmadaw's "Four Cuts" campaigns had caused considerable suffering and displacement in the early 1990s, with many families wanting to return home (see Chapter 7, box: "'Pya Lay Pya' Campaigns and 'Su See' Villages"). The result was that on 21 March 1995 the KNPP agreed to a verbal ceasefire with the SLORC government in Loikaw, once again through the mediation of Bishop Sotero. The KNPP delegation, headed by Vice-Chair Khu Hteh Bu Peh, claimed to have 7,790 armed supporters,⁷ a number that party officials say included veterans and village militia.

At the time, there were rumours that the authorities in neighbouring Thailand were also putting pressures on the KNPP, Karen National Union and their borderland allies to agree to ceasefires. With the KNPP the de facto "government" along much of Kayah State border, good relations with Thailand have always been important to the KNPP. Following the SLORC's assumption of power, a major logging trade between the military government and Thailand had also been initiated, with the KNPP taking border taxes from this industry as well.⁸ But according to a KNPP commander, the party's actions were in response to requests from the Karenni people.



KNPLF Chair Tun Kyaw (right) with Karen mediator Rev. Mar Gay Gyi (MS)

He denied that the decision was influenced by Thai officials who had both business and refugee concerns over the continued fighting:

"The Karenni people requested the KNPP to talk, because the situation was so bad for them. The Thais did not pressure us before 1995. In fact, at that time we had more pressure from people inside Karenni State. Some elder leaders told us we should talk with the military government and see what a ceasefire agreement could bring, saying we could always start fighting again."⁹

Unlike the KNPLF and KNLP ceasefires, however, the KNPP truce quickly broke down, following arguments over logging and accusations that the Tatmadaw had mistreated the civilian population. "We made a ceasefire in March 1995, but after that the Burmese accused us that we cut logs and sold these to Thailand," said Khu Hteh Bu Peh. "However the Burma army broke the agreement; they were not supposed to collect porters and fees. They started fighting on 3 July 1995, and the ceasefire lasted only three months."¹⁰

The KNPP and local Karenni communities were to pay a heavy price for the 1995 peace

The Failed 1995 Ceasefire: the KNPP View

Abel Tweed *

“We’ve been fighting against the Burmese since 1940, that is about five decades. We’re really fed up with the war and we want peace, and if possible, we want to solve the problem in a peaceful way. So SLORC offered to try a ceasefire, we agreed and then we gave some conditions to the SLORC. They supposedly were willing to agree to the conditions. So, we thought it is maybe a good chance for us, for our people if we can stop the war. Maybe our people can get a chance to live better economically and peacefully. This is the reason that we want a ceasefire. We thought SLORC would be honest enough to keep the promises, but in reality, SLORC didn’t keep the promises. They say one thing and are doing another. So that’s why our ceasefire agreement lasted only three months. It was violated by the SLORC...”

Before we reached this final agreement we gave about sixty points – conditions to the SLORC. For example, we requested SLORC not to collect any porter fees from the civilians, or force civilians to be porters. Other conditions were that SLORC troops would not be sent into the Karenni control areas and that civilians would be allowed to carry out their business and economy.... SLORC said they agreed with these kinds of points, and after that we reached a final agreement. About three months later SLORC started to collect more porter fees from the civilians and they rounded up more people, thousands of people to be porters. They sent troops into the Karenni-control area. So it means SLORC violated the points. That’s why the war started again.”

Teddy Buri **

“Well, in a way we are war-weary. That’s why we entered into a ceasefire, you know. It doesn’t matter that we have decided to give up arms. It’s because...our people have paid a very, very, high price. There have been hundreds killed, thousands disabled. The national loss in terms of money has been so high. And because of this war, Karenni state has never been developed. We think that it is time to have peace, to develop our people, to develop our land. That’s why we entered into a ceasefire, but unfortunately, the ceasefire did not produce the results that we expected...”

The Karenni people took up arms not because they love war or not because they don’t want to live in peace. They took up arms to defend their national identity, to defend sovereignty. But you know, the war has been going on for about five decades and nobody has emerged a winner, neither the Burmans nor the Karenni have won. After so many years of fighting and thousands of lives lost on both sides, the Karenni believe that there’s only one way to solve the problem, and that is through political dialogue. And political dialogue can be achieved the Karenni leadership believes, only through a ceasefire. So after the ceasefire, the Karenni leadership believed that political dialogue would follow and that it would have to be initiated by SLORC. That was why the Karenni leadership chose to enter into ceasefire with SLORC.”

* KNPP Foreign Affairs Minister (currently KNPP Chair)

** Former Permanent Secretary to the KNPP Foreign Minister and then Bangkok representative for the National Coalition Government Union of Burma

Source: Chrissie Gittens, “The Karenni Speak Out: Interview with Abel Tweed and Teddy Buri”, Burma Debate, Vol.III, No.6, November/December 1996.

failure. With the Tatmadaw renewing “Pya Ley Pya” (“Four Cuts”) operations, the numbers of refugees and internally-displaced persons continued to rise (see Chapter 7). The government ordered thousands of civilians in territories with a KNPP presence to move to relocation sites or be “treated as enemies”.¹¹ In subsequent years, areas such as Shadaw Township, east of the Thanlwin River, were almost depopulated as a result. Until the present, many of those forced to leave have never been able to return to their lands.

All was not lost for the KNPP. Its soldiers still controlled territories in the east of Kayah State especially. The KNPP was also allied with the KNU on the Thai border, where support for pro-democracy groups remained strong and international aid reached a peak refugee population of around 150,000 persons (mostly Karen and around 20,000 Karenni).¹² These shared experiences in the camps over the years became an important element in the spread of ethnic nationality consciousness among peoples who previously had little community connection.¹³ But as the Tatmadaw continued its military operations, the KNPP became increasingly marginalised from day-to-day influence in Kayah State politics, a position that it has never completely regained.

For their part, the SLORC and, later, SPDC governments allowed limited development programmes in ceasefire areas across the country, including in KNPLF, KNLP and KNG territories. These groups were encouraged to set up businesses to support their organisational activities. But while many citizens welcomed peace, there was little tangible improvement under the government’s “Ministry of Progress of Border Areas, National Races and Development Affairs”, established in 1992. Many families survived as poor farmers and public services remained limited. As in other parts of the country, the main industries in Kayah State (Lawpita hydropower, Mawchi Mines and logging) did little to help local peoples (see Chapter 8). Instead, continued land confiscations and forced labour only furthered social and economic hardship (see Chapter 7).



Then KNPP Commander-in-Chief Abel Tweed (centre) in 1982 (MS)

As the years passed by, these competing pressures in the Kayah State landscape furthered divisions within Karenni communities about how to continue the nationalist struggle. It was noted that the KNPLF, KNLP and other ceasefire groups had been invited to join the government’s National Convention to draw up a new constitution. This encouraged leaders in several parts of the territory to advocate further peace talks. But, at the same time, anxieties were growing in the conflict front-lines that there had been little demilitarisation after the ceasefires. Instead, the numbers of Tatmadaw troops continued to increase. By 2007, there were estimated to be 28 Tatmadaw battalions in Kayah State.¹⁴

Equally concerning, the SLORC-SPDC government escalated a long-standing Tatmadaw practice of supporting breakaway groups from ethnic armed organisations and establishing local militia forces known as “pyithusit” (see Chapter 5). Following the 1995 ceasefire breakdown, the KNPP suffered three local defections that have endured until the present day. The first was in November 1995 by what became known as the Karenni National Democratic Party (also known as

KNDP “Naga” or “Dragon” party) in eastern Demoso Township. Subsequently, the KNDP was alleged to be responsible for a 1997 attack on a Karenni refugee camp in which three people were killed.¹⁵ The second split occurred in 1999 with the defection of the Karenni National Peace and Development Party (initially known as “KNPP Hoya”) in the Hoya region in Hpruso Township, where it is also known as “Kayaw Ni” (“Red Kayaw”). And in 2002 the Karenni National Solidarity Organisation (also known as the KNSO “White Star” group) was formed in the Mawchi region adjoining Karen State. Subsequently, these three organisations attended the government’s National Convention when it resumed in the 2000s.¹⁶

In the following years, these divisions among EAOs were to seriously undermine Karenni unity. A leading role was played by the KNPLF which had itself broken away from the KNPP in 1978. The most serious fighting occurred during 2004–05 when KNLPF troops, backed by the Tatmadaw, tried to occupy the KNPP headquarters. This was located at Nyar Mu Kone, a strategic mountain base in eastern Shadaw Township on the Thai border. The

fighting lasted for several months, leading to significant casualties and pleas from community leaders to stop.¹⁷ During the same period, the KNPLF and KNSO were also accused of supporting the Tatmadaw in operations against the KNPP’s long-time ally, the KNU, along the Karen State border east of Taungoo.¹⁸

Until the present, local observers believe that these conflicts were instigated by the Tatmadaw. “I would say it was a trick of the Tatmadaw in creating conflict between KNPP and the KNPLF which broke away from them,” one NGO worker privately commented.¹⁹ Another community representative said:

“The Tatmadaw is always trying to create groups in opposition to the KNPP. The KNSO is the latest group to break away from the KNPP. Some of their leaders do not like the KNPP, and do not even want to talk to them. The Tatmadaw knows this, and thus supports them.”²⁰

In their defence, KNPLF and other ceasefire leaders say that they were also frustrated by the lack of social and political progress

KNLFP mausoleum on Kayah–Shan State border (OR)



following their truces with the SLORC–SPDC government. According to Mahn Thet Paw, the KNPLF General–Secretary: “We made the ceasefire for political reasons and for democracy, but we did not get any political discussions with the government.”²¹

During this period, the KNPLF and KNLP also sought to work with other ceasefire groups. Most notably, when the National Convention restarted in 2004, the KNPLF joined with the KNLP, KNG and then “KNPP Hoya” in supporting political proposals for the country’s new constitution. This was done together with other federal–seeking ceasefire groups, including the Kachin Independence Organisation, New Mon State Party and Shan State Army/Shan State Progress Party (SSA/SSPP).²² “We jointly submitted a 10–point declaration together with 13 other ethnic armed groups at the National Convention,” Mahn Thet Paw said.²³

In essence, the 13–party position was for ethnic self–determination under a “union” or “federal” system of government.²⁴ The KNLP and KNSO also put in individual statements to the National Convention.²⁵ All the proposals, however, submitted by ethnic ceasefire groups were rejected by the SPDC, which instead insisted upon a “unitary” system that the Tatmadaw is pledged to safeguard in perpetuity.²⁶

Under the SLORC–SPDC government, this ambiguous position between “war and peace” left many of the ceasefire groups with an uncertain political future. As in other parts of the country, government officials encouraged them to focus on economic issues as a means to support development and build local trust. In Kayah State, this included logging and mining. “In order to survive after the ceasefire, we had to do business,” explained Mahn Thet Paw of the KNPLF.²⁷ But many community groups believed that, whether this was the government’s intention or not, the new dependency on business arrangements weakened the political ambitions and reputations of the ceasefire groups. As critics pointed out, the real profits in Kayah State were mostly made by outside interests and companies – not the Karenni peoples.

Matters came to a head in 2009 when all the ceasefire groups were ordered to accept Border Guard Force (BGF) or pyithusit (militia) status. Both designations effectively put them under Tatmadaw control. In other parts of the country, the stronger ceasefire groups all refused (see Chapter 2). But the ceasefire organisations and factions were very much weaker in Kayah State. Under these pressures, all the ceasefire groups in Kayah State and the Shan State borders – the KNPLF, KNLP, KNPPDP, KNSO, KNLP and KNG – were eventually reported to have accepted. Only the larger KNPLF gained official BGF status, while the others were designated as pyithusit by the government (see “Karenni Conflict Map”).²⁸ The only exception was on the Shan–Kayah State border where the KNLP claims that it neither accepted the BGF order nor was it forced to disarm.

In Karenni nationalist circles, the transformation to BGF or pyithusit status by ceasefire groups was regarded a regressive ending to their advocacy for the political rights of the people. A Tatmadaw security rather than political motive was widely suspected, with the intention of creating further divisions in the Karenni landscape. Opinion was also divided within the KNPLF. For a time, a split was rumoured between a pro–business faction, led by Tun Kyaw, and the political leadership, headed by the party’s veteran chairman Sandar and secretary Shwe War.²⁹ As a political insurance, some KNPLF troops were designated to remain behind as a reserve force, but the main organisation accepted transformation into two BGF battalions. The KNPLF’s Mahn Thet Paw explained:

“Some of our KNPLF members were transformed into BGFs. This is a strategy of the Tatmadaw. They want to separate our army from the main KNPLF. We were forced to do this; it was meant to split us. After becoming a BGF the situation became more difficult for us. We have no more strength.”³⁰

From this point, any political role for the BGF or pyithusit forces in Kayah State came to an official end. Subsequently, none of

these groups has been involved in national level efforts to try and deliver political reform. Ostensibly, they remain nationality movements, and leaders claim to keep armed support in reserve. But, in reality, these organisations are essentially local militia. Their attention is more often focused on business than activism for political change.

As a result, the KNPP is the only independent EAO that is active and politically recognised in Kayah State today. Six decades after its founding, it is still considered by many local peoples as the key to ethnic peace and national reform. At the end of the SLORC-SPDC era, however, the KNPP remained out in the political cold.

The KNPP 2012 Ceasefire

A new cycle of ceasefires began after the government of President Thein Sein took office in March 2011 (see Chapter 2). A joint administration between the Tatmadaw and Union Solidarity and Development Party (the former USDA), the new government pledged a new political direction in relationships with both the National League for Democracy and EAOs across the country. Unlike most of the ceasefires during the SLORC-SPDC era, the agreements with the Thein Sein government were written. Encouraged by the change in mood, seven EAOs had either renewed or signed ceasefires within a year of President Thein Sein taking office, including the KNPP's close ally, the KNU.

Against this backdrop, on 7 March 2012 the KNPP signed a “state level” peace agreement in Loikaw, similar to the new treaties with other EAOs, including the KNU and NMSP. In essence, the KNPP ceasefire consisted of four main points: to sign a ceasefire; to open liaison offices; to inform each party in advance of troop movements; and to form representative teams that would lead to “union level” peace talks.³¹

Further peace meetings followed in which the KNPP submitted a 20-point proposal to the government. Of these, 14 points were agreed to in principle, and they were included in a

“union level” (i.e. national level) ceasefire that was signed on 9 June 2012 in Loikaw. Among key points, the new treaty included agreement by both sides: to stop fighting in all areas of Kayah State; to release all KNPP members from detention; to create a local ceasefire monitoring group; to conduct a joint survey with the KNPP to assess local support for the Tatmadaw Training School in Hpruso; to allow civil society organisations (CSOs) to monitor mega-development projects in Kayah State; to cooperate with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and international NGOs (INGOs) on health, education and development initiatives; to discuss the resettlement of IDPs; and to cooperate on eradicating drug production and implementing rehabilitation programmes.³²

There were, however, a number of points where it was agreed that decisions should be deferred. These included the demarcation of troop positions, large-scale development projects, and a halt to hydroelectric dams on the Thanlwin River. Six years later, they remain some of the most sensitive issues in Karenni politics today (see Chapter 8). Despite these worries, the improvement in the conflict landscape in Kayah State was undeniable following the KNPP ceasefire and without doubt the most far-reaching since independence in 1948.

Impact of the 2012 KNPP Ceasefire

After the 2012 ceasefire, there was an official halt to armed conflict in Kayah State for the first time since 1948. It was an overdue development that was long hoped for in communities across the territory. “The KNPP ceasefire has some good points, as it stopped fighting in our state area,” confirmed Kyaw Htin Aung of the Union of Karenni State Youth (UKSY). “For over three years we did not hear any guns shooting.”³³ The ceasefire also ended the most serious human rights abuses, improved communications and transport, and made it easier for the KNPP and other EAOs to meet with each other.³⁴

In an important indicator of change, the KNPP opened liaison offices in Loikaw, Shadaw

and Hpasawng, facilitating relations with the government and discussion with local communities. A Kayah State Joint Monitoring Committee (KSJMC) was also established. Two members were nominated by the Kayah State government, two by the KNPP and six were community leaders. They have a joint mandate to verify complaints by the people and seek solutions to maintain the ceasefire.³⁵ Until the present, however, the monitoring committee largely exists on paper only. Local civil society organisations have continued to complain of this failing. According to a representative of the Kayah (Karenni) Earthrights Action Network (KEAN): “We submit monthly reports to the Kayah State Joint Monitoring Committee, but they are not very active.”³⁶

In response, a civilian-led Kayah State Peace Monitoring Network (KSPMN) was founded in June 2012. Composed of eleven core team members, the KSPMN has around 60 local monitors in the field, representing various ethnic groups and community-based organisations. The main office is in Loikaw, but the KSPMN also works with other peace groups in the country and has organised

several public consultations. “The network truly represents the local people,” said Plu Reh of KSPMN and the Shalom Foundation, “and KSPMN holds onto the core values of independence and impartiality in facilitating and monitoring the ceasefire and peace process.”³⁷

Trust, however, is taking time to build in the aftermath of the KNPP ceasefire. Memories of the negative fall-out from failed peace initiatives in the past still run deep. “In 1995 the ceasefire was broken, and following that some civilians got killed,” warned Khu Nye Reh, the KNPP representative in Loikaw. “The community still remembers this.”³⁸ Many people also remain in fear of being seen in contact with the KNPP, a situation that the government has done little to resolve. Six years after the 2012 ceasefire, the KNPP was still officially an “illegal organisation” in Myanmar and contact with it punishable under Section 17/1 of the 1908 Unlawful Associations Act.³⁹ According to Kyaw Htin Aung of the UKSY: “This is bad for trust-building, and it is an obstacle for the reconciliation and peace process.”⁴⁰ The

Myanmar Army Training Camp No.14 at Hpruso





KNPP is also unhappy about this restriction. “We took up arms a long time ago, because the constitution was not fair,” explained Khu Nye Reh. “We came here because we want real and genuine peace. We did not exchange arms, so they still consider us as an illegal and unlawful armed group.”⁴¹

Adding to concerns, it also took time for military operations to end on the front-line following the KNPP ceasefire. In the most serious incident, fighting broke out near Mawchi in June 2012, with the KNPP accusing the Tatmadaw of bringing in a new division to guard repairs on the road from Mawchi to Taungoo in Bago Region. “It is a top strategy,” claimed the KNPP’s Gen. Aung Mya. “Repairing or opening the road means troops meet face to face.”⁴² As a result, the Karenni Civil Society Network (KCSN) – a local network of CSOs – released a cautionary statement in October 2012:

“The government has failed to keep various agreements signed with KNPP on March 7 and June 9 of this year, including informing KNPP of its troop movements through Karenni territory. [This] led to an outbreak of fighting in June, resulting in the death of nine Burma Army soldiers.”⁴³

The KCSN spokesperson Thaw Reh questioned: “If the government is not even keeping to its initial agreements in Karenni State, how can we trust them to build lasting peace in Burma?”⁴⁴

It is important to stress then that, after these initial difficulties, the KNPP ceasefire was generally preserved in Kayah State during the Thein Sein era. “Except for the incident in June 2012 in Mawchi region, both sides could keep and maintain the ceasefire,” confirmed the KSPMN monitor Plu Reh. “This was a significant achievement by both sides.”⁴⁵ In August 2013 the All Burma Students Democratic Front, which had maintained armed supporters in KNPP territory since its 1988 formation, was also allowed to open an office in Loikaw as one of its three liaison posts in the country following its ceasefire with the government.

The end to fighting, however, did not mean a reduction in front-line tensions. Given the failures of the past, the KNPP remained suspicious of Tatmadaw intentions. At the same time, the government was unhappy over the KNPP’s demands that plans for new roads and hydropower projects should be halted until there is political progress. A stand-off then

developed in May 2015 when 200 KNPP troops escorted party officials on a political tour around villages in Shadaw Township. Both the Kayah State government and Tatmadaw objected, and the situation was only resolved when the KNPP withdrew its troops.⁴⁶

As a result, a sense of impasse and frustration began to build in many communities following early optimism about the KNPP ceasefire. In part, disappointments were over the slow pace of change on key issues. Refugees and IDPs still remained in many border areas, while there was a rush of outside interests and investors into the territory that brought little benefit to the local peoples (see Chapters 7 and 8). But the KNPP also had serious worries about political developments on the national stage. In particular, Karenni leaders became alarmed about the deepening of new divisions in the ethno-political landscape in the north of the country, which had begun in 2011-12 after President Thein Sein assumed office. For while the Thein Sein government had concluded new ceasefire agreements with such EAOs as the KNPP and KNU in southeast Myanmar, conflicts had resumed or spread in the Kachin, northern Shan and northern Rakhine States during the following years.⁴⁷

As KNPP leaders were only too aware, several of these same territories had been treated as “model” ceasefire areas under the previous SLORC-SPDC government. This retrogressive picture was hardly an encouragement to Karenni and other nationality leaders to believe government promises about peace and political reform. If the government’s intention was nationwide peace, it had to be questioned why the Tatmadaw was launching new offensives against groups that previously had ceasefires. With the Karenni landscape also fractured, there were many concerns that the KNPP might be targeted next.

With this national view in mind, KNPP leaders took on a leading role during the Thein Sein presidency in efforts to achieve a ceasefire for the whole country. Despite the KNPP’s 2012 agreement, future peace and political reform were by no means considered certain. In 2018, it is an endeavour for nationwide peace that is still continuing. After decades of conflict, opinion is widespread that it is the outcome of national processes for peace that will define the ultimate success or failure of the KNPP ceasefire. As in every era of government since independence in 1948, the politics of Kayah State cannot be separated from events that are happening elsewhere in the country.

KNPP leaders at peace negotiations with government representatives in Loikaw (KT)



The 2015 Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement

In order to promote national dialogue, the KNPP has taken part in a number of political initiatives over the years. A co-founder of the 1976 National Democratic Front, it was also a founding member of the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC) in February 2011 by a new alignment of ceasefire and non-ceasefire EAOs in anticipation of talks with the Thein Sein government (see box: “The United Nationalities Federal Council”). The UNFC included both non-ceasefire EAOs (notably the KNPP and KNU) as well as ceasefire groups that had refused the BGF order (the KIO, NMSP and SSA/SSPP). The UNFC aims to form a federal union in Myanmar. The KNPP’s current Vice-Chair, Khu Oo Reh, also became UNFC General Secretary and leader of its Delegation for Political Negotiation. “We

are not hardliners: we are the ones who want peace the most,” he said in a 2015 interview.⁴⁸

In the first year of Thein Sein’s presidency, Karenni leaders had initially been encouraged by the spread of new ceasefires. Momentum, however, soon began to slow, with nationality parties complaining about government delays in beginning political dialogue. To try and regain peace momentum, in 2013 the Thein Sein government embarked on a strategy of calling upon all EAOs to sign a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement. Only after this is signed, government officials argued, could political dialogue begin.

On the surface, this proposal was not controversial. As a matter of principle, the KNPP and other EAOs have always said that they want a nationwide ceasefire prior to political dialogue. However, the

The United Nationalities Federal Council

The UNFC was formed in February 2011, shortly before President Thein Sein took office, to seek the establishment of a Federal Union in Myanmar. Different ethnic armed organisations, both ceasefire and non-ceasefire, have joined and left over the years. This chart lists their ceasefire status and UNFC position in April 2018.*

Ceasefire EAOs

Chin National Front (suspended 2015: re-instated February 2018)
Karen National Union (self-suspended 2014)
Karenni National Progressive Party
Lahu Democratic Union
New Mon State Party
Pa-O National Liberation Organisation (suspended 2015)
Shan State Army/Shan State Progress Party (resigned 2017) **

Non-ceasefire EAOs

Arakan National Council
Kachin Independence Organisation (resigned 2017)
Kachin National Organisation (subsequently joined with KIO in UNFC)***
Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (resigned 2017)
Ta’ang National Liberation Army (resigned 2017)
Wa National Organisation (resigned 2017)

* The Arakan Army became an affiliate member but never formally joined.

** The SSA/SSPP’s resignation is scheduled to become formal at the next UNFC Congress.

*** May be reinstated at next UNFC Congress.

selective manner by which the Thein Sein administration pursued its “nationwide” strategy soon became a problem in itself. Instead of facilitating political dialogue, the NCA process put up procedural obstacles that held peace in the country back.⁴⁹

The reasons for the NCA’s failure to gain national traction are still disputed. One source of grievance was economic. President Thein Sein initially won praise for suspending the Myitsone dam in Kachin State shortly after taking office. But subsequently, the ceasefires of the Thein Sein era were accompanied by one of the most rapid periods of land-grabbing and natural resource exploitation in the country’s history.⁵⁰ Whether in Kayah State or other parts of the country, local peoples did not feel consulted about the direction of how the country should develop. As a result, civil society groups called for a moratorium on new investments until political dialogue and nationwide peace have been achieved.⁵¹

The main reason, however, for the slow pace of Thein Sein’s NCA process was military: the resumption of armed conflict in several territories in the northeast and northwest of the country. The first flash-point came in June 2011 when the Tatmadaw broke a 17-year old ceasefire with the KIO and, despite mediation efforts, the fighting intensified during 2012, causing a massive displacement of local peoples.⁵² As the fighting spread, the Tatmadaw began to violate other ceasefires, by attacking positions of the SSA/SSPP as well as the Shan State Army/Restoration Council of Shan State. By 2015 fighting had also escalated in territories where the non-ceasefire Myanmar National Defence Alliance Army and Ta’ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) also operate. At the time, the KIO, MNDAA, SSA/SSPP and TNLA were all UNFC allies of the KNPP.

From 2012, conflict and displacement also began to break out in Rakhine State.⁵³ Here the main tension was initially between the majority Rakhine population, who are mostly Buddhist, and minority Muslims, many of whom identify as Rohingya. But during the Thein Sein presidency a UNFC affiliate, the

Arakan Army (AA), also spread its operations from northeast Myanmar to the Rakhine State borderlands, furthering the sense of national unrest and instability.⁵⁴ Neither government nor opposition parties appeared able to control the direction of events.

In an initiative to break the deadlock, a Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT) representing the KNPP and 15 other EAOs was set up in November 2013 at the KIO headquarters of Laiza on the China border. They then proceeded to Myitkyina to meet with government negotiators. Also in attendance were the UN Secretary-General’s Special Envoy to Myanmar Vijay Nambiar and the Asian Special Representative of China Wang Ying Fan.⁵⁵ Not all EAOs were NCCT members, notably the powerful United Wa State Army. But from this point, a total of 21 EAOs (including the UWSA) were generally “recognised” as conflict actors to be included in the national peace process (see Chapter 4, chart: “Ethnic Armed Organisations, April 2018”). Subsequently, the KNPP Chair and UNFC Vice-President Abel Tweed was in a UNFC delegation that travelled to Yangon where they also met with the NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi at her lakeside residence.⁵⁶ In Kayah State, hopes of a nationwide peace accord were beginning to rise.

Intensive negotiations then followed between the NCCT, Tatmadaw and government representatives, leading to a draft NCA text in March 2015. Consisting of seven chapters and 33 clauses, the NCA attempted to lay out a roadmap to political solutions, involving both parliamentary reform and ethnic peace. The Tatmadaw’s “three main national causes” of “non-disintegration of the union, non-disintegration of national solidarity, and perpetuation of national sovereignty” were guaranteed. There was also respect for ethnic nationality demands. This included provisions for political dialogue, the creation of a federal union and the removal of signatories from the list of “illegal organisations”.⁵⁷

For a brief moment, it appeared that a nationwide breakthrough had been achieved. The final text, however, had not been approved by the different parties. Equally



problematic, Tatmadaw leaders now insisted that they would not accept the MNDA, TNLA and AA, as well as three smaller UNFC parties, as participants in the NCA process.⁵⁸ This was unacceptable to a majority of EAOs, including the KNPP and its UNFC allies – the KIO, NMSP and SSA/SPPP.⁵⁹

As all sides hesitated, the UWSA convened a summit of 12 EAOs, including the KNPP, at its Panghsang headquarters on the China border in May 2015. At the end of the meeting, participants issued a statement that called for the inclusion of all EAOs in the NCA, an end to fighting before NCA signing, and the amendment of the 2008 Constitution.⁶⁰ The following month, the KNPP participated in another EAO meeting at Law Khee Lar in KNU territory. Here it was agreed to call for amendments to the NCA draft and hold back on any signing until all 16 NCCT members were included. “We want a real peace, not a fake one,” warned Shwe Myo Thant, the KNPP’s NCCT negotiator:

“I think the government and the military should reassure us that they are sincere and really want to stop fighting, in order to establish genuine peace. That’s the only way out. On the one hand, they are

proceeding with the political dialogue; on the other, the military keeps launching operations. That doesn’t make sense. It will make genuine peace impossible.”⁶¹

Undeterred, the government pushed ahead with a “partial” NCA signing as the clock ran down on Thein Sein’s presidency. According to Aung Naing Oo of the government-affiliated Myanmar Peace Center: “Better a half-signed deal than no deal at all.”⁶² Against this backdrop, a lavish ceremony took place on 15 October in Nay Pyi Taw where eight armed groups signed the NCA with the Thein Sein government and Tatmadaw.⁶³ The KNPP and majority of EAOs, however, stayed away. Out of the eight signatories, only two had significant political and military strength: the KNU and the SSA/RCSS. Three of the others were splinter groups and another, the All Burma Students Democratic Front, was not actually a nationality force (see Chapter 4, chart: “Ethnic Armed Organisations, April 2018”).⁶⁴

Whether intentional or not, the rush to sign an incomplete NCA was to have a deeply divisive impact on the peace process over the next two years. The agreement effectively separated EAOs into two different blocks:

NCA signatories and NCA non-signatories. In the NCA's defence, Thein Sein's supporters said that they were keen to show tangible success in the peace process as a means of maintaining Tatmadaw commitment. In contrast, many nationality parties preferred to wait until after the November general election, which they hoped that the NLD would win.

To try and bridge these divisions, the KNPP and KNLP attended another EAO conference with nine other non-NCA forces at the UWSA's Panghsang headquarters on the eve of the polls.⁶⁵ "There are different opinions between the groups who signed and not signed," the KNPP's Khu Nye Reh warned. "The eight groups who signed want to play a leading role...this is a big obstacle and very difficult for us."⁶⁶

Following the NLD's election victory, however, the divergence between NCA signatories and non-signatories deepened. Before Thein Sein left office, the outgoing administration and NCA signatories started to make important decisions about ceasefire monitoring, military codes of conduct and the framework for political dialogue without the inclusion of the KNPP, KIO, UWSA and the other influential EAOs in the country. The NLD was also not involved. Concerns then grew further as the Tatmadaw escalated attacks on the SSA/SSPP and TNLA in northern Shan State, with the signatory SSA/RCSS also involved in clashes with the TNLA.⁶⁷

In January 2016 a Union Peace Conference was organised in Nay Pyi Taw as a first step in the NCA process before Thein Sein's departure. But following the NLD's election victory, political attention was largely focused elsewhere. Although the KNPP and some non-NCA groups were invited as "observers", none effectively took part.⁶⁸ Within three months of signing, disillusion with the NCA was growing in many parts of the country.

As Thein Sein prepared to step down, the lack of ethnic and political inclusion was stark. In all the states and regions, different ethnic nationalities had voted for the NLD in large numbers in what was generally regarded as the best way to defeat the USDP-Tatmadaw

government.⁶⁹ Although the NLD's victory was not disputed, many nationality parties feared that they were at risk of being excluded from political dialogue, whether in the NCA or parliamentary legislatures. As the Kayan National Party Chair Khun Bedu warned:

"We need to change the current NCA and Peace Conference process and review the agenda and the way they organise the conference, and we should include all key stakeholders. The KNPP has not signed the NCA, and the KNLP and KNPLF are not in the NCA process. It should not be like that. Only eleven people from Karenni went to the Peace Conference, this is not enough, and the selection process is not good. There should be more regional representatives, as we want to raise our voice there."⁷⁰

President Thein Sein's time in office thus ended under a shadow. The increase in political freedoms that his government had introduced were not in doubt. But several borderlands had seen the greatest escalation in fighting in many years, and this was resulting in ever-rising numbers of internally displaced persons. Meanwhile conflict and displacement in Rakhine State showed little sign of ending amidst Buddhist-Muslim tensions that the Thein Sein government did little to resolve. As U Soe Naing of the ceasefire KNLP explained: "During the last years armed conflict has reduced in some places, but in other states, such as Kachin and Rakhine States, conflict increased. I do not see this as positive change."⁷¹

In hopes of better change, the KNPP joined other UNFC members in forming a new negotiating committee, the Delegation for Political Negotiation, to be ready to open talks with Aung San Suu Kyi and the incoming NLD government. But the question remained as to whether Tatmadaw leaders had truly changed their attitudes after half a century in control of government. Would the NLD be allowed to form the next administration and, if so, what kind of government would this be?

4. Karenni Armed Organisations and National Peace

The 21st Century Panglong Conference

As a first step in reform promotion, the National League for Democracy government organised a second Union Peace Conference at the end of August 2016 in Nay Pyi Taw. Entitled the “21st Century Panglong Conference”, the name symbolised a landmark moment of national aspiration and celebration in bringing so many different peoples and parties in the country together. As different sides recognised, it was at the original Panglong Conference in February 1947 that the principles for union and equality were agreed that had brought the new nation into being (see Chapter 2). In the following days, what became known as “Panglong-21” was attended by over 750 representatives from the government, Tatmadaw, ethnic armed organisations (both ceasefire and non-ceasefire), political parties and civil society organisations.

To prepare for the conference, the Karenni National Progressive Party and 16 other EAOs met at Mai Ja Yang in Kachin Independence Organisation territory beforehand for a meeting of NCA signatories and non-signatories.¹ Other attendees included representatives of the two main ethnic groupings in electoral politics, the United Nationalities Alliance (UNA) and Nationalities Brotherhood Federation (NBF). China’s Special Envoy on Asian Affairs, Sun Guoxiang, and UN Secretary-General Special Advisor, Vijay Nambiar were also present. Confirmation was agreed during the discussion on “eight points” (initially referred to as “nine”) that they wanted to be considered in an amended NCA draft in the establishment of a federal democratic union. Over the next two years, these became a key negotiating point for the KNPP and other non-NCA signatories that were members of the UNFC (see box: “The ‘Eight Points’ of the UNFC”).²

In Kayah State other parties also attempted to make preparations. The ceasefire Kayan New Land Party sent a letter to Aung San Suu Kyi requesting to be able to participate

Protest in Loikaw against government handling of killing of civilian and 3 KNPP soldiers by the Tatmadaw (KT)



in the Panglong-21 conference but received no reply. The Karenni Nationalities People's Liberation Front, Karenni National Peace and Development Party and Karenni National Solidarity Organisation made a similar request to Aung San Suu Kyi through U Win Thein, a senior NLD member who was on a visit to Kayah State. They also did not receive a reply. The KNPP's invitation was also late, meaning that there was insufficient time to prepare input based on consultations with local communities. But nationality organisations were not initially too concerned. By reviving the historic "Panglong" name, Karenni and other ethnic leaders anticipated that the NLD was prepared to embark on significant reform. In her opening address to the conference, State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi promised that the government's objective was to return to the "Panglong spirit and the principle of finding solutions through the guarantee of equal rights, mutual respect, and mutual confidence between all ethnic nationalities."³ In a long-divided country, these were words that many citizens longed to hear.

It did not take long, however, for worries to emerge. Participants complained that the meeting had been organised without proper arrangements and vision, without prior consultation with different EAOs and political parties, and did not allow debates or discussions on the issues raised. This was highlighted when the delegation of the United Wa State Army, representing the largest EAO in the country, walked out over procedural arrangements.⁴ For their part, the KNPP and other non-NCA signatories quickly realised that, although invited to attend, they were not allowed to participate in processes or discussions about political dialogue. Equally concerning, the different agendas of the NCA's Union Peace Conference and NLD's "Panglong-21" swiftly became blurred.

The subsequent course of events has yet to be adequately explained by the different participants involved. After the conference ended, Aung San Suu Kyi met with the military Commander-in-Chief, Snr-Gen. Min Aung Hlaing. From this moment, both the NLD and

The "Eight Points" of the UNFC*

1. Bilateral ceasefire agreement between the government-military and the UNFC
2. To build a federal union with result achieved from Panglong-21
3. Agreement of tripartite dialogue composition
4. Drafting and promulgation of constitutional law based on the outcome of Panglong-21
5. Advance agreement on Military Codes of Conduct and monitoring on Terms of Reference
6. Formation of military Joint Monitoring Committee with representatives from government, EAOs and international figures acceptable to both parties
7. Formation of a neutral, enforcement tribunal for NCA involving domestic and international law experts and judges that are acceptable to both parties
8. Developmental projects to be tackled according to Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), in cooperation with the public and the EAOs.

* These are the eight points that UNFC members agreed at their meeting in August 2016 should be added to the 2015 Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement before any further signing.

Source: Sai Wansai, "Framework for Political Dialogue: UNFC's boycott leads to peace process deterioration", S.H.A.N., 21 September 2016.

Tatmadaw's positions appeared to harden up behind the NCA as the only path to nationwide peace. The Tatmadaw's position was that the NCA could not be amended, and no progress was made during the following months on the "eight points" of the UNFC. Military officers pointed out that the Tatmadaw has "six principles" of its own. These were built around defence of the 2008 constitution, from which they are not prepared to move.⁵ To back this up, officers argued that some of the UNFC "eight points" were contradictory to existing laws and the 2008 constitution. Therefore negotiation was impossible.

The details of the agreement between Aung San Suu Kyi and Min Aung Hlaing have not been publicised. But certainly, following their meeting, Tatmadaw commanders seemed to believe that they now had the green light for military actions in defence of the NCA. During the following months, they launched some of the heaviest operations yet in Kachin and northern Shan States. Once again, a new wave of internal displacement and human rights violations was reported amidst aerial attacks and artillery shelling. IDP numbers among such peoples as the Kachin and Ta'ang now approached the 100,000 mark. "Myanmar's borderlands on fire," concluded Amnesty International in a subsequent investigation.⁶

The consequences of this escalation in military attacks were profound. Just six months into government, the NLD appeared to be caught completely off-balance. This time, the EAOs in northeast Myanmar fought fiercely back, forming a new "Northern Alliance" consisting of the KIO, Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, Ta'ang National Liberation Army and Arakan Army. Meanwhile, another humanitarian emergency broke out in northern Rakhine State. Here a major Tatmadaw security operation was underway in response to attacks in October on three police stations by a new armed group, the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA). In the following months, hundreds of local people were reportedly killed and over 70,000 Muslim refugees fled into Bangladesh. The exodus prompted widespread international condemnation.⁷

As these events unfolded, the second Panglong-21 meeting, initially scheduled for February 2017, was postponed several times. The assassination in January of the NLD's leading constitutional lawyer U Ko Ni, a prominent Muslim, also deepened insecurities within the country. This horrifying killing outside Yangon Airport was interpreted by pro-democracy supporters as a warning shot by military interests against rapid change.⁸

The good intentions of NLD leaders were not generally in doubt. But opinion was developing that there was not so much an NLD government in Myanmar as an "NLD-Tatmadaw" hybrid. With control of three ministries, 25 per cent of seats in the legislatures and the General Administration Department of the civil service, the Tatmadaw remained a dominant force in political as well as military affairs. For many ethnic and religious minorities, there were also worries about the continuing rise of a militant Buddhist nationalism. This was headed by the "Ma Ba Tha" movement ("Organisation for the Protection of Race and Religion"), which had emerged during Thein Sein's presidency and appeared to enjoy some official backing.⁹

These tensions in state-society relations appeared to lie at the heart of NLD indecision on moving forward in support of peace and reform. After taking office, the government's Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee was reformed with Aung San Suu Kyi as chair. Her personal physician Dr Tin Myo Win was appointed as the new lead peace envoy. A new National Reconciliation and Peace Center replaced the Myanmar Peace Center that had been formed under President Thein Sein. By early 2017, however, government meetings with the different ethnic parties had slowed to a halt, and the NLD failed to reveal any clear details of a new vision for national peace and federal union. Many nationality leaders drew the conclusion that the NLD leadership did not sufficiently appreciate nor understand the depth of ethnic grievances and aspirations within the country.

With the peace process faltering, new splits now began to occur in the conflict landscape. In February, two of the leading UNFC



members, the KIO and Shan State Army/Shan State Progress Party attended another summit at the UWSA’s headquarters at Panghsang on the China border, where there were calls for the NCA to be replaced. Instead, it was proposed to form a new political negotiation team between EAOs and the government.

The establishment, of a new EAO body, however, created an immediate dilemma for the KNPP and several other UNFC members. For although there was sympathy for a different peace approach towards the government, abandonment of the NCA was contrary to the UNFC’s “eight points”. The KNPP, NMSP and EAOs in southeast Myanmar were also wary about joining alliances that appeared too close to political events in the Yunnan borderlands. The splits in nationality movements due to Chinese influence in earlier decades had not been forgotten (see Chapter 2).

Concerned by the deepening crisis, the KNPP, NMSP and other UNFC members tried to break the deadlock on the basis of the “eight point” plan for NCA amendment. On 1 March, the UNFC’s Delegation for Political Negotiation met with Aung San Suu Kyi in Nay Pyi Taw. “We were able to clarify

to the State Counsellor that all [actors in the process] are interconnected,” said the KNPP Vice-Chair and UNFC negotiator Khu Oo Reh. “All-inclusiveness and the NCA cannot be separated, and neither can our eight-point proposal.”¹⁰ Further meetings between the UNFC and government Peace Commission followed in Yangon and Chiang Mai, but without formal acceptance of the UNFC proposal.¹¹ Embarrassment was then caused when the State Counsellor incorrectly announced that the KNPP, NMSP and three other UNFC members had agreed to sign the NCA.¹² For nationality parties, it was further evidence as to how out of touch Aung San Suu Kyi and her peace advisors appeared to be.

By now, however, it was too late to salvage inter-ethnic unity. In April the political stakes were raised further when the EAOs that had attended the Panghsang meeting confirmed the formation of a new coalition, the Federal Political Negotiation and Consultative Committee (FPNCC). Over the following weeks, the FPNCC grew to seven organisations: the ceasefire UWSA, SSA/SSPP and National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA) and non-ceasefire AA, KIO, MNDA and TNLA. The KIO and SSA/SSPP now

added their names to a growing exodus from the UNFC alliance.¹³ Following the FPNCC formation, the UNFC was effectively left with only four members: the KNPP, NSMP and two residual fronts from earlier organisations, the Arakan National Council (ANC) and Lahu Democratic Union (LDU). It was a steep decline in influence for the UNFC which had once been the leading ethnic nationality voice for political change.

The new FPNCC formation meant that there were now, in effect, three negotiating groups among the EAOs in national politics. These were the KNPP and three remaining UNFC parties, the eight NCA signatories, and the seven members of the new FPNCC alliance. Of these, the FPNCC far exceeded in strength and influence most of the other forces under arms. The result for the KNPP was a difficult dilemma. For despite their long-standing relationships with such forces as the KIO and SSA/SSPP, KNPP leaders indicated that they had no choice but to remain with the UNFC alliance. “The Wa issued a statement at the Panghsang conference, and it included they would follow China’s Belt and Road Initiative,” said the KNPP representative Khu Nye Reh. “This is quite opposite to our approach, so I think politically we cannot go together. Geographically they are also far away.”¹⁴

As the second Panglong-21 approached at the end of May, the political prospects looked far from opportune.

The Second “Panglong-21” Meeting

It was in rather more cautious circumstances that the second “Panglong-21” took place at the end of May 2017. Around 700 representatives from the government, Tatmadaw, political parties, civil society and EAOs attended, including the eight NCA signatories. The KNPP and remaining UNFC members declined to join the meeting after talks with the government failed to achieve agreement on the “eight-point” principles. “We stick to the UNFC’s eight points until they are negotiated,” explained the KNPP spokesperson Khu Plu Reh.¹⁵ But there was one

moment of surprise when the FPNCC members unexpectedly flew in from Yunnan Province following some last-minute lobbying by China. The FPNCC parties did not participate in the sessions, but their presence appeared to indicate that NLD leaders understood that the NCA had its limitations. “We recognise that ceasefire negotiations can address surface problems, but only political dialogue can address underlying grievances,” Aung San Suu Kyi said in her opening address. “As such the NCA itself is not the ultimate destination.”¹⁶

The subsequent meeting, however, made little progress. “Accord or discord at Panglong?” queried the *Frontier Myanmar* magazine.¹⁷ At the conference end, it was announced in the state media that agreement had been reached on 37 out of 45 basic principles in the political, economic, social, land and environmental fields in a new Union or “Pyidaungsu” accord.¹⁸ Future political reform, it was stated, would be on the basis of the principles of “federalism”. But this view of “national” agreement was not widely shared among nationality representatives. The Pyidaungsu agreements were announced without nationwide peace or participation by all ethnic parties in the country, and many important issues were not debated at the conference at all. When differences of opinion arose, decisions were made by the Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee and not by the delegates. Indeed in many sessions it appeared to be Tatmadaw representatives who were really controlling the direction of the NCA and Panglong-21 process and not the NLD or other participants.¹⁹

Disagreement at the meeting ultimately came out into the open on a matter of especial importance to the Karenni cause: the 1947 right of secession. Argument started when Tatmadaw representatives insisted upon the inclusion of a “non-secession” clause as one of the principles in the new Union accord during discussion on the rights of states and nationalities.²⁰ This Tatmadaw proposal was considered counter to the spirit of the 1947 Panglong Agreement. Nationality delegates also regarded it as premature and prejudicial to impose a “non-secession” principle before the achievement of nationwide peace and

political dialogue. They also questioned how the conference could decide on such issues when so many peoples and parties in the country were not included. Disagreement continued for two days. In the end it was decided to leave the “non-secession” principle aside. But this left a multitude of other issues still to be agreed. If ethnic parties would not agree on the “non-secession” principle, NLD and Tatmadaw representatives refused to discuss political matters further at the conference.

In the following weeks, the political atmosphere deteriorated even further. The Tatmadaw stepped up security pressures around the country and officers began using the language of suppressing “terrorism”. In a clear warning to non-signatory groups, another major “clearance operation” was launched in the amber mining region around Tanai in Kachin State. In a revival of “Four Cuts” tactics, local villagers were ordered to relocate from their homes or be treated as “enemy” KIO.²¹ Highlighting international concerns, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Yanghee Lee warned that she was disappointed to see

“tactics applied by the previous government” being used at the end of a visit in July.²²

Worst-case scenarios then followed in late August when violence exploded again in northern Rakhine State. On the day after Kofi Annan’s Advisory Commission on Rakhine State published its recommendations on how to defuse the crisis, another series of ARSA attacks²³ was followed by a draconian Tatmadaw response against what the government described as “extremist terrorists”.²⁴ In the following weeks, hundreds of people were reportedly killed amidst reports of arson and violence to drive local Muslims out. The UN reported more than 670,000 refugees fled across the border to join the estimated 350,000 refugees already living in Bangladesh.²⁵ While there was some support among Buddhist nationalists for the Tatmadaw’s actions, international opinion was appalled at the apparent lack of response by Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD upon whom so many human rights hopes and expectations had been invested. Government officials appeared to be defending the Tatmadaw’s clearance of Muslim communities along the northern Rakhine State frontier.

Tatmadaw camp on pagoda compound in Shadaw



The “Rohingya crisis”, however, was not even on the agenda of “Panglong-21” nor NCA process, and the NLD had not fielded a single Muslim candidate in the 2015 general election. In October, Aung San Suu Kyi announced the formation of a “Union Enterprise for Humanitarian Assistance, Resettlement and Development in Rakhine State”. But as 2017 came towards a close, the alarming scale of the humanitarian emergency came to overshadow other political developments in the country. International confidence was further undermined when the government informed the UN Special Rapporteur Yanghee Lee that she would not be allowed access again for the duration of her tenure.²⁶ Addressing the rights of the Muslim population in Rakhine State appeared an insuperable challenge for the NLD, beyond its understanding and capabilities, within the present landscape of national politics.

Such events inevitably caused doubts around the country about the political direction of the NLD government. At the end of the second “Panglong-21” meeting in May, the KNU and

the seven other NCA signatories initiated a process to review its implementation. Opinion was widespread that the latest Panglong conference had failed to follow the agreed procedures and spirit of the NCA. It was also felt that that the EAOs had not been treated as equals by the government and Tatmadaw in seeking solutions. With conflict still continuing in several parts of the country, it was no longer clear what peace procedures the government was actually following. Even after five years of new ceasefires and 18 months of the NCA, no significant progress had been made on the most basic issues of political reform, refugee resettlement and equitable development.

For their part, KNPP leaders joined UNFC and FPNCC members in proclaiming their willingness to keep peace talks going. In mid-August, it was reported that agreement had been reached with the government’s Peace Commission on four of the UNFC’s “eight points” for signing the NCA.²⁷ At the same time, the FPNCC issued a statement expressing willingness to attend the next

Ethnic Armed Organisations, April 2018²⁸

Arakan Army ^{1 2 3 4}
 Arakan Liberation Party ^{2 5 6}
 Arakan National Council ^{1 2 7}
 Chin National Front ^{2 5 6 8}
 Democratic Karen Benevolent Army ^{2 5 6}
 Kachin Independence Organisation ^{1 2 3 4 8}
 Karen National Union ^{2 5 6 8}
 Karenni National Progressive Party ^{2 5 7}
 KNU/KNLA Peace Council ^{2 5 6}
 Lahu Democratic Union ^{2 6 7}
 Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army ^{1 2 3 4 8}
 National Democratic Alliance Army ^{4 5}
 National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang ^{5 *}
 New Mon State Party ^{2 5 6 7}
 Pa-O National Liberation Organisation ^{2 5 6 8}
 Shan State Army/Restoration Council of Shan State ^{5 6}
 Shan State Army/Shan State Progress Party ^{2 4 5 7 **}
 Ta’ang National Liberation Army ^{1 2 3 4 8}
 United Wa State Army ^{4 5}
 Wa National Organisation ^{1 2 4 8}
 All Burma Students Democratic Front ^{5 6 ***}

- ¹ Non-ceasefire with government
 - ² Nationwide Ceasefire Coordinating Team
 - ³ Northern Alliance
 - ⁴ Federal Political Negotiation and Consultative Committee
 - ⁵ Ceasefire with government
 - ⁶ Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement signatory
 - ⁷ United Nationalities Federation Council
 - ⁸ Ex-UNFC member
- * Also operational in India
 ** Resignation from UNFC pending recognition
 *** Non-nationality force based in ethnic territories



Protesting the arrest of activists who demonstrated against killing of civilian and 3 KNPP soldiers by the Tatmadaw (KT)

“Panglong-21” meeting. The alliance called for an end to Tatmadaw “offensives” and the start of political negotiations to “build a federal democratic Union that guarantees equality and self-determination.”²⁹ Aung San Suu Kyi, however, appeared to stick to her position that EAOs must sign the NCA “to join the peace process”.³⁰ A subsequent meeting between the UNFC and government Peace Commission in Yangon failed to make agreement.³¹ There was also UNFC disquiet after the Tatmadaw seized three checkpoints of the NMSP, a key KNPP ally, in what appeared a thinly-veiled attempt to force the party to sign the NCA.³²

Nevertheless the likelihood of the KNPP and remaining UNFC members signing the NCA appeared to increase again during November. Khu Oo Reh, who led the UNFC negotiating team, indicated that progress had been made on discussion of the “eight points” for amendment during the latest meeting in Yangon. “It’s almost completed,” he said.³³

Not for the first time, hopes of a peace breakthrough in Myanmar were expressed too soon.

Renewed Crises and Contemporary Impasse

Just as a change in the peace process seemed possible in Kayah State, trust was destroyed on 20 December when three KNPP soldiers and a civilian were killed by a unit from the Tatmadaw’s Regional Operations Command. The circumstances remain murky. But reports subsequently emerged that they were arrested and executed in retaliation after a KNPP checkpoint, on the road to Shadaw near Loikaw, had uncovered evidence of illicit timber smuggling.³⁴ Local disquiet then deepened when five organisers from the Union of Karenni State Youth and the Karenni State Farmers Union (KSFU) were arrested in Loikaw and imprisoned for 20 days for allegedly violating Article 19 of the Peaceful Assembly Law as protests against the killings spread.³⁵

In a bid to defuse tensions, Aung San Suu Kyi continued with a scheduled visit to Kayah State at the end of December, the fifth in a series of public “peace talks” around the country. The State Counsellor sought to address local concerns about ethnic equality, federalism and Tatmadaw behaviour in her

speech.³⁶ But local antipathies were further raised when three prominent citizens were also arrested and charged under the Peaceful Assembly Law for leading a demonstration in Loikaw on 5 January. They were protesting against the earlier prosecutions. Those arrested were Khun Bedu, Chair of the Kayan National Party; Khu Tu Reh, Chair of the KSFU; and Khun A-Than, a member of the Kayan New Generation Youth (KNGY).³⁷ Karenni parties and civil society organisations were outraged. They accused the government of using the clampdown as a distraction rather than investigating the killings.³⁸ The charges for the latter demonstration were eventually dropped, but the damage to local trust and confidence had already been done.

Against this backdrop, the next “Panglong-21” meeting was postponed again several times. Fighting continued between the Tatmadaw and such FPNCC members as the KIO, TNLA, MNDAA and AA in the north of the country. The eight NCA signatories voiced concerns about restrictions on holding public consultation meetings that had been mandated at the NCA’s 2015 signing.³⁹ And opinion was strong in Kayah State that future peace dialogue was impossible for the KNPP until the issues of justice for the December killings and Loikaw crackdown were resolved.

Eventually, in an apparent boost for the government, the NMSP and LDU broke ranks from the UNFC by signing the NCA at a public ceremony in Nay Pyi Taw one day after Union Day on 13 February.⁴⁰ Like the National Democratic Front, National Council Union of Burma and other anti-government alliances that preceded (see Chapters 2 and 3), another united front among opposition groups – this time the UNFC – seemed about to be consigned to history. Many nationality leaders considered that this had always been the Tatmadaw’s intention, given its “divide and rule” tactics (see Chapter 5). It was also noted that the LDU did not have an existing ceasefire nor had it previously been accepted by the Tatmadaw as a dialogue partner. These heightened perceptions of the government’s ad hoc management of the NCA as a control strategy rather than an inclusive process to bring about national peace and reform.

After these latest signings, there now appeared to be just two EAO networks effectively in existence in the country: the NCA signatories and the FPNCC alliance. This left the KNPP in a very lonely position. This was a point highlighted at a Ministry of Information press conference where the KNPP was described as a “stand-alone” group.⁴¹ It was also asserted by government officials that the other remaining UNFC member, the Arakan National Council, was too small in size to be included in nationwide dialogue. Negotiations with the UNFC would thus be halted, and the government would open bilateral talks with the KNPP.⁴²

In response, the KNPP and other UNFC members attempted to regroup. In late February it was announced that the Chin National Front (CNF), an NCA signatory which had been suspended from the UNFC in 2015, could be reinstated.⁴³ Another former faction, the Kachin National Organisation (KNO), would also be considered for readmission.⁴⁴ This would appear to bring the UNFC back to a potential six members: the KNPP, ANC, CNF, KNO, LDU, NMSP (see Chapter 3, box: “The United Nationalities Federal Council”). But with the UNFC echoing the Tatmadaw’s “numbers game” of seeking to boost credibility by making selective agreements with groups small or large, it was difficult to see how this would advance meaningful dialogue rather than reflect representational divisions in the field (see chart: “Ethnic Armed Organisations, April 2018”).

As of mid-2018, therefore, many obstacles remain if there is to be a peace and reform breakthrough at any time soon. Fighting still continues in several borderlands, and political dialogue about the key ethnic, social and economic challenges facing the country still seems some way ahead. Both the NCA and Panglong-21 have raised peace expectations, and both processes are likely to continue in their different ways. The KNPP and other Kayah State parties remain keen to become involved, and the KNPP is considered likely to sign a revised NCA. But, after decades of conflict, meaningful reforms that truly restore rights to the Karenni and other nationality peoples do not appear to be on the immediate

Karenni activists protest in front of military command in Loikaw (KT)



horizon. Rather, political focus is already switching to the next key moment in national politics, the 2020 general election, when the future course of government is likely to become clearer.

In the meantime, the Tatmadaw is seeking to keep control of political transition by defending the 2008 constitution as the only path to political reform and the NCA as the only route to ethnic peace. According to Zaw Htay, a former army major and press spokesperson for both President Thein Sein and State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi: “The country’s reconstruction cannot be done only by the government. The Tatmadaw needs to be involved, it is very clear. Everything has to undergo negotiation with the Tatmadaw under the 2008 constitution.”⁴⁵

The result is that, seven decades after independence, a very unrepresentative status quo among the Bamar-majority and Tatmadaw elite continues to dominate many aspects of national life. If democracy is to be established and nationality rights are to be enjoyed by all peoples, it is a pattern of dominance and privilege that has long

needed to end. Myanmar remains entrapped in conflict and one of the poorest countries in Asia.

Further struggles plainly lie ahead. The aspirations and dilemmas of the Karenni peoples after 70 years of conflict were summarised by the KNPP Vice-Chair and leading peace negotiator, Khu Oo Reh:

“With federalism practising democratic principles, we trust we will have a better future in the next generation. We do not see any better future for ourselves if we just keep fighting on through armed struggle. The problem with the Burmese military is a political one. We need to resolve this through political means. But for the moment we cannot succeed because the military are not interested to negotiate. So we have needed to keep to armed struggle to reach our destination and goal.”⁴⁶



Kayah Woman (IR)

5. Ethnic Armed Organisations and Political Representation

A State of Deadlock

There are many reasons for Myanmar's legacy of ethnic conflict and state failure. Key factors include ideology, economics, repression and human rights denial. But a major reason for failure in Kayah State has always been fundamental: the lack of equality and inclusion. There has never been an integrated peace or reform process of any real substance or duration. As a result, nationality forces and political stakeholders in Kayah State have had some very contradictory experiences in their changing relationships with the different governments over the years. Until the present, this has continued to fuel doubts about trust-building and government intentions.

Under the SLORC-SPDC government, some of the Karenni-Kayan ceasefire forces – notably the Karenni Nationalities People's Liberation Front and Kayan New Land Party – were treated as “dialogue partners” and invited to attend the National Convention to draft the new constitution. But later, when the convention had finished, all the ceasefire groups in the Kayah-Shan State borders were compelled to transform into Border Guard Forces or militias under Tatmadaw control. Since then they have not been permitted to participate in national politics. This included the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement initiated by President Thein Sein and the 21st Century Panglong process inaugurated by the National League for Democracy.

The experience of the Karenni National Progressive Party, the leading ethnic armed organisation in Kayah State, has followed a very different trajectory. After a failed ceasefire in 1995, the KNPP refused to sign another peace agreement until political dialogue was guaranteed. In consequence, the KNPP and its territories came under intense military attack during the SLORC-SPDC era, and the party took no further part in peace talks or political affairs. But in a complete turn-about since its 2012 ceasefire, the KNPP has become the only ethnic armed organisation in Kayah State accepted as

a dialogue partner by the Tatmadaw and successive governments, while the KNPLF, KNLP and other former ceasefire signatories are today excluded.

The KNPP ceasefire, however, does not mean that peace has stabilised or that political dialogue has begun. Hopes were high amongst local communities that the 2012 ceasefire would pave the way for political dialogue to address the grievances and aspirations of the Karenni peoples. But as of May 2018, an inclusive peace and reform process has yet to start in either Kayah State or the country at large. The “21st Century Panglong” Conference has, like the Panglong Conference of 1947, not been inclusive or representative of all peoples and parties.

For this reason, the conclusion drawn by many nationality peoples and parties is that the difficulties in achieving national peace and inclusion in Myanmar are not accidental. After decades of civil war, no side can claim a monopoly on righteousness. But, all too often, government decisions about who is “in” and who is “out” in national politics seem to be based more on Tatmadaw strategies to “manage” conflict rather than to “solve” it.¹

This practice has become a key element in the failures to achieve national peace and reform in the country.

Ethnic-based Forces in the Field

There are presently several armed groups in Kayah State claiming to represent nationality identities or goals. Over the years, this separation has created challenges in political representation in local and national politics. The KNPP and KNLP are the oldest ethnic-based movements, founded in 1957 and 1964 respectively. All the other groups are essentially breakaway groups from either the KNPP or the KNLP. Among the breakaway groups from the KNPP, only the KNPLF, founded in 1978, has significant political and military strength. All the other forces are relatively small but have offices in Loikaw and carry out business activities in their allotted territories where they claim to represent certain regions or nationality groups.

Many citizens attribute this diversity of organisations to “divide and rule” policies used by the Tatmadaw to stimulate splits and support breakaway factions, making



KNPP troops (KT)

it difficult for nationality parties to build common platforms in the promotion of peace and political reform. Not all divisions can be laid at the Tatmadaw's door, however. As the Burma Ethnic Research Group (BERG) concluded in a 2000 study: "While some people blame the government for engineering splits in opposition groups, the reality is a bewildering number of armed groups whose allegiances may not always be transparent."² But as BERG also noted: "The cease-fire arrangements have not addressed this issue at all; rather they appear to have exacerbated the problem."³

The consequence of this militarised way of life is that Kayah State, the smallest nationality state in the country, has a surprising number of EAOs who provide ostensibly different reasons for divisions. These include different policies (national democracy or people's democracy), nationalities (Kayah or Kayan) and political strategies (political dialogue first or ceasefire first). Over the decades, political movements that are nationally-based have also risen and fallen in Karenni politics. This includes the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League, Communist Party of Burma and

Burma Socialist Programme Party. But, as these military and political divisions have continued, there has only been one common denominator in Kayah State politics: the Tatmadaw.

For over half a century, the Tatmadaw leadership appears to have focused more upon conflict management than conflict resolution, tactics that it also follows in other parts of the country.⁴ Myanmar today has one of the greatest diversity of ethnic armed formations of any state in the contemporary world, whether in ceasefires with the government or not (see Chapter 4, chart: "Ethnic Armed Organisations, April 2018"). With the national armed forces also controlling the central government, these structures and patterns have become integral to the failures of the post-colonial state.

Trading Arms for Business

The ceasefires of the 1990s and 2000s established in Myanmar what one analyst called "ceasefire capitalism" as a central strategy of the Tatmadaw.⁵ While peace was

Villagers at community meeting in Hpasawng Township (OR)



being built, officers of the SLORC–SPDC governments encouraged ethnic ceasefire groups not to focus on politics. Instead, they offered business concessions to groups or factions of armed groups after they agreed to truces. Critics argued that over time this had the effect of militarily and politically weakening the leaderships and organisations of many anti-government groups.

In Kayah State, all armed groups except the KNPP agreed to ceasefires during the SLORC–SPDC era. In 2009, the Tatmadaw compelled them to transform into BGFs or militias. Since then the ceasefire groups in Kayah State have increased their involvement in business, including logging and mining, and focused less on political goals. Community leaders nevertheless say that they did initially see some positive impact from the ceasefires during the SLORC–SPDC era. In areas where truces were agreed, it was generally noted that fighting had stopped; civilians were no longer forced to act as porters for the Tatmadaw; and there were no new IDPs.

There were also negative consequences from this concentration on business under the SLORC–SPDC government. This included more deforestation, more communities losing land and more illicit drug production. Over the years, this undermined trust with local communities. “This is because the armed groups focus on the business, and the community does not like this,” said Khun Myint Naing of Metta Development Foundation. “They feel the objectives of the armed groups have not been reached yet. But [the armed groups] cannot stand for the people, because they are weak in administration. They only know fighting.”⁶

These trends have worsened since the 2009 BGF and militia transformations, and important lessons from history have not been learned.⁷ As BERG warned in a 2000 analysis of the Kayah State ceasefires:

“Ceasefires may represent little more than a patchwork of ad hoc economic deals where the success of each would depend on the group involved rather than the overall political process. Such agreements

have entrenched power structures leading to further dispersal, factionalism and cronyism in the competition for increasingly scarce resources.”⁸

There remains some local sympathy for the position of the BGF and militia groups. They are viewed as having once been actors with ethno-nationalist legitimacy. But many of their contemporary actions are not seen in this light. “It is hard for armed groups because they need to survive, but actually if you think carefully it is not good,” said Saw Eh Say from the Kayah Earthrights Action Network.⁹ Many local inhabitants also believe that the militia and BGFs have lost out due to naivety in politics and business, having been wrong-footed by the government’s changing tactics. According to Plu Reh of the Shalom Foundation:

“It is difficult for the BGF and militia. For two decades, they had many opportunities from the government, but after 2010 all opportunities became obstacles. The government strategy was very effective. The KNPLF now have less business because the KNPP signed a ceasefire. Now business is split between the KNPP and government.”¹⁰

For local communities, the critical question remains as to whether the KNPP’s peace agreement will develop in the same business-driven way as previous ceasefire accords during the SLORC–SPDC era. As of June 2018, the KNPP had still not signed the government’s NCA nor participated in the 21st Century Panglong Conference. An uneasy situation exists in many parts of the state that is described by community leaders as “neither war nor peace”. The KNPP’s military wing still retains its arms. Meanwhile, business development and natural resource exploitation are taking off at their fastest pace in all the decades since Myanmar’s independence in 1948.¹¹

Such sentiments are echoed by many civil society representatives. “It is very difficult for the militias and BGFs groups to join political negotiations,” says Plu Reh of the Shalom Foundation that supports conflict resolution

initiatives.¹² Following their ceasefires in the SLORC era, such groups received business opportunities from the government for almost two decades, including mining and logging concessions (see Chapter 8). “All these have become obstacles for them to stand independently in the Myanmar political arena,” Plu Reh explained. “It’s like you owe big money to all the big stakeholders. You have to serve them. It is like a kind of control. So the government’s strategy has been very effective.”¹³

For their part, KNPP officials see this exclusion and division of other nationality forces as a support to the party’s claim to be the only EAO that can represent the Karenni peoples in political discussions. According to KNPP spokesperson Khu Nye Reh:

“All the militia groups and BGFs are under the control of the Ministry of Defence. All they are doing is making business, but not politics. They told us the KNPP is the only group with political power. I think they cannot go back into politics again and join the political dialogue. If militias are interested, they can join our meetings as a civilian, and under our leadership. But at the moment they are under the Ministry of Defence.”¹⁴

Despite their marginalisation, leaders of the militia and BGF groups continue to seek a role in discussions about peace and political dialogue in both Kayah State and at the national levels of government. As the Shalom Foundation has found in its mediation work:

“They want the military, the government and the KNPP to recognise their role and position. But the KNPP never recognises them as independent groups. They have accepted to be under the government since 2009, and so they are not at the same level as the KNPP and cannot participate as such at peace talks. According to the Tatmadaw, all BGFs and militias are under control of the Myanmar army and thus part of the military. But the BGFs and militias do not accept this. They say they have their own mission and vision. Especially the KNLP has a strong view on this.”¹⁵

Initiatives for Inter-Party Cooperation

Although reform progress has been slow, efforts are continuing to try and bring the different parties together. After signing the 2012 ceasefire, KNPP delegates travelled around Kayah State for public consultations during which local people asked them to reconcile with other armed groups in the state. Since this time, several meetings and discussions have taken place.¹⁶ The most successful and inclusive effort for cooperation between EAOs is the Civil Health and Development Network (CHDN), set up in August 2012 by six ethnic armed groups in the state.¹⁷ This is the only joint body in which all the armed groups participate. “CHDN is working because it is only for health,” says Evelyn, a leading CHDN member. “It is led by young and energetic people from different EAOs.”¹⁸ Since its foundation, local community leaders say that the CHDN has been able to deliver meaningful health services across Kayah State for underserved populations.

In December 2015, the KNPP also initiated a Karenni State Peace Conference in Loikaw. Despite initial worries about KNPP domination,¹⁹ this was attended by the armed KNPLF and Karenni National Peace and Development Party, the electoral All Nationalities (Nationals) Democracy Party (ANDP), Kayah Unity Democracy Party (KUDP) and Kayan National Party,²⁰ and a diversity of local civil society organisations. “In Karenni State there are many tribes, and political parties, so we tried to make a common agreement for the political issue to present at the national level,” said the KNPP representative Khu Nye Reh. “This is the reason for the Karenni State Peace Conference: to prepare for the political dialogue. By having common agreement, we can share this with the government.”²¹ At the end of the conference a seven-point statement was agreed. Key objectives included the formation of a federal state, amendment of the 2008 constitution, building genuine peace, changing the name of Kayah State to Karenni State, and the establishment of a federal army to take care of the security and defence of Karenni State.²²



In October 2016, the pyithusit (people’s militia) and BGF groups in Kayah State also set up the Karenni National United Joint Committee (KNUJC) in an effort to seek participation in political dialogue, including the 21st Century Panglong Conference.²³ The KNPP declined to join on the basis that it might dilute the party’s autonomy on decision-making. “They had concerns that the KNUJC would challenge the KNPP,” explained the KNUJC Secretary Evelyn. “But our purpose is clear. In the past, people are fighting each other. But now people are fed up with fighting. The KNUJC has no idea to argue with others in Karenni State.”²⁴

Since its formation, the KNUJC has held several public consultation meetings during which three main public concerns surfaced: problems related to checkpoints and taxation; environment (especially logging and mining); and narcotic drugs. “We got very open feedback from the people, and now we need to take action and do many things for the future,” said Evelyn. “We would like to include the other armed groups who are also striving for peace. Even though they say these

armed groups focus on business, we still rely on them. They are strong at holding the gun. So we need to do something with these groups.”²⁵

Despite such explanations, the legitimacy of political representation by the militia and BGF groups continues to be challenged in Kayah State. As a result of past experiences, some local observers are suspicious about whose idea it was to set up the KNUJC. One local NGO representative privately commented: “It was formed just a few days after the visit of the Tatmadaw Eastern Commander based in Taunggyi, who met all the militia and BGF groups in Kayah State. So many people thought it was his idea.”²⁶

For this reason, the question as to who among the EAOs should represent the Karenni peoples in political dialogue remains a contentious one. Many communities have been divided by conflict in the field, and there are also emerging political movements in the towns that need to be considered (see Chapter 6). Representatives from different community groups and networks in Kayah State generally

Karenni Armed Organisations 2018

Armed struggle among the Karenni peoples began in 1948. Formed in 1957, the **Karenni National Progressive Party** (KNPP) is the oldest and largest EAO in Kayah State. It has an independent political agenda, the largest number of troops, the most developed administrative structure, and greatest ability to deliver services to local communities. The KNPP has passed through all eras of government that began after independence in 1948 and has taken part in peace talks in three political eras: in 1963, 1995 and the continuing meetings since 2012. The previous peace initiatives in 1963 and 1995 both ended in failure. Today the organisation and its military wing, the Karenni Army, have a presence in many areas of Kayah State, with especial influence in Shadaw, Hpruso and Hpasawng Townships. It also has strongholds along the Thai border, including its headquarters in the southeast of Shadaw Township.

Since its inception, the KNPP has a long history of alliances with other armed opposition groups, notably the National Democratic Front (established 1976) and United Nationalities Federal Council (established 2011). Over the decades, it has been especially close to the Karen National Union but it has also retained good relations with such nationality forces as the Kachin Independence Organisation and New Mon State Party. Karenni “independence” and the right of self-determination have often been voiced in respect of historic sovereignty, a position promoted by such founding leaders as the late Saw Maw Reh. As the KNPP veteran Abel Tweed explained in 1996: “Historically, we are not a part of Burma and our policy is to maintain our independence. We want all Burmese to recognize that the Karenni are supposed to be a nation...as the Karenni recognize Burma as a nation. So we are equal status.”²⁷ For this reason, other than a brief National Democratic United Front alliance with the CPB (established 1959), the KNPP has generally refrained from joining united fronts that include Bamar-majority leaderships or organisations.

In recent years, the KNPP has changed its focus from historic independence and now calls for the establishment of a “federal union” based on democratic principles in line with its NDF and UNFC allies. The KNPP also continues to reject the name “Kayah State”, which it says represents only one nationality. Instead, the KNPP wants a return to the original name of “Karenni State” that is considered collective for all peoples in the territory. “Now it is called Kayah State. This is only for one people, and this is not good as other groups also live here, not only Kayah,” said the KNPP spokesperson Khu Nye Reh. “The U Nu government changed this name, and we feel that the military regime then destroyed our history.”²⁸ Such groups as Kayah, Kayan and Kayaw are closely related, and the KNPP seeks to represent all ethnic groups in the state, denying allegations that it mainly represents the majority Kayah population. Some senior KNPP leaders in the past were non-Kayah, including the late Gen. Aung Than Lay who was Pwo Karen and played an important role in the KNPP’s development.

The **Karenni Nationalities People’s Liberation Front** (KNPLF), locally known as “Kye Ni” (“Red Star”) or by its Burmese acronym “Kalalata”, was created in 1978 by a breakaway group of KNPP members, who subsequently allied with the CPB that then had strongholds on the China border. Following its split from the KNPP, the KPNLF worked closely with two other CPB allies in the Shan State borders, the

Kayan-majority KNLP and Pa-O majority Shan Nationalities People's Liberation Organisation. With the 1989 collapse of the CPB, the KNPLF changed its position from the promotion of "people's democracy" to supporting the creation of a "federal state", and is willing to be part of a Union of Myanmar.

Under the leadership of Sandar and Tun Kyaw, the KNPLF signed a ceasefire with the SLORC government in 1994. It was awarded "Kayah State Special Region-2" and took part in subsequent sessions of the National Convention to draw up the 2008 constitution, where it supported calls for federalism and the right of self-determination. In November 2009, however, it was forced by the SPDC government to transform into two BGF battalions, with an official 600 troops operating in Loikaw, Hpasawng, Mese, Bawlakhe and Demoso Townships. The KNPLF continues to maintain a stronghold in southern Kayah State in Mese Township, adjacent to the Thai border, where BGF battalion 1004 is currently based. The other battalion, BGF 1005, is located in the northeast of Bawlakhe Township.

The KNPLF has many Kayan and Kayaw members as well as Kayah. But, like the KNPP, the party's leaders claim to represent all nationalities in Kayah State. "In the past, the KNPP stood for independence and Kayah identity, and the KNPLF stood for a federal union and multi-ethnic identity," said the KNPLF Joint General Secretary Mahn Thet Paw. "But now the KNPP has changed, and their idea became the same as us."²⁹

KNPLF representatives assert that, although its army has transformed into a BGF under Tatmadaw control, its political wing remains independent and the organisation retains its political objectives. For this reason, some troops remain outside BGF formation. Leaders also reject reports that the organisation has become primarily business-focused under the direction of Tun Kyaw, the party chairman (see Chapter 8). "We hope for democracy, and hope to have political equality and a federal union," says Mahn Thet Paw. "Our country has been under conflict for sixty years. Because of that, our state is the most underdeveloped of the country. We hope to get democracy with the new government, but the military is still involved in politics, so it is difficult. We need to re-write the 2008 constitution."³⁰

The **Kayan New Land Party (KNLP)**, locally known as "Kayan Pyi Thit Party", was established in 1964 following a farmer uprising against the "Burmese Way to Socialism" in Pekon Township, Shan State. The movement was led by a local headman Bo Pyan who had fought in the anti-Japanese resistance. With an influx of younger supporters led by Shwe Aye, a Yangon University student, the KNLP was formally set up shortly afterwards and over the following years spread its activities in the mountainous junction area between Shan, Kayah and Karen States and Mandalay Division. In 1976, the KNLP initially joined the NDF at its foundation, but it subsequently joined the KNPLF in allying with the CPB and worked closely with the KNPLF and SNPLO during the following decade.

Like the KNPLF and SNPLO, the KNLP was left isolated following the CPB's 1989 collapse, and it signed a ceasefire with the SLORC government in 1994, being awarded "Kayah State Special Region-3". The party subsequently took part in National Convention sessions to draw up the new constitution where it supported pro-federal

positions. During 2005, the KNLP was forced to withdraw from some of its territory in northern Kayah State after the Tatmadaw promoted the formation of a new militia force among local villagers. A number of fatalities were reported. “It is part of the [government’s] divide and rule policy to disrupt ceasefire groups and make divisions between civilians and the groups,” said Khun Marko Ban, MP-elect for the Democratic Organisation for Kayan National Unity in Pekon Township.³¹

The KNLP also came under Tatmadaw pressures in 2009 to transform into a local militia. KNLP leaders, however, reject claims that they accepted pyithusit status. “Our people need to maintain their armed revolution until the country has a new constitution,” declared Than Soe Naing, KNLP Chair, at a ceremony to mark the 50th anniversary of the commencement of armed struggle.³² “We are not a people’s militia; we are a political party under the political leadership of the KNLP, and the Kayan New Land Army still exists,” said U Saw Lwin, KNLP Joint General Secretary. “We made a truce with the government, but we still are fighting for democracy, federalism and peace. We cannot accept any form of military dictatorship; we cannot accept the 2008 constitution; and we cannot accept the involvement of the army in politics. But the military regime lists us as a militia in an attempt to marginalize our party in the political process in Myanmar.”³³

As evidence of its continuing political activities, the KNLP was one of the 12 EAOs invited to participate in the Panghsang conference organised by the United Wa State Army in November 2015. “We attended because the UWSA, NDAA, KIO, SSPP, TNLA and AA recognised the KNLP as a revolutionary organization,” said U Saw Lwin.³⁴

Since independence, the political and nationality status of Kayan-inhabited areas has been unclear (see Chapter 7, box: “Kayan Territory and Identity”). The KNLP has largely been based in the former Mongpai (Moebye) substate, which was awarded the right to join Karenni State under the 1947 constitution. Since the parliamentary era after independence, the Tatmadaw has also often treated this territory as under its Kayah State operations. Both Kayah State and southern Shan State come under the Tatmadaw’s Eastern Command in Taunggyi, with a Regional Operation Command established in Loikaw in the early 1990s (see Chapter 2).

For its part, the KNLP claims to be a political movement that promotes an ethno-nationalist Kayan agenda. Rather than calling for a separate state, the KNLP wants all the four Kayan-inhabited areas (in Shan State, Kayah State, Karen State and Nay Pyi Taw Union Territory) to join and become part of a reformed Karenni State. It also wants to amend the constitution through dialogue based on “Panglong spirit” leading to a federal union and genuine democracy that ensure equal rights for all nationalities.³⁵

“The four separated Kayan regions should be integrated into an autonomous Kayan region,” said U Saw Lwin. “And the name of Kayah State should be changed into Karenni State. The majority of Kayan people should vote in a referendum to decide to become part of Kayah State or not. After these things have been decided and implemented, the Kayan region shall be included in Karenni State.”³⁶ In line with this position, the KNLP has declined to join formal political alliances with other armed groups in Kayah State until this issue is settled, but it has encouraged political

parties, whether NLD or ethnic nationality, to take part in electoral politics to support constitutional reform and the establishment of a “real civilian government”.³⁷

The **Kayan National Guard (KNG)** is a small faction that broke away from the KNLP in 1991 after a leadership struggle. It is based in Moebye in Pekon Township. The split was led by Gabriel Byan who had taken part in the 1988 pro-democracy protests in Pekon and Moebye towns and subsequently joined the KNLP with a number of supporters. In February 1992, the KNG agreed a ceasefire with the SLORC government; was allocated “Kayah State Special Region-1”; and subsequently invited to take part in the National Convention. The KNG, however, has not expanded as a political movement since this time. It was forced to transform into a pyithusit in 2009, and is locally considered to concentrate on business, including sawmills, construction and narcotics.³⁸ Since the 1993 killing of Gabriel Byan by another member of the group, the KNG has been led by Htay Ko.

The **Karenni National Democratic Party (KNDP)** was formed in November 1995 by former KNPP combatants, led by Lee Reh, who did not return to the Thai border after the breakdown of the KNPP ceasefire earlier that year. The KNDP is known locally as the “Naga” (“Dragon”) Group. It is based in the eastern part of Demoso Township. Its formation was encouraged by the Tatmadaw and, as such, it did not have a formal ceasefire. The KNDP was represented at the National Convention when it resumed in 2004 but was forced by the Tatmadaw to accept pyithusit status in November 2009.

The **Karenni National Peace and Development Party (KNPDP)**, initially known as “KNPP Hoya”, broke away from the KNPP in 1999 under the leadership of the late U Gori and is based in the Hoya region in Hpruso Township. The KNPDP is locally known as “Kayaw Ni” (“Red Kayaw”), and most of its members are ethnic Kayaw. “Our first priority is literature, culture and peace for Kayaw people,” said a KNPDP regional administrator in Hpruso Township. “We try to cooperate with the government to provide education and healthcare, and to improve transport and infrastructure, and to develop the area. We also try to do some reforestation.”³⁹ The KNPDP was also represented at the National Convention after 2004 but was convinced by the Tatmadaw to become a pyithusit in 2009. KNPDP leaders, however, say that they still maintain their political objectives, which are similar to the KNPP. “It did not change our situation, it is just a change in name only,” said KNPDP Chairman Myint Maung Maung. “We see ourselves as a political organisation. We did not fight the KNPP as the KNPLF did, because we have the same political ideas.”⁴⁰

The **Karenni National Solidarity Organisation (KNSO)**, also known by its Burmese acronym Ka Ma Sa Nya, broke away from the KNPP in 2002, led by a local commander Richard (Ka Ree Htoo) and is based in Khe Ma Phyu village tract in the Mawchi region, adjacent to Hpapun Township in Karen State. Most KNSO members are ethnic Karens, often referred to as Paku Karen, and considered by those in Kayah State to be a Karenni group. The KNSO is locally known as “Kye Phyu” (“White Star”). Like the other post-1988 breakaway groups from the KNPP and KNLP, it was invited to the National Convention following a 2002 ceasefire agreement with the government but was forced to accept pyithusit status in 2009. Following the advent of the Thein Sein government in 2011, KNSO leaders are reported to have expanded business interests related to the Mawchi Mines (see Chapter 8).

consider three ethnic armed organisations to be politically-oriented in society today: the KNPP, KNPLF and KNLP. These are also the three largest organisations in military outreach. As Peter Gathui, a member of KNPLF Youth, explained: “Three armed groups in Kayah State have political objectives and should be involved in the peace process: the KNPP, KNPLF and the KNLP. People want them to be united.”⁴¹

Communities, Representation and Governance

The defining and redefining of ethnic and geographical identities that are currently underway is part of a larger renegotiation for the rightful representation and recognition of the Karenni peoples in national politics (see Chapter 7). The central government, state government, Tatmadaw, political parties, armed ethnic groups and civil society organisations are all vying for and claiming legitimacy during a time of national awareness. Debate on these issues has never effectively taken place during previous political eras since independence in 1948. The outcome of consultations and decisions today is therefore likely to have long-term resonance.



KNPLF BGF (KT)

Civil society organisations in Kayah State generally have the most independent connections to local communities but are overwhelmingly based in Loikaw and other towns. As a result, most CSOs make a concerted effort to learn about both rural and urban needs, offering support and representation. Their main focuses are on education, livelihoods, water, electricity, infrastructure, health care and land rights. When it comes to other socio-economic and political issues, there is sometimes a disconnect between the perspective of the educated, urban CSOs and those of the rural village communities.

One area of difference is on the peace process, particularly the NCA where CSOs often have reservations about a government and Tatmadaw-led process that does not guarantee constitutional reform for non-Bamar peoples. In this respect, CSO views may appear closer to those of EAOs and political parties. In contrast, rural communities in the field have little knowledge about the peace process and the NCA but will often support any suggestion that is promised as bringing peace and stability. Similarly, some CSOs take the position that shifting cultivation is unsupportable for conservation, while local villagers have long practised this in a sustainable manner and as a way of life. In facing these challenges, CSOs endeavour to “educate” rather than “represent” their views, and community leaders say that they are aware of the need for sensitivity.

The future shape of community leadership at the local levels is likely to be determined by the political direction of the national peace process and the KNPP following any nationwide ceasefire agreement in the country. The KNPP certainly assumes legitimacy to a greater extent than other organisations and parties in Kayah State, earned from its years of struggle for Karenni rights. Its leading role now transcends four eras of government. For many CSOs and nationality activists, the KNPP is therefore accepted as the main political actor in the state. But in rural communities, which have often suffered the most in the crossfire, local peoples may prefer to avoid conflict rather

than take sides with the KNPP or any other of the competing forces. This hesitancy is especially apparent in areas that have multiple conflict actors.

Since the 2012 ceasefire, the desire for peace and security has solidified. In some cases, it has eroded sympathies or support for armed groups, especially those that seem to focus on economic activities rather than working for political change. As political space has opened up, local communities have more choices, less reliance and can move around more freely than before. There is also frustration at continued taxation by armed groups that many citizens no longer see a need for.

The KNPP recognises that some of the benefits from the ceasefire may have also weakened the “people’s ability to sacrifice for the struggle”.⁴² In this respect, the central government and Tatmadaw can be seen to be gaining from the ceasefire in Kayah State. This does not mean defeat for the KNPP. The hope in many communities is that the present peace process will prove a platform for political dialogue and reform in the future.

If this really happens, the KNPP is likely to remain a strong voice in shaping the direction of Karenni politics. Other armed groups, with the exception of elements of the KNLP and the KNPLF, seem set to remain focused on business. In the short-term, this economic priority may be necessary for their survival. But it also diminishes their credibility among the general population. Local politicians are therefore beginning to question their legitimacy, bemoaning “so many factions” and that “armed groups are still carrying arms”.⁴³ The current dilemmas in the structure of Karenni politics were summarised by Sai Naing Naing Htwe of the Kayah State Democratic Party (KySDP): “Political parties represent the people; armed groups just focus on ceasefire.”⁴⁴

If the country continues on a path towards political dialogue and national peace, then many of these transitional challenges can be resolved. Karenni leaders affirm that a much more open debate has developed on many socio-political issues during the past few

years. This was enhanced by the 2011 change in government and the KNPP ceasefire. Many people in Kayah State are becoming more active citizens, especially the young.

The return, however, to conflict in the Kachin, northern Rakhine and northern Shan States since President Thein Sein assumed office in 2011 warn that there is no room for complacency. This is felt strongly by KNPP and many veteran leaders in Kayah State. These reminders hit home in Kayah State last December following the killing of a civilian and three unarmed KNPP personnel by the Tatmadaw (see Chapter 4). Not only did it disrupt the KNPP’s participation in the NCA and 21st Century Panglong Conference, it also caused community outrage, highlighting the growing awareness and pressure for change in Karenni society. Members of the Union of Karenni State Youth, Karenni State Farmers Union, Kayan National Party and Kayan New Generation Youth all took part in the protests. The arrest by the police of demonstrators only exacerbated unrest, with a committee of 21 CSOs issuing a statement accusing the local authorities of “turning a blind eye to the truth and making instigations instead of solving the case”.⁴⁵

As the activities by community groups show, the struggle of the peoples of Myanmar has always been for justice and equality. It has been the failure to address these most fundamental of human rights challenges that have underpinned conflict and national breakdown in the country. Above all, it is the local peoples who want peace. Provided that social, economic and political rights are genuinely achieved, then the transition from military to democratic government should not be as difficult as is often believed.

In this respect, community-based organisations have an integral role to play in ensuring that political reform and democratic transition prove successful and have beneficial outreach to all. As Lahpai Seng Raw, co-founder of the Metta Development Foundation, argues: “Peace requires the people. It is a social state and cannot be developed by military men.”⁴⁶



Kayah women (KT)

6. General Elections and Political Reform

The 1990 General Election and Political Suppression

The 1990 general election, Myanmar's first in three decades, was won by the National League for Democracy with a landslide victory at the national level. The NLD was also successful in Kayah State, winning four seats of the eight seats available. The newly-formed Kayah State All Nationalities League for Democracy won two seats, both in Demoso Township.¹ The military-backed National Unity Party (the former Burma Socialist Programme Party) won the remaining two seats. In Kayan-inhabited areas in the adjoining borderlands, the Democratic Organisation for Kayan National Unity won two seats, one in Pekon (Shan State) and one in Thandaung (Karen State).

Elsewhere in the country, a number of ethnic-based parties also fared relatively well at the ballot-box. This included the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD) and Arakan League for Democracy (ALD), which won the second and third largest number of seats respectively in the polls. Many of the nationality parties, including the KSNLD and DOKNU, were allied in the United Nationalities League for Democracy (UNLD), whose seats totalled 67 seats altogether.² UNLD supporters, however, suffered from similar harassment to the NLD during the election period. As a result, many parties complained that they were unable to organise properly.

The risks that they were running soon became clear. After the NLD victory, the State Law and Order Restoration Council government refused to allow the calling of a new parliament. Instead, the security services cracked down on pro-democracy parties, especially targeting NLD and UNLD members. Amidst continuing arrests, U R. P. Thaung, DOKNU MP-elect for Thandaung (1), was imprisoned in 1991 for five years under the 1950 Emergency Provisions Act.³ The following year, the KSNLD, DOKNU, UNLD and several other nationality parties were banned by the

government. This precipitated the flight of more democracy activists into territory controlled by the Karenni National Progressive Party and other ethnic armed organisations along the Thailand border. Those leaving the towns included Khun Marko Ban, DOKNU MP-elect for Pekon, and Teddy Buri, NLD MP-elect for Loikaw (2).⁴ Subsequently, another NLD MP-elect (for Hpruso Township), Saw Oo Reh, was arrested in 1996 and sentenced to 17 years in prison. He was accused of support for the KNPP after writing a book, “The Crisis of Kayah State and Causes of Civil War in Burma”.⁵

Political activism continued in Kayah State and the country more generally during the SLORC-SPDC era. But, under these pressures, by the mid-1990s the brief revival in pro-democracy parties was effectively curtailed.

The National Convention and the 2008 Constitution

Under the SLORC-SPDC government, political transition was deliberately slow. Instead of implementing reform on the basis of the 1990 general election, the military government initiated a new process, a National Convention, to draft a new constitution. Consisting of 702 delegates who were mostly hand-picked by the government, it included only 99 representatives from political parties that had won seats in the election. This included the NLD, SNLD and representatives of several other nationality parties. First convened in 1993, its composition was to vary over the years, and meetings did not finish until 2008. The NLD and other pro-democracy parties soon withdrew in protest at continuing arrests and restrictions on freedom of expression. Meetings of the National Convention were then adjourned in 1996. This marked the beginning of a 15-year period when in effect there were no political relations between the military government and the majority of parties that had won seats in the 1990 election. Meanwhile the SLORC-SPDC government concentrated on building up the mass Union Solidarity and Development Association for national support, which grew to over 20 million members.⁶

As this impasse continued, parties from the 1990 election remained active in two political spheres: in the borderlands in alliance with ethnic opposition groups, and in government-controlled areas. On the Thailand border, the NLD MP-elect Teddy Buri became a prominent Karenni advocate in the National Coalition Government Union of Burma of exile MPs. The NCGUB was headed by Aung San Suu Kyi’s cousin, Dr Sein Win. Because of the continued detention of NLD leaders, the NCGUB was unable to develop detailed political positions. Nevertheless, Teddy Buri and other NLD representatives were keen to confirm the party’s commitment to the achievement of peace and democracy:

“[The] NLD leadership has made it plain, that once there is peace, the NLD will have a national convention – the one like Aung San had back in 1947 in Panglong, where they had the Panglong agreement. The NLD has always recognized the need to iron out ethnic issues and then build a real federal nation. Although the NLD has never used the word ‘federal’, we think that they are really for a federal state.”⁷

As the years went by, however, the NLD’s stand on federalism and nationality rights appeared unclear to many nationality leaders. This was perceived as reflection of a larger problem of inter-ethnic understanding with the Bamar majority population in the country. Such perceptions are still present among nationality leaders today. According to Abel Tweed, then Foreign Minister of the KNPP:

“We really honor Aung San Suu Kyi for her sacrifice...her life and her fight for democracy. We support her, but we are not really clear about Aung San Suu Kyi’s policy. She doesn’t specify clearly about the ethnic people – specifically about the Karenni. So even if Aung San Suu Kyi is really sympathetic to the nationalities, it may be difficult for her to persuade all Burmese society, the Burmese people, to follow her policy, to recognize the right of the ethnic nationalities.”⁸

For this reason, many nationality politicians preferred to rely on ethnic-based parties for



political advocacy during the SLORC-SPDC era. Although the NLD was seen as an important voice against Tatmadaw dominance, it was believed that non-Bamar peoples had to represent themselves if negotiations were ever to take place between the military authorities and pro-democracy parties. A leading voice expressing these concerns was the DOKNU MP-elect Khun Marko Ban. He had attended the National Convention in 1993 but left for the Thai border shortly afterwards.⁹ Here he worked closely with Teddy Buri, becoming NCGUB Minister for Federal Affairs and secretary of the National Council Union of Burma.

In government-controlled areas, meanwhile, electoral parties tried to continue political activities, despite the continuing arrests and security harassment. The 25-party UNLD was forced to come to a halt with its 1992 banning. But in 1998, the SNLD, ALD and two other nationality allies¹⁰ joined with the NLD in forming the Committee Representing the People's Parliament (CRPP). The CRPP called upon the military government to release all

political prisoners and respect the result of the 1990 election. The military authorities did not respond.

Frustrated by the lack of progress, the United Nationalities Alliance (UNA) was set up in 2002 by the KSALND, SNLD and seven other ethnic-based parties that had participated in the 1990 election.¹¹ The UNA's objective was to promote "tri-partite" dialogue between the Tatmadaw, NLD and ethnic parties. This position was also advocated by the NCGUB and NCUB in the borderlands. In 2005, however, the UNA and SNLD chairman Khun Htun Oo was arrested and sentenced to a 93-year jail term on charges of "high treason" in a government clampdown on Shan leaders. For the next few years, UNA activities were largely brought to an end.

For democracy supporters in Myanmar, these were very dark days. Two decades after the collapse of the BSPP government in 1988, political progress remained paralysed throughout the country. Kayah State was no different. Isolated from the outside world,

Karenni “Vote No” Referendum Campaign

“The democratic forces in exile were split on what we should campaign for: ‘vote No’ or ‘No vote’. The ‘No vote’ campaign means we do not trust and totally ignore the process, and that the National Convention and the 104 principles that were drawn up ahead by the military government to write the constitution are fake. But a ‘Vote No’ campaign is meant to organise public participation, and to increase understanding about democracy and the referendum among communities, and to encourage people to try to vote for the first time since the 1990 elections.

I decided to organise a ‘vote no’ campaign and link up with other networks. Three of us went back to Karenni State. We organised 20 trainings across Karenni state, and we tried to multiply our trainees so that they could organise meetings with local people. We had large participation of youth, and we were supported by the KNLP, KNPLF, the church and Karenni elders. After this, we collected signatures on the street. More than thirty people took part in this effort, and we covered Pekon and Moebye in Shan State as well as Loikaw and Demoso in Kayah State. It was a success and many people became aware of the campaign. We also spread our message via hot air balloons and small floats on the water, but this was less effective.

We then selected sixty people to monitor the voting at the polling stations on 10 May 2008, the day of the referendum. We collected information on these sites and sent reports to journalists throughout the day. We received a lot of media attention from the Kantarawaddy Times, BBC, VOA, and RFA etc. The reports from the polling stations showed similar problems with the referendum: the casting of advance votes; people forced to vote instead of having a free choice; only few people came to cast their votes; and many people did not trust the process.

On that evening around 5 PM, the police followed some of our members who were monitoring the polling stations. They entered our houses, demanded to look into our computers and arrested us. We were interrogated for ten days at the police station. The police were also involved but the main investigators were from Sayapha (the reformed military intelligence). They were not satisfied with our answers, and they tortured us very seriously. Finally, the police knew they could not get much information from us, and they were also afraid that we would die at the police station, so after nine days they transferred us to prison. There we were under close watch and regular interrogation but there was no heavy torture anymore.

There were restrictions on our first year in prison, especially in Loikaw. We complained about lack of medical care for Khun Kawrio, who was infected with TB and who was seeking treatment inside prison. Since they found out we had connection with the outside world and with the exile media, they transferred us to different places. Khun Kawrio was sent to a prison in Myein Chaum Township (northwest of Mandalay Township, and very notorious for keeping political prisoners under bad conditions), Dee De to Mandalay and I was transferred to Taungoo prison. I would like to highlight that the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) and the regional prison assistance group helped us a lot, including people from the 88 Generation and NLD.

We were not the first political prisoners at Loikaw jail. There were many others, many of them had been sentenced under Section 17/1 of the 1908 Unlawful Association Act for alleged contact with the KNPP.

We met with other political prisoners, including Ko Myar Aung (88 Generation), U Myint Aye (Human Rights Defenders and Promoters chair), U Tein Lwin (NLD–Madayar Township chair) and Ko The Har (Generation Wave). We could talk to each other and exchange ideas. When we were transferred to other prisons we also met with other political prisoners. In my case, I met with U Khun Htun Oo (SNLD Chairman). We had limited access to books and information but we could consider a lot about ideology and the future.

Dee De and I were released on 13 February 2012. But Khun Kawrio was detained for another 6 months. We do not know the reason but he was released after the KNPP – with whom he had some relation – signed a ceasefire with the Kayah State government. Right after our release from prison, we conducted a trip for members of the 88 Generation to Loikaw and to visit Kayan National Day on April 10. While I write this I am sitting beside U Khun Htun Oo (SNLD) at the UNA leaders submit.”

Communication with Khun Bedu, 23 September 2017. At the time of the campaign he was a member of the Kayan New Generation Youth. At present, he is Chair of the Kayan National Party.

the divided landscape in Karenni politics provided a mirror image of the conflict crises in Myanmar at large.

The constitution drafting only gathered pace when the National Convention resumed in 2004 as part of the SPDC’s “seven-stage roadmap” to “disciplined democracy”. In these later stages, additional delegates attended from several of the ethnic ceasefire groups, including those recognised by the government in Kayah State. Various proposals were submitted, including calls for federalism, a union system, self-determination and an end to the Tatmadaw’s dominant role in politics. All these goals were rejected by the military government, and the final document failed to reflect the aspirations of ethnic nationality parties (see Chapter 3).

The constitutional draft was also approved in controversial circumstances in May 2008. Voting took place just days after a powerful cyclone struck the Ayeyarwady and Yangon Regions, leaving some 130,000 dead and many injured. Entire communities were devastated. Despite this tragedy, the SPDC government claimed that the draft was approved by over 92 per cent of votes cast with a claimed 98 per cent turn-out of eligible voters.¹² Opposition groups contested this, saying that the referendum was not “free and fair” and

that the constitution did not represent the will of the people (see box: “Karenni ‘Vote No’ Referendum Campaign”).¹³ Human Rights Watch labelled the referendum a “vote to nowhere”.¹⁴

A decade later, the 2008 constitution is continuing to define the direction and shape of national politics.

The 2010 General Election and Quasi-Civilian Government

The November 2010 general election was held under the terms of the 2008 constitution that guaranteed the Tatmadaw the “leading role” in national politics. As a result of these restrictions, there was little trust in the constitution or election process among opposition parties that had earlier participated in the 1990 general election. Negative perceptions were further heightened by the continued detention of Aung San Suu Kyi, Khun Htun Oo and other political leaders in the run-up to the polls. The NLD and UNA parties therefore decided to boycott the 2010 election altogether.

Despite these reservations, a number of new parties decided to contest the polls on the basis that national elections represented

a political opportunity that should not be missed. In Kayah State, the All National Races Unity and Development Party (ANUDP) was set up by local activists. Kayan nationalists (some of them associated with the former DOKNU) also established a new Kayan National Party. This reformation of ethnic-based parties reflected a national trend. Over half the 42 parties that registered for the 2010 election represented different nationality groups around the country.

Configuring where to stand in the polls was a challenge for all parties. Under the new constitution, an upper House of Nationalities (Amyotha Hluttaw) and a lower House of Representatives (Pyithu Hluttaw) were created as the national Assembly of the Union (Pyidaungsu Hluttaw), as well as regional parliaments in each of seven states and seven regions. In addition, five new “Self-Administrated Zones” were created for the Naga in Sagaing Region and Danu, Kokang, Pa-O and Ta-ang in Shan State, which also gained a Wa “Self-Administrative Division”. Twenty-nine seats, including Bamar, were

also designated for a new position of ethnic affairs minister for minority populations of 60,000 or more in each region or state.¹⁵ By such designations, twenty nationality groups are officially marked by different rights or territories in Myanmar politics today.

How these populations or territories were decided remains controversial, a situation that the subsequent 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census did little to clarify.¹⁶ In Karenni politics, the main change was the introduction of a Kayah State parliament and government as well as the new post of a Bamar ethnic affairs minister for Kayah State and a Kayan ethnic affairs minister for Shan State. This was the first time that the Kayan people have been designated political representation in the country. Kayan activists, however, were not satisfied. For while an ethnic affairs minister post had been created in Shan State, a “self-administered” region for the Kayan people was not allowed in the Shan-Kayah-Karen borderlands. This would be a significantly more important representation. Until the present day, the

Ballot boxes in 2010 elections in Kayah State (KT)



issue of Kayan rights and lands remains unresolved (see Chapter 7, box: “Kayan Territory and Identity”). With the 2008 constitution, the SPDC was not introducing ground-changing reforms.

There was little surprise, then, that the balloting at the 2010 election was far from “free and fair”. Unlike the 1990 polls, the manipulation of the vote count was blatant. Allegations of fraud were especially made regarding “advance votes”. These were overwhelmingly for the pro-military Union Solidarity and Development Party (the former USDA) that won over 75 per cent of the contested seats.¹⁷ Opposition politicians also complained of the obstacles in registering new parties, the cost in registering candidates and the limited time available to organise.¹⁸ Instead, an elite of powerful military and business leaders were pushed through as USDP representatives. Many of them were former generals and ministers in the SLORC-SPDC governments. The incoming cabinet of President Thein Sein was also dominated by former military men, including Thein Sein himself.

Against this tightly-controlled backdrop, hopes for electoral success by the new democracy parties failed to materialize. In four of the ethnic states (Chin, Kayin, Rakhine and Shan), local nationality parties did manage to win more than 25 per cent of the seats in the state assemblies, but this was insufficient for any of them to gain legislative control. In Kayah State, the military-backed USDP won all 14 contested seats for the state assembly as well as the position of Bamar ethnic affairs minister. The USDP also won all seven Kayah State seats for the lower house and all twelve for the upper house in Nay Pyi Taw. When USDP MPs were added to the 25 per cent of seats reserved for Tatmadaw appointees, USDP-Tatmadaw control would be unquestionable in the first legislatures of the new political era (2011-16).

In the polling aftermath, it was not difficult to identify the reasons for the USDP’s domination in Kayah State. The NLD and nationality parties from the 1990 general election boycotted the polls and voting was

suspended by the military authorities in parts of Hpruso and Hpasawng Townships for security reasons. In addition, the newly-formed ANUDP was not allowed to complete its registration process.¹⁹ Among a number of explanations given for the ANUDP’s blocking, government officials were reportedly unhappy about peace mediation activities by some of its members.²⁰ “We tried to set up a local party to represent the voice of the local people. But it was suppressed by the regional commander, and he forced us to dismantle it,” said U Solomon, one of the ANUDP founders. “In 2010, our Kayah State did not have a local political party like other states.”²¹ The only exception to this virtual shut-out of local parties in Karenni politics was in the borderlands with Shan State where the newly-established KNP won the state assembly seat for Pekon (2) as well as the reserved seat for a Kayan ethnic affairs minister.

As the USDP-Tatmadaw government prepared to take office in March 2011, there appeared little prospect of significant reform. But within a year of taking office, President Thein Sein initiated the most wide-ranging political and economic reforms in half a century. This included political reconciliation with Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD. As a result, the NLD stood in parliamentary by-elections the following month, winning 43 of the 44 seats it contested. None of the “advance vote” manipulations were employed this time to weaken the opposition count and ensure USDP victory. Following this bridge-building, tensions further eased between the NLD and the USDP-Tatmadaw government.

Sensing the new political space, community activists were quick to try and revive local political parties across the country. This was especially the case in Kayah State. Encouraged by the KNPP ceasefire, it appeared a highly opportune moment to attempt to build a new political movement for state-wide representation. In August 2013 local Kayah, Kayaw and Kayan activists, some of whom had been involved in the former ANUDP initiative, set up a new All Nationalities Democracy Party (ANDP)²² to promote the achievement of a federal union. According to the ANDP Vice-Chair U Solomon:

“When there was more political space, we re-grouped and formed the ANDP. Our motto is ‘awake Kayah or Karenni national people’. We need a spirit of co-fraternity. All these native peoples are our brothers, and we must have mutual understanding and respect for each other. We welcome other tribes to join us. We represent all Kayah State.”²³

The same year, a Kayah Unity Democracy Party (KUDP) was also formed by ex-NLD members. “We are a local ethnic-based party, and we represent all the different ethnic people,” said Sai Naing Naing Htwe, the KUDP Secretary-1. “During the 2010 elections, all local parties were banned and only the USDP ran for elections. As there are many ethnic groups in Kayah State, we felt it would be better to join the NLD.”²⁴ Subsequently, however, many local members felt that the NLD’s Kayah State organisation was dominated by the national centre. They therefore left the party to set up the new KUDP. “We worked with the NLD for one year, but we felt that control was unfair and very centralised,” Sai Naing Naing Htwe said.²⁵ The long-term aim of the KUDP was to promote democracy, federalism and an end to the leading role of the armed forces in national politics. But the party also placed priority on Kayah State issues. U Nyunt Shwe, KUDP Secretary-2 said: “People have no equal rights, and do not benefit from development projects. They only suffer. Now the government plans to build dams on the river, but they do not inform the people. There is no transparency. We need to set up a regional policy for these issues.”²⁶

Following these two new formations, there were now three ethnic based-parties in Kayah State affairs: the ANDP, KUDP and KNP. Unlike the ANDP and KUDP, the KNP was also active outside of Kayah State, with its main base areas in Kayah-inhabited areas in Pekon and Moebye Townships in Shan State where it won two seats in the 2010 polls. The KNP also joined the formation of the Nationalities Brotherhood Federation (NBF) as the main coalition of ethnic parties that stood in the 2010 election. But reflecting the unresolved anomaly of Kayah-Karenni status from the

1947 constitution, the KNP also continued to advocate for the potential unification of Kayah-majority areas in the Shan, Kayah and Karen State borderlands. The goal is that, one day, this “self-administered” zone might be incorporated into an enlarged “Karenni State” (see Chapter 7, box: “Kayah Territory and Identity”).

The 2015 General Election

As in 1990, the NLD won the 2015 general election by a landslide. Under the 2008 constitution, the Tatmadaw continued to be reserved 25 per cent of seats in the legislatures. But, unlike in 2010, the polling was generally deemed to be “free and fair”.²⁷ In consequence, the NLD captured a majority of seats in both the upper and lower houses of parliament. Ethnic-based parties, however, did not do as well as they had done in either the 1990 or 2010 polls, a result that led to a great deal of reflection in nationality circles.

In Kayah State, the pattern for Karenni-based organisations was broadly similar, with local political parties failing to win a single constituency. “We had 26 candidates, but did not win any seats,” confirmed the KUDP’s Sai Naing Naing Htwe. “Now the NLD is the ruling party, and we are the opposition.”²⁸ In a strong showing, the NLD won 10 out of 14 seats for the Kayah State assembly as well as the position for Bamar ethnic affairs minister. The party also won 9 out of 12 seats for the upper house and 5 out of the 7 seats for the lower house. The remaining seats were won by the UDSP, except for an independent candidate U Soe Thein, a former government minister, who won a seat for the upper house in Bawlakhe Township (see box: “High Profile Candidates”). Meanwhile, the NLD won the two seats previously held by the KNP in the adjoining Pekon Township, including that of Kayah ethnic affairs minister for Shan State.

Ethnic nationality leaders pointed to four significant constraints to explain this failure. First, because previous attempts to register had been impeded by the military authorities, many nationality parties were relatively new or unknown to their constituents. Second,

only larger national parties, notably the NLD and the USDP, were able to run substantial campaigns during the two-month period assigned for canvassing. Third, local parties were generally small, with insufficient resources and network support.²⁹ “We have so many problems, the first one is fundraising, the second one is resource persons,” said Sai Naing Naing Htwe. “Now it depends on our own pockets.”³⁰ And fourth, the difficult geography posed many challenges in campaigning for new political candidates. For while people in remote villages might have heard about Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD, they were often less familiar with newly-established parties like the ANDP. “My constituency in Hpruso is a very wide and mountainous area, which is difficult to access, and I tried to venture out by car, motorbike and foot,” said U Solomon, the ANDP Vice Chair.³¹

Compounding these difficulties, vote-splitting among local parties caused electoral confusion, with the large number of parties complicating the decisions for voters. In addition to the three local nationality parties, the ANDP, KUDP and KNP, eight other parties stood in Kayah State in the polls.³² Under

Myanmar’s “first past the post system”, this competition could have been addressed through political cooperation, by either merging nationality parties or agreeing not to run against each other in certain constituencies.

In response, some Kayah State CSOs suggested tactics of working together to political leaders before the polls, but to no avail. “Our state has three ethnic-based parties, and we wanted them to make an alliance and compete as one party,” said Kyaw Htin Aung from the Union of Karenni State Youth. “But they did not agree with our suggestion, so they lost everywhere.”³³ Equally important, it was not only competition between national parties like the NLD with Karenni groups that split the ethnic vote. In addition to the KNP,³⁴ other nationality parties that had their main organisational bases outside Kayah State also stood for seats. U Solomon from the ANDP explained:

“Unfortunately we lost to the NLD, and none of our candidates were elected. There were three native parties here, and parties coming down from Shan and Karen States, as well as the USDP, NLD and NUP. All

Aung San Suu Kyi on 2015 election campaign in Kayah State (KT)



together we had eleven parties contesting seats here, and it caused a lot of confusion among the population. If there were less indigenous parties, there would have been hopes we could have won some seats.”³⁵

Despite these explanations, the overwhelming nature of the NLD victory also pointed to a decision by voters that went much deeper: an undoubted desire for real political transformation in the country, with the NLD considered the most likely to bring about national change. After decades of military rule, it seemed a much better option to back the NLD as a large nationally-based party to compete with the Tatmadaw-USDP rather than support a number of small locally-based parties. “The community really wants change, and feel only the NLD can lead this process,” said the KNPP Liaison Officer Khu Nye Reh. “They feel local parties are not united and do not have strong persons.”³⁶

Representatives of other Kayah State organisations shared this view. According to U Solomon from the ANDP: “The people have been calling for one unified local party. The main reason why Aung San Suu Kyi’s party won here is because of that reason. She came to Kayah State and swept all seats and left nothing for us. We need to do a revival.”³⁷ The UKSY youth activist Kyaw Htin Aung confirmed the strategic thinking behind voters’ choices: “People thought we need to make democratic change first, and later change from a democracy to a federal system. People are still thinking about the common enemy, and that if we will fight together we will be strong. This is the thinking of people here in the 2015 election.”³⁸ In particular, a vote for the NLD was regarded as a vote against the Tatmadaw’s involvement in national politics. “How much the people hate the military appeared in the voting,” said U Soe Naing, a central committee member of the ceasefire Kayan New Land Party.³⁹

Certainly, the NLD’s election campaign appeared well-organised, with the party’s message of democratic change appealing to many voters. In speeches across the country, Aung San Suu Kyi pledged to reform the 2008 constitution, prioritise ethnic peace and

organise a “Second Panglong Conference” if the NLD won office.⁴⁰ This contrasted with what many citizens felt was a lack of vision among locally-based parties about how they intend to achieve national reform. According to Plu Reh of the Shalom Foundation: “The local candidates always mention in their campaigns how they will improve education and infrastructure, but people want to hear their vision on the peace process and the future of our state, and who will be president.”⁴¹

In Kayah State, the NLD’s campaign tactics proved especially effective. Aung San Suu Kyi led canvassing with a visit to Kayah State in early September 2015, speaking at rallies in Loikaw, Demoso, Hpruso, Hpasawng and Bawlakhe Townships. “We have to collaborate for the country’s development. We believe that democracy gives people freedom and security,” she said at a public rally in Demoso. “A ceasefire is the beginning of peace. If we can make a firm NCA that all ethnic groups accept, we can say that the door to peace is open.”⁴² The following day she addressed a crowd in Bawlakhe: “A country where people live in fear will never get stability. A country where people are deep in poverty will never be peaceful. So, when you vote on November 8, think of Myanmar’s future.”⁴³ For local audiences, these were bold words in a conflict-divided territory that had long been under Tatmadaw control. The NLD wanted, Aung San Suu Kyi said, “100 per cent” of the vote.⁴⁴

The timing of Aung San Suu Kyi’s visit also contributed to the success of her party. “Her appearance was very effective to win the election,” said Plu Reh from the Shalom Foundation. “She came here when people were confused about the ethnic candidates from KUDP, ANDP, KNP, a Lisu party,⁴⁵ SNLD, Shan Nationalities Democratic Party, Karen People’s Party, NUP, USDP and NLD.”⁴⁶ “Daw Aung San Suu Kyi said ‘vote for the party and don’t look at the representatives’,” noted Samuel Khun Sha Mu Aye La, a member of the Head Committee of Kayan National Unity (HCKNU). “This was very influential and that is why they have a landslide victory.”⁴⁷ KNPP representatives also believed that Aung San

Suu Kyi's appearance was a deciding factor. "The NLD used the motto 'time to change', and these were very effective words for the people," said KNPP spokesperson Khu Nye Reh. "Aung San Suu Kyi came and greeted local communities in a very friendly way, and this persuaded them to vote for the NLD."⁴⁸

A further factor in the NLD's success was the number of local nationality citizens who ran for the party as candidates. This boosted the party's claim to be promoting change at the local and national levels, providing a unifying image for the NLD in a territory where there are a diversity of peoples and parties. A local NGO worker privately commented: "Many people who ran for the NLD were local people. This is another reason the NLD won. Here there are many different languages, so to find something common is a big challenge. We cannot find a party that we could vote for that represents the whole state."⁴⁹ U Khun Maung Aye, who won victory for the NLD as Kayan Ethnic Affairs Minister for Shan State, confirmed the importance of choosing local candidates:

"The NLD won here because of us; many NLD people here are Kayan. During the election people felt it was better to give power to the NLD than to the USDP. Unless the NLD is in our area, there will be no justice, no stable government, no civil power, and the whole region will be controlled by armed groups. If you have a gun, you have power. Now the NLD won, and arms become the second priority; law and rights become the first priority. People feel this is the way to solve the problems in a peaceful way."⁵⁰

Not all voters, however, were convinced that the NLD would be the best party to represent Kayah State interests. "The NLD chose state-based people for their candidates, but their party is very centralised, so this is not good for our ethnic people," said Kyaw Htin Aung from the UKSY. "The national level NLD is okay, but the local level is not."⁵¹ The KNP Chairman Khun Bedu also questioned whether the NLD can effectively represent non-Bamar-peoples: "During the election campaign, the NLD said that they can do many things at the state level and a Kayan party does not need to

exist. They should not say these things. I think they cannot represent the Kayan and all the ethnic people."⁵²

Clearly, there were questions over the NLD's ability to represent the state, and these soon came out into the open during the 2017 by-election (see below). But among Karenni parties themselves there was little doubt that, whatever the political arguments, the main reason for their poor showing in the 2015 polls was the factionalism that exists in Kayah State politics. "We, the Kayah ethnic group, have a history of faction," the ANDP Vice-Chair U Solomon said in an interview with the Irrawaddy magazine.⁵³ "Local communities want the political parties to be united and form only one party," said Peter Gathui from the KNPLF Youth. "It is the same with the armed groups here. The armed groups are split, now the political parties also split, and the community is fed up."⁵⁴

This factionalism also fed into political canvassing in the field, with several of the ethnic armed organisations thought to prefer the NLD. Officials were cautious with their words. One local politician commented: "There were many restrictions, including from the KNPP. They were in much favour of the NLD, and in these rural areas people were told by KNPP and some other factions to vote for NLD."⁵⁵ In the case of the Karenni National Peace and Development Party, a spokesperson privately admitted his organisation's support for the NLD: "Currently the situation is still confusing as there are many political parties here. I think it is a strategy of the government. We suggested the community to vote NLD. This is the only way to reduce the power of the military government."⁵⁶

Perhaps the most contentious voting took place in Shadaw Township. This was one of two seats where, taking advantage of Tatmadaw dominance in the constituency, senior figures in the Thein Sein administration decided to seek election (see box: "High Profile Candidates"). The Myanmar Times called the ensuing "battle" in Kayah State "an election litmus test."⁵⁷ Here an NLD candidate accused the government as well as the KNPP of helping the campaign of

High Profile Candidates

Kayah State attracted a number of high-profile outsiders because of its unusual politics. Two especially stood out: U Soe Thein, a former admiral, and U Aung Min, a former general. Both had both been ministers in the SPDC and Thein Sein governments, and both had been government mediators in Thein Sein's peace initiative. In the 2015 polls, they stood in Bawlakhe and Shadaw Townships respectively. These are two of the smallest constituencies in the country, but with several army camps housing a large number of Tatmadaw personnel. In comparison to local candidates, they were considered to have access to large budgets.⁵⁸ According to a local media report: "Shadaw and Bawlakhe are military-controlled areas. Those who run for election in these areas can surely win if they get an average of 1,500 votes. This is why Kayah State is attractive to every political party."⁵⁹ Because of the odds against them, ANDP leaders decided to stand for election in all townships in Kayah State except in Bawlakhe. Said U Solomon: "There are three army regiments based there, so it is no use to compete."⁶⁰

In a surprise twist before the election, neither Soe Thein nor Aung Min were allowed to stand as party candidates by the USDP chairman Thura Shwe Mann. They therefore ran as independent candidates. A few days before the registration deadline passed, Shwe Mann was himself ousted as party chairman. But the USDP did not change its candidate list. This meant that Soe Thein and Aung Min now stood against their former USDP colleagues.⁶¹

In the run-up to the polls, Soe Thein and Aung Min were both accused of vote-buying and violating election laws. According to a KUDP member, Soe Thein sponsored local football matches and gave away satellite dishes to people in his constituency. An ANDP member also accused Aung Min of giving money to village elders and distributing rice along with campaign materials.⁶² Similar complaints were made by other local observers.⁶³ As a result, a member of the UKSY called for careful scrutiny of the conduct of the polls in these constituencies: "These ministers have spent a lot of money to persuade voters."⁶⁴

Soe Thein eventually won an Amyotha Hluttaw seat in Bawlakhe Township after a well-financed campaign. However his colleague Aung Min, despite leading the government's negotiations with the KNPP and other ethnic forces, could not overcome a local Karenni civil society leader who stood against him representing the NLD. "I came here because I thought it was going to be easy," Aung Min told a local reporter. "But my biggest problem is that the voters don't know what I'm talking about."⁶⁵ The result was that U Aung Kyaw Soe, who had a strong local reputation as the UKSY founder, was able to win despite Aung Min's campaign tactics and advantages (see box: "David versus Goliath").

ex-Gen. Aung Min, Thein Sein's lead peace negotiator.⁶⁶ In particular, it was claimed that on one occasion the KNPP had intimidated NLD supporters by taking photos of them.⁶⁷ In response, the KNPP denied trying to influence the elections in support of any individual or party. "We did not give any opinion, and we did not encourage the people which party to vote for," said Khu Nye Reh, the KNPP spokesperson in Loikaw.⁶⁸

Ultimately, however, there could be no doubting the resonant scale of the NLD's victory. The activities by other parties did not appear to make much of a difference at the polls. After over half a century under military rule, the result was a historic and incontrovertible indicator of national opinion. Finally, the NLD was in office, the first government that could be considered to have been democratically elected since 1960.

The "Hybrid" NLD-Tatmadaw Government

When the NLD assumed government office in March 2016, hopes for political reform were high across the country among peoples hungry for change. A new mood of optimism was in the air. According to a KNGY activist:

"I have much hope in the new NLD government, in terms of transparency, freedom of speech and assembly, and to create more opportunities for people to participate in political and peace process. The NLD can open more space for ethnic armed groups and other ethnic organisations to participate on dialogue, peace process and reconciliation. We hope that the NLD can help more people in remote areas, help with health, education, the economy, and other crops than opium. We can ask them because we voted for them."⁶⁹

Any honeymoon period, however, proved to be short and, within a year, the NLD administration found itself engulfed in a new cycle of crises. After decades of ethnic conflict and military misrule, there was a huge legacy of challenges to overcome. These ranged

from reviving the economy and education to political reform and the rebuilding of communities devastated by war.

Compounding the NLD's difficulties, the Tatmadaw retained a dominant role in national politics under the 2008 constitution (see Chapter 2). Even before taking office, the ability of Tatmadaw supporters and representatives to use these powers was demonstrated when Aung San Suu Kyi was blocked from becoming president. Instead, a post of State Counsellor was created for Aung San Suu Kyi to lead the new administration. It was hardly an auspicious start. As the months passed by, it soon became clear that the ability of the NLD to act independently or implement new policies in government was limited. Rather, there was still a "hybrid" system of government in Myanmar. Despite the scale of the NLD's victory, the USDP-Tatmadaw administration had been replaced by an NLD-Tatmadaw administration.

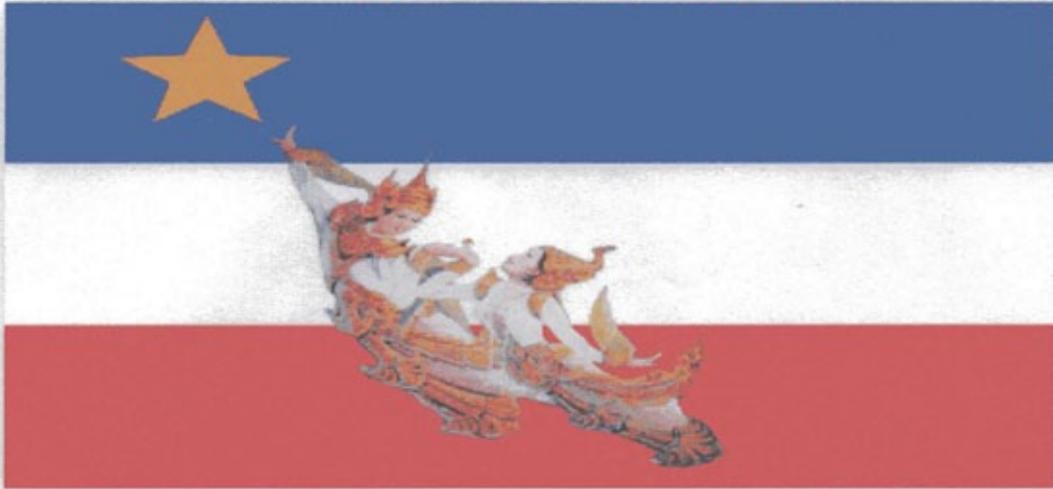
At first, the political atmosphere appeared to improve in Kayah State after the NLD took office. As an indicator of change, civil society organisations reported improved access to government representatives. "For CSOs and organisations like us, we can work more with this government," said Gay Nay Paw from the Karenni Social Welfare Development Committee (KSWDC). "We invited them for some of our events and they came. We can go to the state-level ministers more freely. We were also invited by them to some meetings, like on mine action, and they listened to our suggestions"⁷⁰

But criticisms soon began to emerge. Despite its strong election campaign, the NLD did not seem ready for government. Before the election, the party selected candidates as representatives for hundreds of constituencies around the country. After the elections the party used this new cohort to fill government positions. But after many years of oppression (and sometimes imprisonment), a large number of those elected appeared ill-prepared for the challenges of office. In many cases, their election was due to their support for Aung San Suu Kyi and the party's "time for change" manifesto, and not because of

လူမျိုးပေါင်းစုံဒီမိုကရေစီပါတီ - ကယားပြည်နယ်

လွှတ်တော်ကိုယ်စားလှယ်လောင်းများ

မဲဆန္ဒနယ် အမှတ် (၂) ဖရူဆိုမြို့နယ်



အမျိုးသားလွှတ်တော်ကိုယ်စားလှယ်
မဲဆန္ဒနယ် အမှတ်(၆)

နာမည် - ဦးသာအုဦး
မိဘအမည် - (ဦးမောင်ဦး)+ဒေါ်ဖေစေး
(တောင်ဥက္ကလာတောင်)
လူမျိုး/ဘာသာ - ကယား/ခရစ်ယာန်
မွေးရပ်ဇာတိ - ဒေါ်ရောက်စုကျေးရွာ၊
ဒီမောဆိုမြို့နယ်



ပြည်သူ့လွှတ်တော်ကိုယ်စားလှယ်
မဲဆန္ဒနယ်

နာမည် - ရူးသဲရယ်
မိဘအမည် - (ဦးလိရယ်)+ဒေါ်တူမာ
လူမျိုး/ဘာသာ - ကယား/ ခရစ်ယာန်
မွေးရပ်ဇာတိ - လောဂျာရွာ
ဖရူဆိုမြို့နယ်



ပြည်နယ်လွှတ်တော်ကိုယ်စားလှယ်
မဲဆန္ဒနယ် အမှတ်(၂)

နာမည် - ဦးဆော်လွန်း(ခ)A . စိုးသိန်း
မိဘအမည် - (ဦးသာနီ+ဒေါ်မာနီအု)
လူမျိုး/ဘာသာ - ကယား /ခရစ်ယာန်
မွေးရပ်ဇာတိ - ဟိုယာရွာ၊
ဖရူဆိုမြို့နယ်

professional merit or capability. Aung San Suu Kyi herself seemed to recognise this when she appointed officials from previous military-backed governments as staff members to key positions in her administration. These included U Zaw Htay as government press spokesperson and Director General of the State Counsellor's Office, and U Kyaw Tint Swe as the State Counsellor's Minister.

These deficiencies in the new government were also felt in Kayah State. Here the position of State Chief Minister was given to U L Phaung Sho. Previously, he had

been an education department official in Mese Township who resigned to stand as an NLD candidate for election to the state legislature.⁷¹ Local observers, however, believed that the new NLD ministers and MPs had little experience in politics when selected to office. "The NLD will choose the Chief Minister and other ministers, but there are no qualified candidates among the NLD persons elected in Kayah State," said Sai Naing Naing Htwe of the KUDP.⁷² "I worry the situation is very bad," said Khu Poe Reh of the Kayah Li Phu Youth Committee (KLPYC). "We do not know what the state government and

parliament want to achieve and which route they will go. We are aiming to change this situation.”⁷³

The NLD leadership also appeared reluctant to allow local officials much responsibility. Instead, the NLD central committee issued a number of regulations to curb the freedom of local party officials in speaking to the press, initiating policies or meeting with CSO representatives. “The NLD decision-making process is very centralised, and there is no power sharing to local NLD candidates and representatives,” said Bernard Bote, the UKSY General Secretary. “So instead of representing their constituency, they only represent the NLD central committee.”⁷⁴ According to Maw Kyar from the Karenni National Women’s Organisation (KNWO): “In the administration, I am not clear how the state government communicates with the union government. It seems centralised. How do they share power?”⁷⁵

The apparent remoteness of the new government came as a disappointment to

Kayah State leaders who quickly perceived the NLD administration as “top-down” and failing to take local interests into account. In the past, there had been attempts to build close relationships at the national level between ethnic parties and the NLD through such alliances as the CRPP and UNA. Bridge-building, however, now appeared to come to an end. “There is a long history of contact between NLD and the UNA,” said KNP Chair Khun Bedu. “We had an alliance with the NLD, but now we do not cooperate anymore as in the previous time.”⁷⁶ Local politicians also said that the situation has become the same today at the Kayah State level. “We do not really have mutual relations and understanding with the NLD,” observed U Solomon from the ANDP. “At the state level, we have no link.”⁷⁷

As the months passed by, this lack of policy outreach began to fuel doubts about the NLD’s abilities and intentions. Karenni leaders felt that the party was failing to represent local ethnic interests and lacked a clear view on

Aung San Suu Kyi speaking at campaign rally for 2015 elections in Demoso (IR)



how to achieve peace and federal reform. Rather than promoting radical change, the NLD appeared keener to preserve the status quo. “The NLD is not talking about ethnic rights and federalism,” said Bernard Bote from UKSY. “When they talk about reconciliation, they only talk between NLD and the military, and not with the ethnic groups.”⁷⁸ The Kayan community leader Samuel Khun Sha Mu Aye La confirmed: “I know there are many challenges they face, but we expected more. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi speaks very little about the ethnic issue now.”⁷⁹ Khu Nye Reh, the KNPP spokesperson in Loikaw said: “The current government mostly talks about the rule of law and the constitution, and to act within the law.”⁸⁰

Equally concerning, the weaknesses in NLD policy-making and organisation began to undermine confidence in the national peace process. Despite the high profile of the party’s “21st Century Panglong Conference”, local leaders began to fear that the NLD’s preoccupation with accommodating the Tatmadaw could lead the party to repeat the peace and reform failures of previous governments after independence (see Chapters 2 and 3). Conflict resolution in Myanmar should mean bringing all the peoples and parties together instead of creating new divisions in state and society. As the veteran KNPP leader Abel Tweed warned two decades ago:

“If there is national reconciliation only between the Burmese like the NLD and SLORC, the problem is not finished. The problem between Burmese society and the other ethnics will continue, will lead to more fighting. We don’t know for how long. So we want for the world to understand the larger problem and to look for solutions to that as well.”⁸¹

Upon taking office, a number of administrative decisions taken by the NLD appeared to confirm these fears, suggesting that party leaders had a poor grasp of the challenges in achieving national peace. Most obviously, the NLD reformed the Union Peace-Making Committee and Myanmar Peace Center of the previous Thein Sein

administration and brought in its own appointees. This removed many experienced people in the peace process, and there was limited exchange of information between the two administrations at the government change-over. “The new government did not receive any updates about the previous meetings, so it is a bit difficult to deal with them,” explained the KNPP Liaison Officer Khu Nye Reh.⁸² Saw Maw Maung of the Kayan New Generation Youth (KNGY) shared this view: “We feel that the government has not changed very much yet on important issues such as peace and land, perhaps because of lack of a good handover process.”⁸³

The NLD’s “top-down” approach also weakened lines of communication and ended the informal channels by which decision-makers could meet to address stumbling-blocks as they emerged in the peace process. “During the previous government, we had meetings at the union level, and we were very familiar with a number of ministers,” said the KNPP’s Khu Nye Reh. “If we wanted something, we could ask them directly. But under the new government it is very difficult to meet ministers; there are many layers between us.”⁸⁴

Two years after the NLD took office, many of these gaps in the peace process are yet to be filled. Only the flagship “Panglong-21” has been prioritised by the NLD as the country’s path to peace. “Now it is easier to deal with the new state government for civil society organisations, but not on the peace process as there is too much control from the national level,” said the KNGY’s Saw Maw Maung. “We want the government at the state level to be involved in the peace process, but it is still very weak.”⁸⁵

Despite these concerns, there are leaders in Kayah State who have seen positive changes since the NLD took office. They feel it is still too early to make final judgements. According to UKSY General Secretary Bernard Bote: “There are different opinions on the new government. Some educated people think it is still very new and should be given time. However, at the local level among people on the ground, their expectations were high but there have been no changes in their lives.”⁸⁶

Those arguing for the NLD to be given time point to the historical context and that after decades of struggle there is now at last a transition from military rule to democratic government underway. They also highlight recent improvements in the economy and infrastructure, as well as an increase in community-based activism and international visitors in a once off-limits territory. According to Khu Lay Reh from the KLPYC:

“The motto of the NLD is ‘time to change’, and for me there have been a lot of changes. People blame the NLD and say there is more conflict under their rule. But the country has been under military rule for decades, and the root of the problem dates back to that time. But it is all coming to the surface now. So I want to know, should we move forward or go backwards?”⁸⁷

There is also sympathy for the restrictions under which the NLD is operating. “Even though it is a civilian government, they have many limitations under the 2008 constitution,” said Saw Maw Maung from the KNGY. “Many of the NLD candidates were involved in the 1988 democracy movement, and they became a bit disappointed because of the constitution, which gives more power at the union level but at the state level cannot do anything.”⁸⁸ This view is echoed by others. According to the KNPP’s Khu Nye Reh:

“The role of the army is still very strong here, and the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Border Areas also play a huge role. The officers from the government departments are still from the previous governments, and their habits are still the same. They are taking a very large role in the administration, and the new government has to deal with this very carefully.”⁸⁹

These divisions are currently being played out in tensions between the three main structures in state administration. These are the State Government and State Parliament, which are under the NLD; the General Administration Department (GAD), which is under the military-controlled Ministry of Home Affairs; and the various Tatmadaw interests, including

the regional Eastern Command and the Defence, Home and Border Affairs ministries. “The relation between the State Parliament and the GAD is getting worse, there is a power struggle between them,” the representative of a civil society organisation privately said. “Every decision usually comes from the GAD, and the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Security and Border Affairs.”⁹⁰

It also needs to be stressed that there have been policy areas where damage to the NLD’s reputation is more of its own making. Some of these are on issues that citizens had not expected when they voted the party to victory in the 2015 polls. During its first two years in office, the list of concerns steadily grew. The NLD appeared impervious to local sentiment. Decision-making appeared to have become focused around Aung San Suu Kyi and a small group of advisors in a Bamar-majority elite. No obvious actions were taken to stop – or even criticise – the Tatmadaw continuing military-first tactics in several parts of the country. The party also seemed to be prioritising memorials to Aung San Suu Kyi’s late father, Aung San, instead of addressing nationality concerns in local communities.⁹¹ Plans for such a statue in Loikaw by the Kayah State government were criticised by local organisations.⁹² Equally unexpected, rather than being reduced, the use of restrictive laws was actually increasing under the NLD administration, notably 66(d) of the Communications Act and 17/1 of the Unlawful Associations Act.⁹³ If the NLD disapproved of any of these actions, the party was slow to respond. This was widely interpreted to reflect Aung San Suu Kyi’s support for the “rule of law” – rather than “changing the law” – during democratic transition.

Against this backdrop, parliamentary by-elections approached in April 2017 as the first chance for voters to give their verdict on the government’s performance. By-elections are always difficult for an incumbent government in any country in the world. But as the first under a democratically-elected government in over half a century, the results in Myanmar were awaited with especial interest. In Kayah and other ethnic nationality states, criticisms of the NLD were increasingly being expressed.

“David versus Goliath”

Seemingly against all odds, the NLD candidate U Aung Kyaw Soe defeated former general and government minister U Aung Min in the 2015 general election. A long-time Karenni political activist and former political prisoner, he was surprised himself. “I was sure I would lose,” said Aung Kyaw Soe. “I look forward to working with him in the interests of our state.”

Aung Kyaw Soe won his legislative seat in his native Shadaw Township. He participated in the 1988 democracy protests and fled to the Thai border after the SLORC took power on 19 September. There he joined the All Burma Students’ Democratic Front. He was captured by the Tatmadaw in 1990 and sent to prison. “They sentenced me to death on a range of charges, including murder and illegal weapons use. They added on five years’ imprisonment because I took a typewriter from the university when I went underground,” he said. “We were allowed no books or paper and were beaten if they found any. I tried to learn sutras by heart. Another prisoner told the guards, and I was beaten.”

Aung Kyaw Soe was held in solitary confinement for almost seven years in the infamous Insein prison. His sentence was later commuted to life imprisonment and he was released under President Thein Sein’s amnesty programme in October 2011. After his release, he returned to politics and joined the NLD. “I believe in my party because people really want to see changes,” said Aung Kyaw Soe. “I believe in our chair [Daw Aung San Suu Kyi]. That’s why I was elected,” he said.

For the future, he promises to work for regional development and carrying forward the peace process. “Without peace, there will be no sustainable development,” he said. “The nationwide ceasefire agreement was signed by very few organisations and is not inclusive at the national level. It is far from satisfactory,” he said. “In spite of being a small state, there are up to seven armed groups [in Kayah State] that will have to be dealt with.”

Source: Htoo Thant & Pyae Thet Phyo, “Phoenix rises from ashes of 1988”, Myanmar Times, 4 March 2016.

The 2017 By-Elections

Given the lack of breakthroughs in national politics, there was little surprise when ethnic-based parties fared better in the April 2017 by-elections than they had in the 2015 polls. One year after the NLD’s advent to office, ethnic nationality voters around the country were becoming impatient with the slow rate of progress in peace and political reform. Speaking on the eve of the polls, a Karenni development worker reflected the views of many voters about the NLD’s performance: “Sometimes I tell myself that I was wrong to vote for this NLD government, because we

did not see positive development and changes in Karenni State. The Chief Minister is not working so much on this, and it is still like the previous government.”⁹⁴

Overall, the NLD won nine of the 19 seats up for election countrywide as voting went ahead.⁹⁵ In Shan State, the SNLD did notably well, winning six of the seven available seats. The only seat up for election in Kayah State was won by the ANDP’s U Thae Reh in Hpruso Township, standing on a “genuine federal union” platform.⁹⁶ In a statement to the government-controlled media, he pledged:

“I will do what I can for the constituency and the State. I thank to know the trust that people had in me...I will conduct regional development matters. I will do the best I can according to the rights granted to me by the Hluttaw [parliament]. Peace is a big matter in Kayah State. I plan to take part the best I can in the 21st Panglong for the sake of the State. I aim to attain peace between the current government, Tatmadaw and the ethnic armed groups.”⁹⁷

Once again, there was political resonance in the result of a poll in Kayah State. The ANDP’s victory was the first by a nationality party since the 1990 general election in the territory. The result was not by chance. First, the three local ethnic-based parties – the ANDP, KUDP

and KNP – agreed to put only one candidate forward and not to run against each other. The ANDP and KUDP also agreed to merge but were not able to complete the registration process in time.⁹⁸ They therefore decided to put up one candidate on behalf of the ANDP. In solidarity, the KNP promised not to run against the new party.⁹⁹ Subsequently, the Union Election Commission formally accepted the merger of the ANDP and KUDP into the Kayah State Democratic Party in September that year.¹⁰⁰

Second, the winning candidate, Thae Reh, is a respected local activist, who had led a campaign against land grabbing in the famous “ploughing protest” (see Chapter 7). Such experience supported his credibility among the voting public. And third, in an



Attending NLD rally in Kayah State in 2015 (IR)

error that questioned party competence, the NLD failed to register a candidate to the Union Election Commission before the official deadline. In response, the NLD Central Executive Committee removed both the Kayah State NLD Chair and the Hpruso Township NLD Chair from their positions a day after the polls.¹⁰¹

In both local and national terms, the ANDP result was important. It was only one seat, but for many citizens the outcome of the 2017 polls symbolized many of the challenges in Kayah State politics in an era of NLD–Tatmadaw government. The failure of the subsequent Panglong–21 meeting to make tangible progress in May only raised further concerns about the political direction of government under the NLD’s stewardship. Around the country, other nationality movements accelerated efforts to emulate the ANDP’s political merger.¹⁰²

In Kayah State, the political climate then deteriorated in December after the killing of a civilian and three KNPP soldiers by the Tatmadaw near Loikaw (see Chapter 4). Local anger was compounded when the KNP Chair Khun Bedu was arrested along with civil society activists who were protesting against the deaths. Eventually, the charges were dropped against Khun Bedu, but the government’s handling of the case undermined public confidence at a critical time. The Rohingya refugee crisis in Rakhine State as well as the intensification of military operations in the Kachin and northern Shan States did little to allay ethnic nationality worries about who – the NLD or Tatmadaw – was truly leading the government.

In February this year, in a public relations fight-back, it was reported that over 2,000 Kayah villagers had joined the NLD in Loikaw and Demoso Townships at a mass ceremony attended by government officials. “It is the political vision of Kayah people, as they thought that supporting the NLD rather than other parties is better for the nation,” claimed NLD central committee member U Aung Soe.¹⁰³ But a great deal of damage had already been done. The perception was growing in many political circles that the

Tatmadaw was effectively determining the course of events in Kayah State and the rest of the country.

Subsequently, U Win Myint replaced the ailing U Htin Kyaw as Myanmar state president in March, pledging three objectives in his inaugural address: law enforcement and socio-economic development; national reconciliation and domestic peace; constitutional reform and the establishment of a democratic federal union. Thirty-six political prisoners were also among the 8,500 prisoners released under presidential pardon. But there appeared to be no new indicators as to how the government intends to take constitutional change and ethnic peace forward.¹⁰⁴ Across the country, opinion is widespread that, with the next general election scheduled for 2020, much faster accomplishment is needed before the polls if the NLD is to counter disappointment about the party’s failure to implement meaningful reforms.

In Myanmar today, it is generally accepted that, after decades of conflict and military rule, the transition to democracy was never going to happen overnight. It is also acknowledged that important steps have taken place during the past few years that might provide the opportunity to fulfil the promises of equality and union agreed at independence in 1948. But with both reform impasse and militarisation still continuing, democratic governance and nationwide peace are yet to be achieved.



7. Communities in Transition

The past six years have marked a time of significant change in Kayah State. But in the midst of the transition, so central to Karenni politics and most affected by the years of conflict are the Karenni peoples themselves. They remain often far from information and decision-making about vital issues affecting their lives. Some are urban-dwellers, most are rural, and large numbers continue to be displaced. In the meantime, there are an array of military and political elites who are competing for legitimisation and claim to represent them. At the same time there are an array of outside interests and actors arriving in the state, often bringing negative consequences in their wake.

There are undoubtedly positive steps in the present landscape, not least the ability for long-divided communities to travel more freely and talk together. But as elsewhere in the country, years of conflict have led to endemic poverty, mistrust and a legacy of grave political and humanitarian challenges that are still to be addressed. If political transition in Kayah State is to prove successful, consultation and participation with the local peoples are vital. During the past six years, a slow and uncertain start has been made in peace-building, but many challenges remain ahead.

Testing the Limits

Since the 2012 ceasefire of the Karenni National Progressive Party, communities in Kayah State have tentatively tested the limits of the new political climate and deciphered what change means, and does not mean, in their daily lives. This is a slow, negotiated process and offers a more ambiguous picture than the media headlines. Most people are unprepared and risk-averse, while some are better-placed to take advantage of new opportunities alongside the new external actors who have arrived. This distinction roughly divides between urban and rural communities, although not exclusively.

When considering change since 2012, populations in different parts of the state

Karenni refugees fleeing into Thailand along the Thanlwin River (MS)



generally perceive improved physical security and a decrease in human rights violation. They also report increased freedom to move and communicate, improved infrastructure, and increased interaction with government agencies and service provision. “Before the ceasefire there were more restrictions, and people in Myanmar and from foreign countries hardly came to Loikaw,” said Banya Khung Aung of the Karenni Social Welfare Development Committee, which has links to the KNPP.¹ “The first change after the KNPP ceasefire is better road access,” noted a local representative of an international organisation. “Just outside of Loikaw beyond the bamboo gate was already a black area. Now we can go to many places we could not go to in the past. This is positive. People also have more access to information, and more CSOs have come up.”²

The perceived impact on jobs and livelihoods is more mixed. Some see increased opportunities through access to new markets and products, lower transportation costs and improved information. But others feel undercut or discriminated against, especially in relation to land prices, ownership and resource extraction. There is also a sense that

local people are ill-equipped to respond and will be overwhelmed by those coming from other parts of the country. As Banya Khung Aung highlighted: “Who was coming before? No one. Now everybody is coming.”³

Conflict, Human Rights and Displacement

Since independence in 1948, conflict, displacement and human rights abuses have been formative experiences in the lives of most Karenni communities. The many years of fighting have had a devastating impact on the stability and security of many local peoples. Much of this disruption occurred during military campaigns against the different ethnic forces in which the Tatmadaw has often deliberately targeted the civilian population in a systematic effort to deny armed opposition groups local support. Following ceasefires with the KNPP’s rivals in the 1990s, notably the Karenni Nationalities People’s Liberation Front, these operations were largely against the KNPP.

The most notorious of these operations is known as the “Pyaw Ley Pyaw” (“Four Cuts”).

This has been employed in different parts of the country since the 1960s and aims to cut links between civilians and armed groups (see box: “‘Pya Lay Pya’ Campaigns and ‘Su See’ Villages”).⁴ As these tactics were rolled out, they were generally accompanied by severe human rights abuses, including forced relocations, forced labour, forced portering, summary and extra-judicial executions, beatings and torture, extortion and rape.⁵ Over the years, many communities in Kayah State have suffered these attacks. According to a local NGO leader: “When I was 12 years old and living in the Hoya region, we could not go to school because Tatmadaw soldiers came into the village all the time, and we had to run away to the forest. Whenever we heard a dog barking, we knew we had to run.”⁶

Since conflict began in 1948, the most intense period of displacement in Kayah State occurred between 1988 and 2000 under the SLORC-SPDC government. Amidst widespread reports of forced labour, arbitrary arrests and extrajudicial executions, a major relocation of villagers took place in 1992 when 57 villages were ordered to relocate to Hpruso and other sites in the northwest of the state.⁷ 8,000 out of the 12,000 villagers in the targeted area were reported to have moved, with many displaced into the hills or fleeing to refugee camps in Thailand. There was also considerable community pressure and some displacement during forced labour for the construction of the Aungban-Loikaw railway in the early 1990s, in which are up to 300,000 people took part (see Chapter 2). Tatmadaw operations then intensified again following the breakdown of the KNPP’s 1995 ceasefire. In 1996 alone, over 11,500 Karenni people were reportedly forced to move to government relocation sites. Another 4,400 were registered in refugee camps and a further 9,000 were displaced from their villages and became IDPs.⁸

As a result of these tactics, human rights organisations estimate that up to 30,000 civilians were forced to leave their homes and lands in Kayah State between 1996 and 1998 to move into “Su See” villages, where there was inadequate food, water, medical care, and sanitation facilities necessary for survival.⁹ According to Amnesty International: “In the

last three years (1996–99) hundreds of people have reportedly died of treatable diseases, thousands have fled to Thailand, and still others have chosen to hide in the forest in an attempt to live outside of military control.”¹⁰ During the height of this campaign, the then KNPP Foreign Minister Abel Tweed warned:

“The Karenni villagers don’t want to go to the relocation site as SLORC was forcing them to do because the site is really like a concentration camp, and once the villagers arrive it is very, very difficult for them to go out. At the relocation site people don’t have enough shelter, they don’t have enough food and they don’t have medicine. People are sick and starving and some die. That’s the experience of the people, so the villagers don’t want to go.”¹¹

Two decades later, around 12,000 people from Kayah State remain in refugee camps in Thailand.¹² Since the KNPP ceasefire in 2012, only a few hundred refugees are reported to have returned to Kayah State.¹³ The recorded population in the camps has dropped since 2008 when about 22,000 were counted, but this is due to many refugees working informally in Thailand or receiving third country relocation rather than returning to Kayah State.¹⁴ Community leaders in the camps say that they do not yet have confidence in a secure, stable environment for return. As one explained: “We have hope but it is limited...there should be a real ceasefire, not just on paper.”¹⁵

The military campaigns by the Tatmadaw also included violence against women. However, women also suffered from discrimination and abuses in the refugee camps. According to the Karenni National Women’s Organisation:

“In Karenni state, women were subject to serious human rights abuses by the Burmese military, including rape, torture, and forced labour. This led to many seeking asylum along the Thailand-Myanmar border. However, in the refugee camps along this border, women continue to experience discrimination and violence.”¹⁶

“Pyay Lay Pyay” Campaigns and “Su See” Villages

The “Pyay Lay Pyay” (“Four Cuts”) programme by the Tatmadaw is a military strategy that is intended to cut the four key links between civilians and armed groups: food, funds, intelligence and recruits. First introduced in the mid-1960s, the map of Myanmar was divided into “black” areas (controlled by insurgents), “brown” areas (disputed) and “white” areas (government-controlled). The objective was to turn the whole country into “white”. Army units ordered villages in selected brown and black areas to relocate to areas near towns under government control or Tatmadaw camps before a certain time (often just a few days, sometimes one day or immediately).¹⁷

After the relocation deadline passed, the area would be declared a “free fire zone”, where the Tatmadaw would treat anybody remaining in the area as an insurgent and claim the right to shoot on sight. While some villagers moved to the designated areas, many tried to remain in the vicinity of their villages or fields, hiding in the nearby forest and moving back and forth depending on the Tatmadaw operations. Tatmadaw units would then continue to visit these areas repeatedly, destroying houses, rice barns, crops and food stocks. These tactics were initially instituted in the Ayeyarwady Delta and Pegu Yoma highlands of central Myanmar. But in subsequent decades they were used in different ethnic borderland areas, from which displaced villages also fled into neighbouring countries, principally Thailand and Bangladesh.

Under the “Four Cuts”, many villages in each district of Kayah State have been forcibly displaced during the years of conflict into “gathering villages”, locally known as “Su See” villages. These are located near the main towns.¹⁸ According to a local development worker: “Su See means where the military forced people to live. It means ‘gathering village’ and is a Burmese word. It happened in every township in Kayah State.”¹⁹

While Kayah State remained off-limits to outside visitors, such operations were rarely documented in detail. A 1997 study by Amnesty International reported how serious human rights abuses were then taking place in such “counter-insurgency” operations against ethnic armed organisations in the Karen, Kayah and Shan States in eastern Myanmar. Civilians living in these areas were subject to “deliberate and arbitrary killings, forced portering and labour, and the destruction of their homes and property as the Tatmadaw moved through their villages on patrols.”²⁰

Two decades later, the impact of these operations is still felt in many communities. Some villagers are still living as IDPs within the country and others in refugee camps or working in Thailand. Through these tactics, much of the Kayah State and eastern borderlands became highly militarised. This prevented outsiders from entering most parts of the state which were categorised by the Tatmadaw as “black areas”. Only since 2012 have such designations changed in Kayah State. They remain, however, in force in several other parts of the country, especially in districts of the Kachin, Rakhine and Shan States where conflict still continues.

Since the NLD assumed government office in 2016, expectations of new policies to support peace and community rebuilding have risen. But there remains scepticism as to whether any central government truly understands the plight of minority peoples. Luiz Kaypoe, Secretary of the Karenni Refugee Committee (KnRC), expressed a common worry that Aung San Suu Kyi “cannot do anything for ethnic people...Burmese is for Burman”.²¹

Despite initial difficulties, there has been an increasing amount of coordination between the refugee camps and the state capital

Current numbers of IDPs in Kayah State are harder to estimate. In 2012, there were some 35,000 IDPs recorded across the territory.²³ According to local NGOs and the UNHCR, most refugees originated from Shadaw and Mese Townships and the eastern parts of Demoso and Bawlakhe Townships.²⁴ Since 1996 there have been very few villages on the eastern side of the Thanlwin River following Tatmadaw “clearance” operations. During these offensives, local communities experienced multiple displacements. Many “Su See” villages became formalized, particularly around Demoso and Shadaw towns. Since June



IDPs in hiding in Shadaw Township (KSWDC)

Loikaw during the past few years. This has largely been done through the newly-established Karenni Refugee Repatriation and Reconstruction Working Group (KnRRRWG) as well as cooperation between the KNPP, government and UNHCR on displacement issues. As Gay Nay Paw of the KSWDC said:

“We need to talk more so we can solve the problem. In the past these different groups could not come together and meet.”²²

2013 the UNHCR assesses that over 1,500 IDPs have voluntarily returned to their villages, mostly in Shadaw Township.²⁵ There is also an increasing pattern of farmers returning to their previous areas of land, while formally continuing to live in their current village. Such movements generally go unrecorded.

Although the amount of suffering caused by conflict and displacement has decreased, the shadow of war still remains in many areas. KNPP leaders presented these front-

line realities as one of their main reasons for agreeing to the 2012 ceasefire with the government. According to the KNPP Vice-Chair Khu Oo Reh: “So many innocent people were arrested, tortured, put in jail and prevented from working. Some girls and women were arrested and raped. This happened for sixty years. Long enough. So that’s why we decided to talk to the government.”²⁶

In this respect, the lives of many Karenni people have demonstrably improved since the KNPP ceasefire. But on key issues this change remains defined more by the absence of war rather than a prosperous new peace. As Khu Oo Reh noted: “Most people continue to struggle very hard for their daily survival.”²⁷ Equally concerning, as Banya Khung Aung of the KSWDC warned: “While human rights abuses have decreased, this doesn’t mean there are strong institutions to protect rights... tension is lower due to natural change not government promotion.”²⁸

Many communities therefore still have to rely on survival mechanisms that were developed during the years of conflict when they often found themselves caught between the Tatmadaw, KNPP and other competing forces. A common practice was to rotate the official village leader every few months. This was because of the risk associated with a high-profile position in terms of taxation and security. Some communities also had different village leaders for interacting with the Tatmadaw or KNPP.²⁹ After the 2012 ceasefire, this practice mostly changed and community leaders perceived a significant decrease in human rights violations.

At the same time the heavily-militarised environment continues to pose significant risks to the civilian population. For the moment, there are ceasefires in Kayah State but not peace. The danger of unmapped landmines remains widespread in all townships.³⁰ The Tatmadaw, KNPP, KNPLF Border Guard Force and other Tatmadaw-backed militia show no indication of pulling back. Troop numbers fluctuate but in recent years the Tatmadaw has generally deployed 24 battalions in Kayah State,

while the KNPP, KNPLF, Kayan New Land Party and various militia groups combined can call on up to 2,000 soldiers under arms (See appendix: “Overview of Karenni Armed Organisations”).³¹ The Tatmadaw’s construction of a new military training school in Hpruso Township since the KNPP ceasefire has also undermined confidence about government pledges to be building peace (see below).

The political and military situation thus remains unstable today, fuelling uncertainty for the many civilians displaced by conflict across the state. Until the aspirations and grievances of the local peoples are addressed in a sustainable peace agreement, the options for returning remain minimal. According to the Karenni Civil Society Network:

“Without a concrete agreement, these people will face many problems if they return home, because there has been no reduction of Burmese military troops, so there is no guarantee for safety, and also there is no agreement yet to guarantee the plan for their status, lands, livelihoods, and social welfare.”³²

Compounding the difficulties for displaced peoples, the KCSN is also concerned about the decrease in humanitarian aid provided to 12,000 refugees from Kayah State who are currently based in two refugee camps in Thailand. Some have been there for over two decades, with other refugees living outside the camps working in Thailand’s economy. The KCSN therefore calls on the government “to start withdrawing Burma Army troops from Karenni State and close down the No.14 military training centre in order to build trust in the peace process”.³³ It also urged international donors “to provide adequate humanitarian aid to refugees in Thailand until they can return home voluntarily, in safety and dignity”.³⁴

Land Grabbing

In the same year that the KNPP signed a new ceasefire, the Thein Sein government introduced new land laws that were promoted

as a key element in the country's reform process. From the outset the laws were mainly seen to benefit companies and not smallholder farmers in rural territories such as Kayah State. In particular, the 2012 "Farmland Law" stipulates that land can be legally bought, sold and transferred on a land market. Under this new law, farmers can register their land to receive an official title. For the Karenni peoples, however, this process is extremely problematic, and the question of the right to land has become one of the most contested issues in the country today.

At root, a basic failing is that the new law does not recognise ethnic customary and communal rights to land (see box: "Karenni Customary Land Systems"). Shifting cultivation, which is still widely practised by Karenni and other hill farmers in Myanmar, is not recognised at all. The new law only allows for the registration of private and fixed land titles. In addition, the restrictive mechanisms to receive such a land title have ended up excluding many occupants. Those who do manage to gain registration, mostly for individual plots of lowland paddy fields, often have to pay a large bribe to government officials to be able to do so. Making the situation even more difficult for villagers, the 2012 "Vacant, Fallow and Virgin Land Law" allows the government to reallocate land without official land titles to domestic and foreign investors.³⁵ The combined effect of these two laws has been highly detrimental to communities around the country. They have overnight declared many farmers as squatters, even though their families might have lived and worked on ancestral lands for generations.

In Kayah State, local farmers complain that, even if they manage to officially register their land, this does not protect them against future land grabbing. This follows a pattern reported in communities elsewhere in the country.³⁶ A common form of corruption is government officials accepting bribes from outsiders and business companies in return for land titles to areas pointed out as looking "vacant" on their maps. But often neither they nor the signatory have actually visited these areas which have been lived and worked on by local communities for many generations

in history.³⁷ "I have land, but have not been issued a land form," said a Karenni farmer. "But businessmen can get these forms in just a few days. Why? It is very hard for villagers to get these forms."³⁸

The combination of the new land laws and the opening up of Kayah State to outsiders following the KNPP ceasefire have had grave consequences. Many communities were completely unprepared for the impact. Land grabbing has been increasing, with families living in many parts of the state at risk. According to Banya Khung Aung of the KSWDC: "All these lands are grabbed by businessmen who are outsiders, not local people. These outsiders are coming since the ceasefire, including Chinese businessmen."³⁹

It is not only outside interests that have been taking land. There have also been many cases of land grabs by the Tatmadaw, armed militias and local business groups. In recent years, two high-profile examples stand out. The first case was the 2011 seizure of farmers' land, initially about 3000 acres, in Hpruso Township in order to build the Tatmadaw's No.14 Training School.⁴⁰ Following its ceasefire, the KNPP demanded a halt to its construction. "The government had agreed to conduct a joint survey with the KNPP to assess local support for the project," according to the KCSN. "[But] the survey, completed in July, was dominated by government officials who called for continuation of the project, against the wishes of local people whose lands have been confiscated."⁴¹ Following two years of lobbying, a small amount of land was returned and some minimal compensation was given to the farmers.⁴² However the dispute still continues and has become a major point of contention between the KNPP and Tatmadaw. In the KNPP's view, the Training School has become an integral element in the Tatmadaw's plans for continued military expansion instead of reduction in Kayah State following the 2012 ceasefire. For local peoples, the military Training School stands as a symbol of occupation, not development.

A second land grabbing case occurred in Sokyaku village, also in Hpruso Township. Here residents staged "ploughing protests"



on their land after it was taken by the Tatmadaw’s 531st Battalion during 2012–13 following earlier seizures of land in the 1990s.⁴³ The farmers were initially prosecuted for their protest. But in an important indication of the changing political climate, one of the organisers Thae Reh, former secretary of the Karenni State Farmers Union, won the local seat to the State Parliament for the All Nationalities Democracy Party in the April 2017 by-elections (see Chapter 6). It was a significant victory.

For this reason, it will be a key litmus-test of democratic transition as to whether citizens’ rights to land and security are protected through parliamentary reform as the peace process moves forward. Of critical importance will be legal recognition of the historic and inter-cultural manner by which local peoples work their lands (see box: “Karenni Customary Land Systems”). Many Karenni communities manage their resources jointly, including forests, waterways, fishponds, grazing lands and sacred places. Land and related natural resources provide communities with food and livelihoods, but their attachment to land is also multi-dimensional

and includes spiritual, cultural and social values and traditions.⁴⁴ As a local farmer in Hpruso Township said:

“We have been staying in our land since a long time ago. Our livelihood and lives depend on the land. We feel safe to work and live in our land. If we have land to work on, our food, livelihood, money and other needs of our family are guaranteed. Now since we lost land, we worry for our future.”⁴⁵

In Kayah State, land is also linked to ideas of autonomy and self-determination. As a farmer in Demoso Township explained: “Land has a very deep meaning and value for us. It is our lives and the very blood in our veins. Without our land, our nationality will vanish. Land is our dignity.”⁴⁶ None of these customary and communal rights to land are recognised under Myanmar law today. It is a major political failing and growing source of grievance in a territory where many peoples already feel marginalised after decades of civil war. “The government land law is not appropriate for the community,” said Khun Athai of the Kayan New Generation Youth. “The

ethnic groups here have different customary laws and we want to promote these. The government is trying to grab land by using the new laws. The community does not like the government laws.”⁴⁷

A Karenni land activist summarised the depth of the problem: “In ethnic areas, all the land is owned by people. There is no Virgin, Fallow and Vacant land in our areas.”⁴⁸ If political reform is to reach to all peoples, recognition of existing rights to land is crucial as a fundamental element of national change in the coming years.

Service Provision

The provision of basic services to the local peoples was chronically poor or non-existent in Kayah State during the years of conflict. Government services were mainly confined to urban areas and those areas where the

Tatmadaw could control the population. Apart from armed conflict, health and education services were limited by geography, poor infrastructure, language barriers and a lack of funding and government priority. Mistrust from local communities about Bamar-dominated governments further complicated the situation.

In rural areas, ethnic armed organisations also set up their own civilian administration systems and services in what were in effect quasi “mini-states”. With the escalation of fighting with the KNPP in the 1990s, many of these networks began to contract. But in remoter KNPP-controlled areas, backpack medics continued to provide basic healthcare under the Karenni Health Department (KnHD). In the field, this largely began as support to the KNPP’s military wing, the Karenni Army. But in 1997 the Karenni National Mobile Health Committee (KnMHC) was also formed by the KnHD to provide

Karenni Customary Land Systems

“We manage the land according to our customs. The details vary from village to village. Generally speaking, the whole village knows which land belongs to whom. The villagers know each other and can exchange land among themselves. We have different kinds of land. We have individual farmland to grow crops. We have communal lands, for instance for pastoral purposes and for drinking water, but also along the riverbank for extracting sand and rocks for building purposes. We also have sacred lands or spirit lands, some of them cannot be trespassed. This is determined by the villagers.

If you do not have land, you can approach the village chief to use part of the communal land. If necessary, you can build a house on common lands. You can use community land for personal purposes, but you cannot own it and cannot sell it. People also have responsibilities and cannot sell land to outsiders or exchange it with them. You have to leave the land with the communities, even if you migrate to another area.

Village elders and tribal leaders decide on disputes. You are not allowed to harm other people’s properties and crops. And you cannot move territory markers between communities. If someone violates sacred land, or destroys crops, they have to offer chicken or a pig to clean their sins. You can also give a chicken if one uses land of other people. If one destroys a crop, you need to compensate this according to market prices. In Demoso area, if one trespasses land, one needs to eat some of that land. If someone violates sacred land, one is not punished by the people but by the spirit who lives there.”

Source: Kayah Earthrights Action Network.

emergency healthcare to IDPs in KNPP-controlled areas.

Since the 2012 ceasefire, the KnMHC has worked independently, growing from one clinic to ten at present. There are also an additional 24 mobile clinic teams who work for 15 days every month, covering between six and twenty villages depending on size. Government services remain restricted due to a lack of access to ceasefire areas and the failure to achieve political agreements or interim arrangements while peace talks continue. The KnMHC's main targets are "hard to reach KNPP ex-black areas, mostly in Hpasawng and West Hpruso and Shadaw Townships," according to the KnMHC official Mo Bu.⁴⁹ The priority is to "try and fill the gaps which the government cannot fill."⁵⁰ There are also health workers affiliated to the KNPLF, who operate clinics in KNPLF-controlled areas, mostly in Mese Township. This includes a hospital and a factory to manufacture prosthetic limbs for victims of landmine explosions.

Since the 2012 KNPP ceasefire, the first improvements in basic government services have begun on a broader scale. According to a 2014 survey by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 47 per cent of respondents mentioned improvements in road infrastructure, 29 per cent in education, 27 per cent in drinking water, 21 per cent in electricity and 18 per cent in healthcare.⁵¹ But while encouraging, significant needs remain, especially in rural areas. Human and social development in Kayah State is starting from a very low base. "There is a big gap in delivery in health services between urban and rural areas," warned Plu Reh from the Shalom Foundation. "In the rainy season it is almost impossible for pregnant mothers to reach hospitals in urban centres to deliver."⁵²

Kayah State also lags far behind in education compared to the rest of the country. Community leaders point out that poverty is a prime cause. "The problem here is the lack of food, people have to struggle for their life," said Bishop Sotero Phamo. "They want children to work. They think going to school is for lazy people."⁵³ In schools, depending on

location or system, children may also be faced with four languages: their own local dialect, Kayah, Burmese and, as a foreign language, English. In one sign of cooperation, local service providers that have evolved in non-government areas can operate openly inside Kayah State since the 2012 ceasefire. These include the KnMHC, KSWDC and Karenni National Education Department (KnED). However, service provision remains highly political on all sides, and years of mistrust in government services will take time to repair.

The KnMHC now operates independently from the KNPP, but their relations with the organisation remain important. In 2015, KnMHC officials were concerned that KNPP leaders felt that they were operating "too far ahead" of the political climate. They were themselves worried that "if something breaks down, it will be difficult for us to move back: all our staff are ex-refugees."⁵⁴ Even as KnMHC tried to support linkages with government hospitals, it was difficult to persuade patients to travel far from their homes due to fears of discrimination, inability to communicate in Bamar language and the costs involved. "Some patients refuse to go," said the KnMHC official Mo Bu.⁵⁵

Collaboration between ethnic-based and government service providers is nascent but there have been some constructive developments. The Civil Health and Development Network stands out as a good example, demonstrating how the different armed groups can cooperate to promote health and work together with the government. Established in August 2012 by the health departments of six Karenni and Kayan groups (KNPP, KNPLF, KNPD, KNSO, KNLP and KNG), it has seven clinics and twenty backpack health teams, consisting of trained medics and community health workers.⁵⁶ "Our strength is that we go everywhere and work in remote areas and in areas with IDPs," said Khu Philip from the KnHD and a member of CHDN. "Previously, we did this separately, but since the 2012 ceasefire we combined our efforts with the other armed groups and work together."⁵⁷

The CHDN is presently run by a committee representing all members and is receiving

donor support as an independent entity. CHDN's mission is threefold: to support equal access to the health system for all people; to promote "civic participation" in a health system driven by the people's needs; and to play a "vital role in the national rebuilding of peace and reconciliation."⁵⁸ In a territory long riven by conflict, this peace-building role is considered especially important in supporting cooperation and coordination between the different sides and the government. According to Khu Philip: "Carrying out these health activities by CHDN is really supporting the peace process."⁵⁹

In response to these activities, there has been an increase in cooperation with the government's Ministry of Health and Sports. This has come in the form of midwife visits, exchange visits, joint trainings and vaccination programmes. The government State Health Department has also organised forums to bring together representatives from both ministry and ethnic health organisations to discuss possibilities for further coordination

and cooperation. Compared to the decades of conflict and division that preceded, this is a significant advance, but many challenges remain. At the local level, government officials appear ready to work with ethnic health service providers, but there is some resistance at more central levels. A KnMHC representative quoted a senior Kayah State official as apologising, saying that "he really needs us but he is in a difficult position" with both "Nay Pyi Taw" and the "Tatmadaw".⁶⁰ Ethnic health organisations can also face similar challenges in their relationships with the leaders of EAOs.

Despite these difficulties, local service providers say that they are keen to collaborate on development initiatives with government agencies as long as they contribute to the achievement of a genuine peace. According to Banya Khung Aung of the KSWDC, it is vital to encourage public inclusion if peace is to be achieved: "We need some development to get people to help themselves, if it is sustainable and meaningful, and so they can ask for peace

Karenni farmers practising upland cultivation (KT)



and we can empower them to achieve peace... We cannot wait for government. We need to engage.”⁶¹

Social Relations

As in other areas of Myanmar society, the end of violent conflict and the opening up of the political environment in Kayah State has allowed space for more open debates about identity, ethnicity and human rights. Within Karenni society, this has been matched by an increasing suspicion of “outsiders” and an increasing definition and division of “insiders”.

Across Karenni communities, especially in towns, the perception that the Karenni are losing out to “outsiders” is strong. The term “outsider” generally refers to new people arriving in the area but also to non-Karenni people already residing there. As explained by a local NGO official, this division largely reflects the commonly-held view that “Chinese, Muslims, Burmese are the richest people here...these big houses and shops in Loikaw belong to Chinese. We do not have native people who are rich like this.”⁶² This view of being marginalised also extends into politics where comparisons are made between the Karenni, Shan and other local nationality groups. A common opinion is that the “Karenni people are about 50 years behind other groups”, “left behind in politics” and with “many leaders but no strong leadership.”⁶³

In response to these fears, the sentiment has been growing that the Karenni peoples need to act now and compete or risk losing out completely. This view is especially pervasive in educated circles and among older citizens who remember a time when the social make-up of “Karenni State” did not appear to be under threat or questioned. This is not simply a concern about Karenni politics but extends to much broader reservations about the direction of government policies of “national reconciliation” and “federalism” more generally. KNP Chair Khun Bedu points out that it is still very challenging to reconcile the outlook of the majority Bamar with other

nationality groups: “National reconciliation is difficult: the Burmese mentality and ethnic mentality are different.”⁶⁴

Internal divisions amongst the Karenni inhabitants are also significant. The term “Karenni” is itself often questioned (see Chapter 2, box: “What’s in a name? Kayah or Karenni State”). Primarily this is due to differences over whether “Karenni” or “Kayah” are ethnic, geographical or political delineations in the modern political age. But amongst the main ethnic groupings of Kayah, Kayan and Kayaw, there are also variations in definition and territorial claims. As the Kayan politician Khun Bedu put it: “We still cannot agree who arrived in Demoso first!”⁶⁵

Local nationality leaders do not believe that these differences are insuperable. For although the recent political opening has to some extent accentuated differences, it has also allowed them to be debated and examined together for the first time in many decades (see box: “Karenni Ethnicity”). Local CSOs, armed groups and politicians have organised committees to find common understanding within each of the ethnic groupings with representatives from youth groups, women’s organisations and the different political parties. Their aspiration is that once the Kayah, Kayan, Kayaw and other identity groups can agree on joint positions for their peoples, they will then have a better chance of achieving stronger representation in national level issues and discussions.

Civil Society

Civil society in Kayah State has evolved over time, partly in response to the space that is available for social or political activities. During the “Burmese Way to Socialism” under Gen. Ne Win, NGOs were not allowed and independent community activities were generally supported through faith-based groups. From the mid-1990s when local NGOs were allowed to restart in the country, community-based organisations became more active in Kayah State. The spread of ceasefires with ethnic armed organisations during this period played an important role in this

change. Religious organisations and church leaders, especially, were involved as go-betweens in peace talks between the military government and armed opposition groups.⁶⁶

Non-governmental programmes in Kayah State mostly began as social services provided through such faith-based networks as the Catholic Karuna Myanmar Social Services (KMSS), Kayah Phyu Baptist Association (KPBA) and, from the early 2000s, also the animist Kay Htoe Boe group. Working in communities that mostly correspond to a particular religion or nationality group, today these organisations continue to support programmes that address basic needs, including education, health and water supplies. “There are so many issues here, it is hard to identify the main problems,” said Lee Myar from the KPBA. “We need support for all, including health, education, livelihoods.”⁶⁷

Maintaining an independent stance in the contested environment within Kayah State has often proven difficult. It has been essential to focus on social services rather than politics to be able to operate, with faith-based groups generally respected for their ability to reach divided and hard-to-reach communities. “We have very remote areas; the people there really need support,” said Father Robert from KMSS in Pekon. “The government cannot go to all these places. We have to go by motorbike, and often get stuck in the mud.”⁶⁸

Such activity by faith-based groups has over the years resulted in some competition between the different religious organisations, including the monasteries in Buddhist villages. The Shan population is majority Buddhist. In general, the outcome has been positive, stimulating a greater mixture of community support systems in place of the government. During the past decade, CSOs that are more politically active have also emerged. Since the KNPP ceasefire, they have generally been allowed to operate independently by the authorities.

One area where religious figures have played an important role is in their ability to mediate between armed groups, the Tatmadaw and villagers at the local level. Both Baptist and

Catholic clergy have been involved. At a high-profile level, Bishop Sotero Phamo, head of the Loikaw Catholic diocese, mediated with the government during 1994–95 to enable the ceasefires of the KNPLF, KNLP and KNPP. In the case of the KNPP, Bishop Sotero travelled with two priests to the Thai border during the peace negotiations to meet with KNPP leaders to pass on messages from the government, hear their concerns and report back.

The KNPP ceasefire swiftly broke down amidst mutual recriminations with the government (see Chapter 3, box: “The Failed 1995 Ceasefire: the KNPP View”). As a result, according to Bishop Sotero, trust-building remains an essential task if a sustainable peace is to be achieved:

“I have joined the negotiations and listened to them. The Karenni people are uneducated and do not have much experience, so they do not trust the other party. They have been bullied in the past, so it takes time. But I think both sides are tired of fighting, so they want to get a rest. It is almost 60 years of fighting, and they seem to want to have peace. But they do not trust each other.”⁶⁹

Another important peace initiative was by the Ethnic Nationalities Mediators Fellowship. This was set up in 2002 with the Shalom Foundation, by faith-based leaders in the Kachin, Kayah, Chin, Karen and Mon States. Apart from peace talk promotion between the leaderships of the armed groups, activities spread from 2009 to include peace-making training programmes at the community level in Kayah State as well as education in conflict early warning and response systems.⁷⁰ These activities began during the time of the previous SLORC–SPDC government, and in many aspects became forerunners of the present-day Kayah State Peace Monitoring Network.

In the same period, CSOs also developed in the Thai–Myanmar border region, including amongst the refugee population in Thailand. Some of these new CSOs were formed in order to support IDPs in remote areas inside Kayah State as well as those living in camps along

the border. Most were initially supported by international donors to address the humanitarian needs of refugees.⁷¹ Over the years others became more overtly political, focusing on such issues as woman's rights, the environment and natural resources and free media. The Karenni National Women's Organisation, Karenni Evergreen (KEG) and the Kantarawaddy Times are prominent examples.

The KNWO was established in 1993 by women who had fled to Thailand. Since its foundation, the KNWO has promoted women's rights, protection and empowerment through education and advocacy. The KNWO was also able to open an office in Loikaw Township after the 2012 ceasefire, and it has since organised activities across the state, including conferences in Demoso and Loikaw.⁷² The KEG was set up in 1996 by youths based in refugee camps. The KEG's objective is to protect community forests and natural resources, to increase awareness on environmental issues, and to protect natural and cultural heritage.⁷³ In media terms, the most important outlet has been the Kantarawaddy Times, which was set

up on the Thailand border in 2004 for local audiences to have access to independent news and analysis.⁷⁴

Another significant increase in CSO activity came in 2008 when a number of organisations, including Kayan New Generation Youth, were formed in the Loikaw and Pekon areas and became active in protests against the 2008 constitutional referendum. For the more political leaders, this was a formative experience and a number were either imprisoned or fled to Thailand (see Chapter 6, box: "Karenni 'Vote No' Referendum Campaign"). Some of those on the Thai border studied politics and human rights in the refugee camps or in the nearby city of Chiang Mai. Today they say that their collaboration and experience during this period became central to the current strength and outlook of Karenni CSOs.

This divided landscape inevitably meant that, under military government, there were differences in the scope of community-based activities between those in government-controlled areas and those in territories

Catholic church in Shadaw Township (TK)



administered by ethnic armed organisations. This was especially apparent after the 2012 KNPP ceasefire, when there was an obvious split between CSOs associated with refugees and displaced communities on the Thailand border and those already operating inside Kayah State. Border-based CSOs at first had difficulty gaining access to government-controlled areas. They were suspicious about Tatmadaw intentions as well as the integrity of groups working with the authorities. There was also a division in government-controlled areas between CSOs that were officially registered with the authorities (usually faith-related groups focusing on community development) and the more political CSOs that continued their activities without registration. The future looked uncertain, with the “registered” CSOs concerned that association with “unregistered” CSOs might cause them difficulties with the Tatmadaw and government.

In subsequent years, understanding and cooperation have generally been established between the different CSOs. Free movement and access to information have encouraged stronger linkages. There remain two CSO networks: the Kayah State Civil Society Network (KSCSN) for registered groups and Karenni Civil Society Network (KCSN) for those that are unregistered. These two networks increasingly coordinate together. Encouraged by the NLD’s 2015 election victory, even the most political organisations today recognise the central government and seek to work wherever they can within the state. The Union of Karenni State Youth, initially formed in 2006 as a network of youth and women’s groups affiliated with the ceasefire KNPLF and KNLP has in particular become active. From 2010 onwards, UKSY has also expanded to include other CSO groups and work on “reconciliation between the government and armed groups and amongst the armed groups.”⁷⁵

Looking to the future, the integral role of CSOs in Kayah State politics and society appears set to stay. As national transition continues, community-based organisations are especially attuned to local needs and political aspirations. Their leaders believe that

they are uniquely placed to bring fractured communities together to support a political settlement that addresses the rights of all peoples. Conflict resolution remains a central goal, with a Peacewatch group set up in 2010 that later developed into the Kayah State Peace Monitoring Network in 2012. In addition to delivering social services, Karenni CSOs today have become active voices in raising awareness on a wide diversity of issues of everyday concern to local peoples. This includes land grabbing, natural resource exploitation, development projects, dam construction, women’s rights and inter-community understanding.

Ethnic Identities in Transition

The prospect of convening political dialogues at the state and national levels, and the new space for political discussion since the KNPP ceasefire, has brought the issues of ethnic identity and political representation in Kayah State to public attention. “In the past we had a military government and we could not discuss these things openly,” said KNP Chair Khun Bedu. “But under the new government we have some rights, and we have no fear anymore to speak.”⁷⁶ As a result, different ethnic armed organisations, political parties and CSOs have started discussions since the 2015 general election to promote political participation and joint representation in national dialogue. The 21st Century Panglong Conference of the NLD government has added impetus to this objective.

To date the complexities of the national peace process have undermined efforts to bring all the different parties together. During the past few years, the KNPP has acknowledged local initiatives by other organisations to support political discussion. However, it has not been actively involved because the party appears reluctant to cede its current position as “dialogue partner” to the government as well as the main representative of the Karenni peoples. In the meantime, the UKSY aims to play a coordinating role and has tried to organise all the ethnic sub-groups in Kayah State to work together in setting up common goals.

Karenni Ethnicity

As in the rest of Myanmar, the questions of ethnicity in Kayah State are political, evolving and contested. The exact labelling and division of groups and subgroups continues to be a source of debate. In history, the local peoples were generally known as “Karenni” (“Red Karen”) as a collective term after the red-coloured clothing of the majority sub-group: Kayah. As with other peoples in the borderland plateaus and ranges that surround the central Ayeyarwady plains, linguistic or cultural diversity is regarded by nationality leaders as evidence of “independence” and not being brought under outside rule.⁷⁷

In the case of “Karenni”, the present-day Kayah State and adjoining territories with Karen and Shan States have been considered by linguists as the Karen “heimat” (“homeland”) because of the rich diversity of “Karenic” languages and dialects.⁷⁸ Some of these languages and peoples overlap modern-day administrative borders within Myanmar and Thailand. But because of a political system that was historically closer to the Shan States, the Karenni States (although Karen-related) were regarded as independent from their Karen, Shan and Siamese neighbours in pre-colonial days.

Ten Karen-related groups have generally been considered as the “Karenni peoples” of the modern-day state on the basis of language or culture: Kayah, Kayan (Kakaung, Padaung), Kayaw/Pre, Kawyaw (Manu Manaw), Geba, Yintale, Paku, Kangan (Yinbaw), Kadaw (Gheko) and Lahta (Zayein). But the inter-relationships of these languages are not widely understood. Groups have often been better known by names used by outsiders. Even among Karenni peoples there are differences of opinion over how to classify different dialects or aspects of identity and culture.

Among ethnic groups that do not speak Karenni-related languages, the Shan has historically been the largest, reflecting linkages in Karenni and Shan politics and society during earlier centuries. Contemporary state-based parties in Karenni politics, notably the armed KNPP or electoral ANDP and successor KySDP, say that they seek to represent all ethnic groups in the territory and not only those that are Karenni-related.⁷⁹

The identity of “Karenni State” was guaranteed in the 1947 constitution as one of four nationality states in the new Union, along with Kachin, Karen and Shan. As conflict spread, in 1951 the AFPFL government renamed “Karenni” State as “Kayah” State in an attempt to separate the Karenni peoples from other Karens and remove a name that reflected historic independence (see Chapter 2, box: “What’s in a Name? Kayah or Karenni State”). The “Kayah” State was also retained as one of seven ethnic states in Myanmar under the 1974 and 2008 constitutions. “Kayah”, “Karen” and “Kayan” are all recognised as “national races” by political rights or territories under the 2008 constitution. However, the collective name of “Karenni” has not been restored nor is there acknowledgement that the “Kayah” are only one of the related sub-groups in the territory.

Since the KNPP’s 2012 ceasefire, interest in Karenni ethnicity and languages has increased. This is partly out of political change, with greater travel and access possible in the territory. But it has also been instigated by the flawed definitions for ethnicity and identity in the 2014 Population and Housing Census. It designated a confusing

135 “national races” in the country on the basis of old colonial identifications and various new listings. Many nationality groups fear that this is part of a government intention to complicate notions of identity as a means to undermine the numbers and representation of non-Bamar peoples.⁸⁰

An important debate is now taking place among Karenni peoples. The 1951 renaming of “Karenni” State as “Kayah” State after the majority ethnic group is not widely accepted. But there are also differences of opinion over how groups relate to the collective “Karenni” term. The differences are primarily due to whether it refers to a political, geographical or ethnic grouping – or all three, especially in the case of Kayan-related peoples (see box: “Kayan Territory and Identity”).

Complicating matters, not all “Karenni” languages and dialects are mutually intelligible. In some areas it was often joked: “one village, one dialect”. There are also a mixture of religious beliefs in the territory. This includes Christian (mostly Baptist and Catholic), Buddhist and animist (locally known as Kay Htoe Boe) as well as small Hindu and Muslim populations, mostly in Loikaw. There are also other nationalities in Kayah State, including Shan, Pa-O and Bamar, the last of which have increased in percentage terms since independence, but there have been few studies on their local histories or demographics.

Ethnic Groups Associated with Karenni*

Kayah: Kayah are formally referred to as “Kayah Li Phu”, literally “Kayah People”. Kayah people speak slightly different dialects of Kayah Li (Kayah language) but it broadly separates into two main Eastern and Western dialects. They follow a mixture of Baptist, Catholic, Buddhist and animist (often Kay Htoe Boe) beliefs. The Kayah are the largest population and were traditionally known for their red-coloured clothing.

Kayaw and Pre: Pre are also known as Bre or Bwe in Karen language. The Pre and Kayaw are closely-related groups and speak what is today classified as Kayaw language. Historically, they were geographically separated by the Htoo River. The Pre are considered to originate from west of the Htoo River near Karen State and the Kayaw from east of the Htoo River in central Hpruso Township. The Pre follow Baptist and Catholic beliefs, while the Kayaw are mostly Catholics. For their religious practice, the Catholics use Karen language and Baptists use Karen and Geba language. In recent years, Kayaw and Pre representatives have discussed uniting as one ethnic identity. Some would like to call themselves Pre Kayaw, but others see themselves as separate.

Kawyaw: The Kawyaw have previously been known as Manu Manaw due to Burmese language classifications. But in 2017 Kawyaw groups held a national conference in Hpruso and a majority agreed to formally refer to themselves in future by the name in their own language, Kawyaw, rather than the government name of Manu Manaw. They mostly follow Baptist and Catholic beliefs and mainly originate from the borders of Hpruso and Bawlakhe Townships.

Kayan: Because of the spread of the population and different sub-groups, Kayan identity has been under-studied in social and linguistic research (see box: “Kayan Territory and Identity”). In political terms, they are historically best-known in the

former Shan sub-state of Mongpai (today Moebye). But many Kayans also live in the present-day Kayah State, northern Karen State and Nay Pyi Taw Union Territory. Kayans follow a mixture of Christian (mostly Catholic) and animist (often Kay Htoe Boe) beliefs and speak a number of dialects. A number of terms used to record Kayan groups in the past are regarded discriminatory, notably Padaung which has been used in reference to the Kakaung.⁸¹

Recent research suggests that there are four main Kayan-related groups, a position also agreed at the 2nd Kayan National Conference in Demoso in 2017.

- **Latha:** “people from the north” (also Zayein)
- **Kakaung** “people from the mountain” (also Lahwi, Padaung)
- **Kangan** “people from the plains” (also Yinbaw)
- **Kadaw** “people from behind the hill” (also Gekho)

“Lahwi” is also used to refer to the Kakaung, but it was agreed at the recent conference that the term covers all “southern” groups (Kakaung, Kangan and Kadaw).

Geba: Geba language is considered part of the Eastern branch of Bwe Karen that is spoken widely in adjoining territories, including Karen State, Bago Region and Shan State borders. Some Geba people in Kayah State consider themselves as Karenni but those on the Karen State side regard themselves as Karen. A Geba Youth Forum in Loikaw in October 2017 did not agree on a shared position.

Paku: The Paku are often referred to as “Paku Karen” but are generally recognised as a Karenni group in Kayah State politics. Their language is a dialect of Sgaw Karen, which is the most common Karen language in contemporary Myanmar. Most live in western Hpasawng, the Mawchi area and in the borders with Karen State.

Yintale: The Yintale are a small group, mostly living in a few villages in Bawlakhe Township. They have been very disrupted by conflict over the past decades. They speak their own dialect, which is reputedly a variety of Western Kayah, and follow a mixture of Buddhist and animist (often Kay Htoe Boe) beliefs.

Other Ethnic Groups in Kayah State

- **Bamar**
- **Intha**
- **Pa-O**
- **Shan**

* This list should not be considered definitive. It intends to reflect recent discussions and classifications over identity among local peoples rather than ethnographic research.



When organisations meet today, the earlier demands of Karenni independence are no longer promoted. A reconstituted Karenni State in a federal union is a widely agreed position among local parties. But during KNPP negotiations over whether to sign the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, concerns have grown among other Kayah State groups that they might be left behind in future dialogue. “While the KNPP was planning to sign the NCA, all Karenni ethnic sub-groups tried to make an ethnic-based dialogue ahead of the NCA,” explained Plu Reh from the Shalom Foundation. “They are preparing to be ready for political dialogue. But if they wait for the KNPP to sign, it might be too late.”⁸²

The KNPP itself initiated a Karenni State Peace Conference in December 2015 in Loikaw, attended by a diversity of armed groups, political parties and CSOs (see Chapter 5). At the same time, the UKSY has stepped up

efforts to encourage local Karenni sub-groups to hold their own conferences to better define their local challenges and needs. According to the UKSY’s Bernard Bote: “They never had a chance to discuss their problems. If they can solve these issues among themselves, and have some common agreement, they can then discuss them at the national level.”⁸³

Language and ethnicity, however, are not politically synonymous with identity and citizenship. Karenni leaders worry that decades of conflict, Tatmadaw dominance and inward migration of settlers from other parts of the country are part of a long-standing policy of “Burmanisation”. This strategy, they believe, has continued in every political era since independence in 1948. The same concerns exist in other non-Bamar territories.⁸⁴ In the last census of any real detail, which was conducted by the British in 1931, the “Karen” population of the Karenni States was calculated at 73 per cent of those

recorded, with the Shan (Tai) at 19 per cent and Bamar (Burma) at just 3.7 per cent.⁸⁵ To date, the 2014 census results have been considered too confusing and contentious to release. But nationalist leaders fear that, if the results are made public, they will show a relative decline in the proportion of the indigenous population since the Karenni State joined the post-colonial Union.

Although classifications overlap, there are generally considered to be around ten Karen-related sub-groups that are thought to be the historic inhabitants of the state, along with a Shan minority (see box: “Karenni Ethnicity”). But after decades of civil war and displacement, the situation for some groups has become critical. Many communities have been badly disrupted. There are, for example, reports of just three Yintale villages still in existence today.⁸⁶ But as Karenni activists are finding, it can be a delicate balancing act to try and define identities in order to revive a sense of unity. KNP Chairman Khun Bedu explained: “We all originate from Tibet. Since we arrived here, we do not seem to agree with each other anymore. But I think we all relate to each other from the past.”⁸⁷ Many Karenni leaders therefore believe that more discussions are urgently needed on common positions to bring the KNPP and other nationalist organisations into the same consultative process. According to Plu Reh from Shalom Foundation:

“It is important that every ethnic sub-group makes sure to go forward on the same goal, to the path to federalism. You can decide how you call yourselves. But we need common goals and to work together with the KNPP towards federalism. Kayaw, Kayah, Kayan: it means human being. It is all the same word.”⁸⁸

Such nationality discussions about representation and identity increased during 2017, with conferences held among the Kayan, Kayah, Pre/Kayaw and Kawyaw. In February, a 2nd “Kayan National Conference” took place in Demoso Township, organised by the KNLP, KNGY and Kayan Cultural and Literature Committee.⁸⁹ At the conference, it was decided to form the Head Committee of Kayan

National Unity “to solve the problem among Kayan”.⁹⁰ The HCKNU includes a diversity of Kayan-related groups, including the KNP, KNLP, KNG, KNGY and Kayan Women’s Organisation as well as representatives from different communities and sub-groups (see box: “Kayan Territory and Identity”). According to the HCKNU President Samuel Khun Sha Mu Aye: “Our main objective is to re-unite the Kayan people.”⁹¹

During the discussions, participants highlighted how many Kayan villages have lost their original names or how Kayan people may be listed as Karens or by other identities on their national registration cards. “Some people do not even know they are Kayan,” said Hsa Eh Ywar from the Kayan Literature and Cultural Committee.⁹² “We Kayan are the original people living here for a long time,” added Samuel Khun Sha Mu Aye. “But at the moment, we are still struggling to get our basic rights. We cannot freely promote our literature and culture. We still need to ask permission.”⁹³ With this in mind, the conference made some important clarifications. “Karenni is a territory; it is not an ethnic name” said Plu Reh from the Shalom Foundation. “So a person can be a Karenni citizen or a Karenni national. But the people are ethnic Kayan, and they want their area to be part of Karenni State. This is a very significant decision.”⁹⁴

In early March a “Kayah National Youth Conference” was also held in Demoso Township.⁹⁵ Kayah-based groups appear less active on identity issues than Kayan or Kayaw. This is presumed to be because the Kayah are the largest ethnic group in the state. It could also be because they are considered to have a closer affiliation to the KNPP, which has long been the main advocate for the Karenni cause. The Kayah National Youth Conference is trying to address this issue and find more unity, especially among young people. “We mostly focus on youth; we try to promote the culture of Kayah Li Phu,” said Poe Reh from the Kayah Li Phu Youth Committee. “Li Phu means Kayah People, and you cannot separate Li Phu and Kayah. During military rule, using these names was very sensitive. Now we are recalling our history and identify who we are.”⁹⁶

The language issues are nuanced, but the name “Kayah Li Phu” is in fact a reversion to the original name before “Kayah” was designated as an ethnic term in the Karenni State. “In the past we called ourselves “Kayah Li Phu”, but when the country was built, Karenni joined the union and people called Karenni ‘lu-myo’,” explained Poe Reh. “Now we want to use our original name again.”⁹⁷ In order to support a cultural regeneration, the conference concluded by agreeing to unite and build stronger connections among the “Kayah Li Phu”, to work with other ethnic youth groups, and to promote peace in the region.⁹⁸

Later the same month, a “Pre Kayaw Bi-National Conference” was organised.⁹⁹ This was supported by the KNPDP, which mainly consists of Kayaw members. As with other Karenni peoples, there have been issues over local ethnicity that have not been deeply studied or resolved. This especially relates to the question as to whether they should be known jointly as “Pre Kayaw” people or be referred to separately (see box: “Karenni Ethnicity”).

The history behind these differences once again provides insight into the evolution of local dialects and cultures. Communities on the west bank of the Htoo River, which runs through the territory, have historically had more socio-economic contact with Karen people to the west and are generally called “Pre”. Those on the east side in Hpruso Township on the other hand are known as “Kayaw”.¹⁰⁰ Furthering these differences, the Kayaw are mostly Catholic while the Pre are both Baptist and Catholic. According to Dee Dee from the Pre Kayaw Committee, these differences then became accentuated during the “Burmese Way to Socialism”:

“Until the 1960s, we were called ‘Pre’. Then after Ne Win took power, and because of the political situation, some of this group were called ‘Kayaw’. However, some felt left behind and neglected, especially in remote areas. The Karen call us ‘Bwe’. It is the same group, but because of different intonation, it turns out as ‘Pre’ here.”¹⁰¹

Group of Yintale men hunting in the forest (KT)



Despite these differences, there is a general consensus that the recent discussions about nationality rights and identity have marked a significant change for the local communities. At the conference last year, it was agreed to end the use of separate names, promote unity and instead use “Pre Kayaw” in future as the formal term for ethnic identity. According to the Pre Kayaw Committee member Dee Dee: “Previously meetings were just based on culture, dominated by the Church leaders. We did not talk about these ideas two to three years ago. Now people start to use the word ‘Karenni’ proudly.”¹⁰² But not all local observers are so certain. One CSO representative privately commented: “The Kayaw group are trying to organise the Pre and made the new name ‘Pre Kayaw’, but not all Pre agree.”¹⁰³ This reflects wider divergent views on ethnicity and identity among the different groups in Kayah State and neighbouring areas.

Finally, in May 2017 a “Manu Manaw (Kawyaw) National Conference” took place in Hpruso Township among another Karenni sub-group in Kayah State: the Kawyaw. Again there are challenges in disentangling historic labelling and perceptions of ethnicity and identity. The Kawyaw are presently trying to address this, and there are different explanations as to how confusion over their representation has come about.

According to local belief, the situation became formalised under Gen. Ne Win’s “Burmese Way to Socialism” when a survey was held, but the Burmese-speaking enumerators wrongly listed the Kawyaw people as “Manu Manaw”. One theory is that this came about because of a lack of familiarity with local languages, causing errors in writing down local dialects and pronunciations in Burmese. The result is that the Kawyaw have been incorrectly named, a classification repeated in the 2014 Population and Housing Census.¹⁰⁴ Thus a main objective of the Kawyaw national conference was to seek consensus on the proper recognition of their name. According to Plu Reh of the Shalom Foundation: “The government calls them Manu Manaw. It is one of the 135 ethnic groups in Myanmar that are officially recognised by the government.



Kayah women (MS)

They will decide their name and change it to Kawyaw.”¹⁰⁵

As these initiatives continue, the discussion and promotion of Karenni cultures and identity look set to increase in the coming years. The perception is widespread that there are many decades of marginalisation and neglect to catch up on. Community and political leaders are keen that this should not result in arguments that can be used to instigate division or undermine the representation of the Karenni peoples, especially by external actors and outside interests. After the unnecessary friction caused by the 2014 Population and Housing census, much greater integrity and understanding are needed in future projects on issues of identity and ethnicity. As the academic Tadayuki Kubo wrote on the Karenni-Kayah State question: “The people’s sense of belonging – their identity – needs to go back to being malleable, with multiple identities, rather than the rigid ‘ethnic groups’ as defined by the state.”¹⁰⁶

Kayan Territory and Identity

Comprising a number of sub-groups, the Kayan people live in adjoining areas across the current Shan, Kayah and Karen State borders as well as Nay Pyi Taw Union Territory (formerly in Mandalay Division). This geography adds another layer of political and historical difference when determining rights and identity. In the development of Kayan nationalism, the main centre has been the Shan sub-state of Mongpai (Moebye) that lies to the north of the Kayah State capital of Loikaw.¹⁰⁷ Mongpai was historically included in the Shan States because its ruling Sawbwas were ethnic Shan. But in terms of ethnicity, the Mongpai sub-state was often considered to be more closely connected to the Karenni States. The right of amalgamation with Karenni State was granted in the 1947 constitution. Both the “Karenni” and “Shan” States were also granted the right of secession after 10 years in the 1947 constitution (see Chapter 2).

After independence in 1948, the Kayan was one of four ethno-nationalist movements that developed among Karen-related peoples, along with the Karenni, Pa-O and mainstream Karen (predominantly Pwo and Sgaw). After the Shan State was put under military administration during 1952–54, Mongpai became treated as part of “Kayah State” under the Tatmadaw structures of command. Both southern Shan State and Kayah State come under the Tatmadaw’s Eastern Command that is headquartered in Taunggyi.

In pre-independence history, there are a number of reports of uprisings by local Kayan peoples. In 1692, the chronicle of the Shan State of Mongpai records a local uprising in which the Shan Sawbwa was killed and apparent independence established for the next few decades. During 1936–38, Kayan villagers also ousted the Shan ruler of Mongpai but received little British support.¹⁰⁸

In the post-colonial era, a Kayan nationality movement first took up arms in 1964. That year the Kayan New Land Party was formed after an uprising by farmers in the Pekon area (see Chapter 5, box: “Karenni Armed Organisations 2018”). The KNLP has since worked closely with Karenni nationality movements. In acknowledgement of the Kayah–Kayan nexus, the Tatmadaw also awarded “Kayah State Special Regions” to the KNLP and a Kayan National Guard breakaway group in their ceasefire agreements of the early 1990s (see: “Karenni Conflict Map”). These were largely in name only on the Kayah State side of the border. But they also allowed the KNLP and KNG to set up offices in Loikaw and operate in Kayah State. The politics and economics of Pekon and Moebye Townships have always been closely connected with nearby Loikaw.

Other Kayan-based parties have also emerged during the past three decades to promote political rights for the Kayan people. The Democratic Organisation for Kayan National Unity won two seats in the 1990 general election in Karen State and Shan State respectively. The subsequent Kayan National Party won two seats in the Shan State in the 2010 general election. In Kayah State, meanwhile, many Kayan people have joined Karenni nationalist movements over the years, including the KNPP and KNPLF. The KNP has also cooperated with Karenni organisations in seeking to promote local nationality parties for election to parliament (see Chapter 6).

Among Kayan leaders, there is a generally shared goal of creating an enlarged Kayan “Self-Administered” territory that would likely join with Kayah State. Under the 2008 constitution, a reserved seat of “ethnic affairs” minister was created for the Kayan

population in Shan State. But this is not considered sufficient to represent the Kayan people either in Shan State or other parts of the country. Many challenges therefore lie ahead if broader representation is to be achieved.

In considering future Kayan relationships with Kayah State, a major issue among community leaders is the interpretation of the term “Karenni” and whether Kayan people feel it also applies to them as a people or as a region. There are different views amongst Kayan communities in different areas. For the Kayan population in Kayah State, this has not been considered a political issue for deep discussion until now. The local Kayan population is generally regarded to be one of the inter-related peoples in Karenni politics and society, like the Kayah and Kayaw. In the Shan and Karen State borderlands opinions are more uncertain, with some inhabitants reluctant to come under a new name or administration.

One solution suggested by the KNP is to hold a referendum among the population in Shan State.”¹⁰⁹ A member of the KNGY agrees a referendum would be helpful: “People have different ideas about this. They are confused. If you call it Karenni State, how can we participate? How can we get one place for Kayan people?”¹¹⁰

The KNLP is also concerned that the choice of either “Kayah” or “Karenni” State could be used to place the Kayan in a “subordinate” position to Kayah, depending on interpretation. According to the KNLP joint General Secretary U Saw Lwin, the key is that all “nine tribes” in the Karenni State are treated on an “equal footing”.¹¹¹ In the meantime, the Kayan population is concerned that the military authorities have promoted “Kayah chauvinism to undermine and marginalise the Kayan people in the political field”.¹¹²

Many Kayan CSO members in Kayah State want to continue to be included in “Karenni”. But they are also aware that there is little understanding of the issue in rural areas. According to a member of the Kayan Women’s Organisation: “When I travel in Kayan villages, they do not know about Karenni. Even a few leaders in our community, they do not understand about the Karenni. So we need to promote their understanding about why it is important that Kayan and Karenni are related.”¹¹³

The current scope of opinion was summarised by Plu Reh of the Shalom Foundation: “The government and some Kayah people want to keep the Kayah State name because of political interest. But most people want to rename it Karenni State. It is more inclusive. But we need to understand the history and meaning first, otherwise it will create problems. Kayan leaders really like Karenni, but it should be a state name, not ethnic name.”¹¹⁴

In recent years, discussion on intra-Kayan nomenclatures and cultural relationships has also been increasing. According to the HCKNU, there are four main groups within Kayan ethnicity today and these identities were confirmed at the 2nd Kayan National Conference in 2017: Latha, Kakaung, Kangan and Kadaw (see box: “Karenni Ethnicity”).¹¹⁵ Another concern is that the Kayan people have often been known by terms used by outsiders, notably “Padaung”, which are considered pejorative. This trend has continued in recent years with the opening up of the area to outside visitors, with the Kayan people often portrayed as the “long-necks” because of the brass coils traditionally worn by women in some upland communities. While proud of their traditions and cultures, such depictions by outsiders are far from the affirmative representation that Kayan leaders want to achieve.¹¹⁶



8. Development Directions and Dilemmas

Ceasefires and Economic Transition

Like many of Myanmar's ethnic borderlands, Kayah State is rich in natural resources. This includes valuable metals such as gold, tin and tungsten, once pristine teak forests, and opportunities for hydropower on the various rivers. Some of these resources have already been depleted during the years of conflict, with different sides appropriating shares during the fighting. Thai logging companies have also cleared large areas of forests in areas adjacent to the border with Mae Hong Son province.¹

Meanwhile, the majority of the population remains very poor, making a living as subsistence farmers. They have seen very few benefits from natural resource extraction, despite the considerable potential. If anything, they have only suffered the negative consequences. This includes land grabbing, displacement, loss of access to forests and environmental degradation. Most natural resource extraction has also taken place in an unsustainable manner, with most benefits going to local elites and outsiders. In consequence, economic marginalisation has been a long-standing cause of grievance in Karenni politics.

The ceasefire by the Karenni National Progressive Party in 2012 opened up Kayah State for what are termed new "development" projects for the first time in decades. The nature of development in Kayah State is therefore currently the most visible indicator of the character of the ceasefire as well as the strength of foundations for peace and political settlement. But the dividends and direction of the peace process remain ambiguous. There have been gains in terms of infrastructure, tourism and development assistance, although none have come without their challenges. The sense that external and elite interests stand to gain most from new investments is pervasive.

Ceasefire history in Kayah State and other parts of the country has furthered these

perceptions. Peace agreements have often been characterized by business deals amongst military government officials, armed group leaders and outside companies at the expense of “ordinary people”.² Adding to concerns, the 2008 constitution has continued the centralisation principles and practices of previous military governments. Section 37 has enshrined the Union (central) government as the “ultimate owner” of all lands, natural resources, water and atmosphere in the country.³

Many communities have thus become suspicious of “development” in all forms. Their hesitancy stems from a concern that development is synonymous with economic profit for the benefit of others. They also fear that, without a prior political settlement, large-scale and unconditional development will offer the central government all the gains from the ceasefire without any of the compromises of genuine peace and political reform. As the Burma Environmental Working Group recently warned: “The current central government is proceeding as if peace has already arrived, without proposing any changes in the centralized control over the ownership, management, and revenue generation from natural resources.”⁴

There is also a strong feeling that the central government has been keen to extract resources from Kayah State but has been reluctant to reinvest the profits back into the local population. An often-cited example is the case of the Lawpita hydropower plant. This is one of the main sources of electricity for the capital Nay Pyi Taw, Yangon and other towns in central Myanmar.⁵ Yet many villages in Kayah State, including those surrounding the Lawpita hydropower plant, have for many decades been left in the dark without electricity. This has been a long-standing source of complaint (see box: “Lawpita Blues”).

The issue of natural resources also runs deeper than economics in Kayah State. They are very much the ingredients of culture and identity. Similar fears exist in neighbouring countries, where local peoples and resources are often closely inter-linked with Myanmar.

In opposition to planned dams on the Thanlwin River, which is shared with both China and Thailand, a local analyst wrote in 2005: “In some cultures people are linked to the land. It is not just a resource, but rather a part of them – the mountains, plains, rivers, lakes, and animals.”⁶ The destruction and exploitation of natural resources for commercial purposes does not have only economic and environmental consequences. It also has social, political and cultural repercussions. As the author pointed out: “The effects of breaking a cultural bond ripple through communities for generations and when the bond is forcibly broken by outside parties the damage multiplies.”⁷ These warnings still capture the sense of vulnerability and foreboding that many Karenni communities experience today.

Despite these concerns, there are local actors and organisations who feel that economic programmes in Myanmar can this time be different. They point out that the ceasefires made under the previous Thein Sein government (2011–16) were agreed in a very different context to the first round of ceasefires during the SLORC–SPDC era (1989–2011). As an indication of partnership, the ceasefires of the Thein Sein era were presented both at home and abroad as part of a broader political, economic and peace transition in the country at large.

To support these goals, specific agreements were written into the KNPP’s union-level “14-point” accord with the government in June 2012. These included the commitment “to ensure transparency on the planned mega-projects” and for both parties “to provide information to the public and to allow the local people and community-based organisations to seek information.”⁸ These commitments were also reiterated in the subsequent union-level “8 Point Agreement” of June 2013 in which both the government and KNPP affirmed that they would “cooperate for regional development”.⁹ To ensure local participation, both sides pledged “to allow the public and social organisations to observe the new major projects to be implemented”.¹⁰ They also agreed that the implementation process



would be “transparent with responsibility and accountability” and guaranteed that local people would “not suffer loss”.¹¹

Six years later, the worries that development projects have brought in their wake are familiar. Local communities are once again complaining that a ceasefire in Kayah State has brought about serious problems through unsustainable natural resource extraction and land grabbing related to investment. The commitment to political dialogue appears forgotten, and local voices have been marginalised. To date, Karenni organisations have not been an integral part of either the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement or 21st Century Panglong Conference.

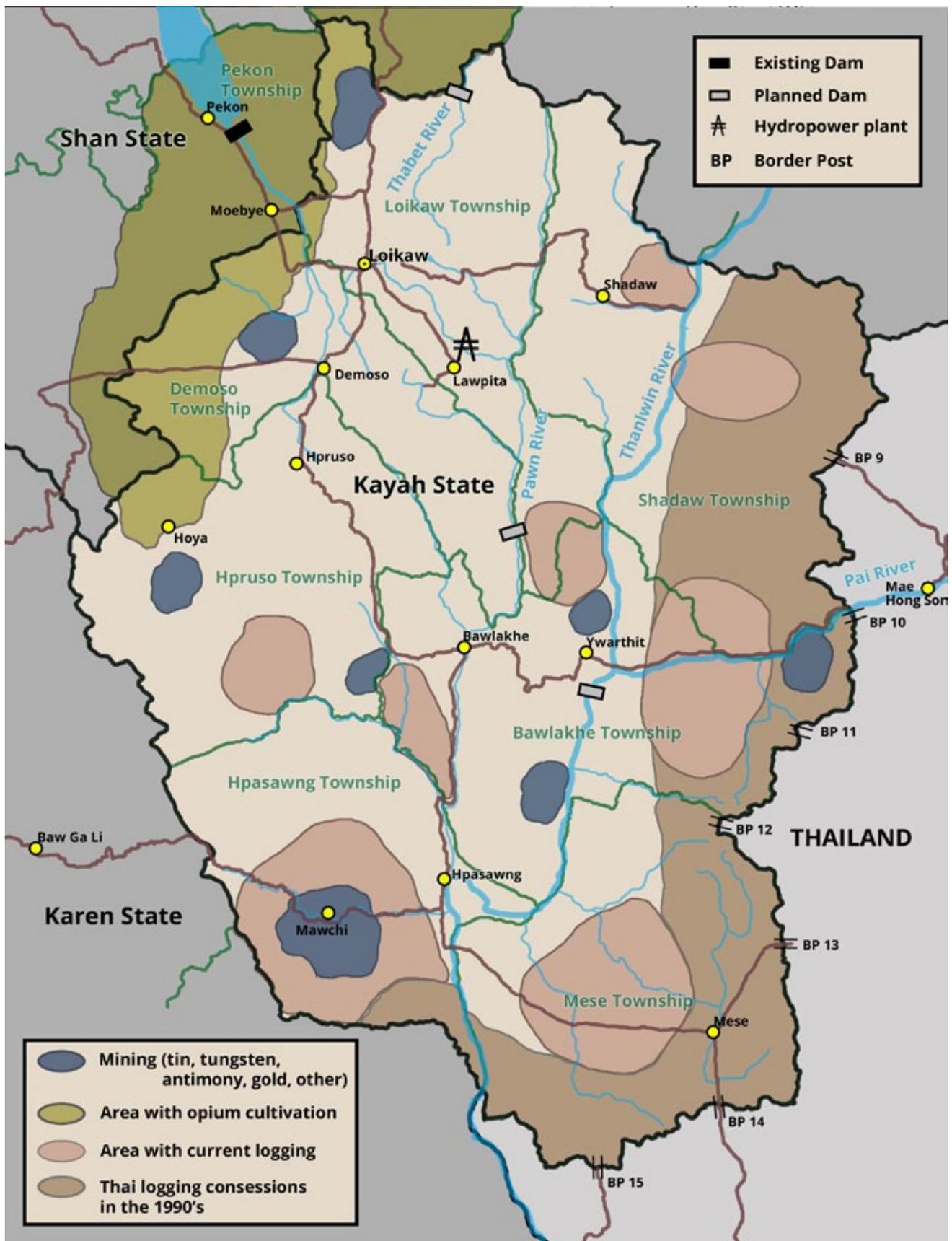
In Myanmar today, respect for and implementation of these principles has become a touchstone among the Karenni peoples for adjudging the success of the contemporary peace process. Transparency, decentralisation and the inclusion of local communities and non-state actors in decision-making processes are essential if peace-building and political reforms are to succeed.¹² All sides are now under scrutiny.

“What is the point of the dialogue process, if the central government has already sold off all our natural resources?” asked Mi Ah Chai, coordinator of Burma Rivers Network (BRN).¹³

A key failing remains to be addressed: development is all too often promoted as the solution to conflict rather than recognising its true political causes.¹⁴ The dilemma for the local peoples was summed up by the environmental campaigner Ah Mu Htoo of the Molo Women Mining Watch Network:

“The problem in our state is a political problem and ethnic conflict. So we have to solve this problem first, and then can have development projects second. But after the ceasefire, there has been no political dialogue and development projects are coming first, so it will create more problems. For example, the military government built dams but does not use them for local people; they sell the electricity. If there is power sharing, the people have the right to manage their resources. But with current projects everything is connected to the centre, so local people do not get the benefit.”¹⁵

Karenni Natural Resources Map



Source: This map is based on information from KCSN, KEAN, UNODC and TNI Research. This map is illustrative only and meant to give a general indication of natural extraction in Kayah State only.

Logging

Logging is a highly visible example of resource extraction that increased again following the KNPP's 2012 ceasefire. As Kyaw Htin Aung of the Union of Karenni State Youth described, this unwanted outcome reflects one of the ceasefire trade-offs: "Three years no shooting is good, but now they can freely cut the forests."¹⁶ Presently, there are three main logging companies in Kayah State: Sure Trading Co Ltd, Ah Shae Than Lwin and Tamaw Htar.¹⁷ Ah Shae Than Lwin is owned by the armed Karenni Nationalities People's Liberation Front and Tamaw Htar by the KNPP.¹⁸ They are major sources of income for the two groups. The KNPP set up Tamaw Htar following the 2012 ceasefire agreement. Improved access and security then allowed a high volume of cut logs to be removed from Kayah State as well as fresh logging to take place. Both the KNPLF and KNPP are also able to exercise control over contracts or permissions for smaller logging companies to work in areas under their operational influence.

In earlier decades, armed groups informally exported logs over the border to Thailand. This developed in the early 1990s into a major

trade in which the military government, Thai companies and ethnic armed organisations were all involved. Business declined again during the SLORC-SPDC era.¹⁹ Following the KNPP's 2012 ceasefire, however, logs also began to be exported through Yangon as well, allowing the government a greater share of the profit.²⁰ Only logs that were previously cut were officially allowed to be transported out of Kayah State, although this rule was often ignored. As Saw Eh Say from the Kayah Earthrights Action Network commented: "After the ceasefire, there is more freedom to do logging. This is not good for future generations. They are only meant to take already cut logs but they burn and take new ones. Money can make anything."²¹

As an indication of the scale of this trade, the official Myanmar Timber Enterprise logging target for Kayah State in 2016 was 5,000 tons of teak and 6,000 tons of hardwood.²² But such figures do not take account of illegal operations. Businesses from outside the state are also perceived to be taking advantage of new logging opportunities and benefitting from the post-ceasefire formalisation of previously informal practices. "Under military rule Chinese businesses were active and exploited resources before communities even

Logs along the road in Hpasawng Township (TK)



knew about them,” explained Khun Myint Naing from Metta Development Foundation. “Chinese businessmen also invest in companies owned by armed groups. Now they do it officially instead of unofficially, but it is still corruption.”²³

For the present, it remains very difficult to keep track of the real extent of logging. Both the KNPP and NLD government have recently made efforts to recognise the environmental damage of logging and tried to limit the trade. The KNPP called in a 2015 statement for an end to logging activities. The NLD government subsequently instituted a nationwide logging ban from May 2016–March 2017.²⁴ This followed an earlier 2014 export ban of raw timber logs by the Thein Sein government.²⁵ In some areas, these prohibitions appeared to have some local impact on timber extraction as well as on jobs for labourers and truck drivers. At the same time, Thai officials acknowledged that the number of logs being traded has fallen in recent years. This is partly because of government bans but also because of years of over-logging along the common border.²⁶

The rush, however, to sell in advance of the 2016 ban limited any positive environmental impact. The ban was lifted less than a year later. As Khin Maung Yi of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment Conservation admitted, 50,000 tons of illegal timber was intercepted nationwide during the 2016–17 ban. This suggested a high level of logging during the ban’s existence.²⁷ The government then announced in January 2018 that it would cut timber production by 40 per cent during the 2017–18 fiscal year, and would no longer allow the felling of trees by private companies.²⁸ But given historic experiences, community leaders have long been sceptical about official figures and statements from all parties. As Khun Myint Naing of Metta Development Foundation said: “A statement is just a statement.”²⁹ According to the KNPP spokesperson Khu Nye Reh: “As soon as we released the 2015 statement to end logging, the Kayah State government asked us to ‘reduce it’, because they had signed deals with companies, but these had not yet taken all the logs out. They are taking logs out under a contract with the previous government.”³⁰

Unless urgent steps are taken, the future outlook for forest conservation in Kayah State seems bleak. Six years after the KNPP peace accord, the inherent problem of unsustainable extraction for the benefit of a small elite still remains. It is facilitated by endemic corruption and poor governance.³¹ U Aung Kyaw Soe, the NLD MP for Shadaw in the Amyotha Hluttaw, also points to this lack of transparency and regulation across the industry: “We don’t know exactly who recommended which company; some are associated with the government, some with armed groups, and among them are some doing nothing but illegal extraction.”³²

In response, Karenni CSOs are calling for greater transparency in business decisions because “local people get nothing and feel bad about the future.”³³ According to Banya Khung Aung of the Karenni Social Welfare and Development Committee, the only way to address business abuse on such scale is to end “investment-based development that causes social and environmental harm.”³⁴

For the moment, corruption and strong-arm tactics are still continuing. This grim reality was brought to international attention after the December 2017 execution of three KNPP soldiers and a civilian who were arrested by Tatmadaw troops at a KNPP checkpoint near Loikaw. According to Amnesty International, their apparent offence was to have inspected a convoy of Tatmadaw trucks transporting illegally cut timber.³⁵ During a time of supposed peace-building, timber and other resource wars are still continuing in Kayah State.³⁶

Dams

Dams are a mobilizing issue among communities in Kayah State. Following the KNPP peace agreement, planned dams on the Thanlwin, Pawn and Thabet rivers became a rallying point for civil society organisations. They worry that the ceasefire will allow the much-criticised projects to move forward. Karenni sensitivity to dams also goes far beyond the concerns of social upheaval and environmental damage. It is acutely political,

and the advocacy and protests by local CSOs are testing the limits of new democratic expression.

Resentment over the 196 megawatt (MW) Lawpita (also known as Baluchaung) hydropower plant remains especially deep-rooted. It was completed southeast of Loikaw with Japanese assistance in the 1960s. The construction displaced an estimated 114 villages and nearly 1,740 people without compensation.³⁷ Many more were reputedly forced to move in the flooding that followed the completion of the Moebye dam which supplies the power stations. The plant also brought increased military presence and landmines into the territory. But the main bitterness felt today is focused on the fact that none of the large volume of electricity produced was actually provided to the local population, despite the suffering and disruption caused by the construction (see box: “Lawpita Blues: Risking My Life For Your Electricity”).

As a sign of these concerns, the KNPP ceasefire agreement stipulated that the government would allow CSOs to monitor future mega-development projects in Kayah State. This includes the planned 600–4,000 MW Ywarthit dam on the Thanlwin River, for which the Chinese company Datang is carrying out survey work. Karenni CSOs claim that the government has not been adhering to the provisions of the ceasefire and that representatives of the Karenni Civil Society Network were prevented from visiting the dam site.³⁸ For the moment, the project is reportedly paused. But this is hard to determine as there is little information provided by the government and access to the site is prohibited.

Even less information is available on the proposed 130 MW dam on the Pawn River and 110 MW dam on the Thabet River. The KSCN reported that in October 2015 a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Myanmar Ministry of Electric Power, H.T.C.T Energy Investment Co. Ltd (Myanmar) and Trust Energy Investment Pte. Ltd (Singapore) to build a hydropower dam on the Pawn River.³⁹

The following February, company representatives reportedly began conducting a survey along the Pawn River in the Saw Lon village tract, about 10 kilometres north of Bawlakhe town. However, as with the Ywarthit dam, KCSN noted that “the survey took place without consulting local people and with no transparency about the project”, with some villagers apparently told that the survey was for the “construction of bridges”.⁴⁰ The KNPP stated that this action was “in violation of the Union-level ceasefire agreement, which stated explicitly that any large development projects in Karenni State must be carried out transparently and responsibly”.⁴¹ The KNPP thus “blocked the survey team, and asked them to leave the area”.⁴² The KNPP has continued to object to the construction of the dams and has gained increased respect from local communities because of this stance.

Worries about the negative impact of dams among Karenni peoples have also been exacerbated by the displacement of 8,000 people from their homes during the construction of the Upper Paunglaung Dam across the border in Shan State during 2013–14.⁴³ This predominantly affected Kayan, Pa-O, Shan and Bamar communities. The threat to local communities is no longer simply on the drawing-table.

Concerns about these projects galvanized 17 Karenni CSOs into making a joint statement on International Rivers Day in 2016. They criticised the detrimental impact of dams on the peace process, the potential loss of culture and heritage for the historic Karenni capital of Bawlakhe, and increased militarization and human rights violations associated with security for the dams.⁴⁴ The Karenni network also pointed to the irreversible damage to biodiverse ecosystems and forests as well as farmlands and fisheries upon which local communities depend.

To halt these trends, the Karenni CSOs called for “all mega development projects, including dam projects, that will have negative impacts on local people” to be “suspended until there is a political settlement to the ethnic conflict, guaranteeing ethnic self determination under a federal democratic system”.⁴⁵ As Kho Reh

Lawpita Blues: Risking My Life For Your Electricity

“The community in Kayah State feels our natural resources are being exploited. In the past, local people had to protect the Lawpita hydropower installation as well as the electricity cables providing electricity as it was passing through areas with conflict. However, the electricity only went to the capital. It made people want to rebel, and contributed to the emergence of the armed groups. When I was six or seven years old, I also had to take security for these electric posts. When we did this, sometimes the military would treat us badly and in an inhumane way, scolding us and showing their hatred to us. The government fenced the areas around the electricity posts, and we had to build a little hut nearby and guard these posts for day and night. When the soldiers came, we have to give them a place to stay, and build a toilet for them. They would ask us to give them an animal, like a pig, and we would have to find it for them. Some of the soldiers would scold and kick us. These posts were on the electricity lines from Loikaw to Taungoo. This was in a conflict area. We had to risk our lives for people in central Myanmar to receive electricity. But we did not get any electricity ourselves.”

Source: Interview with representative of local NGO, 2 February 2016.

of the KCSN warned: “For Naypyitaw to build a giant concrete wall above Bawlakhe, our ancient capital, blocking off the river that has nourished it for centuries, is hugely controversial...this project is a time bomb for the peace process.”⁴⁶

Into 2018, the concerns about dam construction in Kayah State continued. During a protest in March at Ba He Hta village in Hpasawng Township, 300 locals and BRN members repeated their opposition to dams being built “within the conflict zones”.⁴⁷ A recommendation by the World Bank and International Financial Cooperation (IFC) was welcomed at a recent stakeholder discussion in Yangon that mainstream dams should not be built on major rivers, including the Thanlwin and Ayeyarwady. But protestors disagreed with the IFC’s recommendation to build dams on tributaries instead, such as the Pawn River. “The tributaries are also important in preserving the ecological health of the river basin and in sustaining the livelihoods of countless ethnic communities,” said Mi Ah Chai of the BRN. “This is not development for us, as the prolonged war and suffering there are due to the dam projects, which are in conflict zones....When we discuss peace, people talk about the NCA, but we have not achieved peaceful livelihoods in many places yet.”⁴⁸

Mining

Another central aspect of the ceasefire landscape in Kayah State is mining. There are several mining sites in Kayah State, including in Hpruso, Loikaw, Mese Townships and Ywarthit sub-Township, where a variety of minerals are excavated. According to local environmentalists, all armed groups are to some extent involved in mining as well as some Chinese and Japanese businesses.⁴⁹ Each of the Karenni armed groups owns at least one mining company, but the Tatmadaw controls the market. The most significant area in Kayah State is Mawchi, where the Tatmadaw is also dominant. The locality was first mined on a large scale by the British under colonial rule and was once the largest source of tin and tungsten globally. Today the local industry is a mixture of small-scale mines and larger concessions.

Production at the Mawchi mines was difficult during the long decades of conflict after independence. It increased significantly, however, following the ceasefire by the breakaway Karenni National Solidarity Organisation in 2002. According to Ah Mu Htoo, a local environmentalist: “After the ceasefire the mining was expanded and illegal ‘black market’ trading allowed to increase.”⁵⁰

This encouraged many migrants to come to Kayah State from central Myanmar and work in the mines, which were generally owned by the Tatmadaw-controlled Kayah State Mineral Production Company (KMPC). Many local inhabitants, mostly Karens, changed from farming to mining during this time. They were swayed by the possibility of making a monthly income of “10 million Myanmar Kyat between two or three people” on a good quality shaft.⁵¹ This profit was made even after paying for explosives, materials, water and shaft transportation.

On the ground, however, community-based organisations believed that there were few benefits from these arrangements. A 2012 report by the Molo Women Mining Watch Network, which takes its name from a stream badly affected by mining, outlined the deeply exploitive nature of the industry:

“The people of Kayah State have no way of knowing the income from the mines because even the Kayah State government does not know this. It is clear that the central government has been monopolizing the Mawchi mines. The company took most of the benefit from the tin mining. The tin mine owners can get profit only by smuggling the tin on the black market. The government army and KNSO have set up checkpoints on the road from Mawchi to Loikaw, where they levy official and unofficial taxes on transported goods.”⁵²

The Molo Women Mining Watch report also documented the risks taken by miners. They are vulnerable to shaft collapse, health problems and related social issues of drug and alcohol abuse.

After the 2012 KNPP ceasefire, more companies and migrants became interested in Kayah State mining. The KNPP Kayah Htar Ni Company received a permit from the state and union governments. It was also able to block some government permits for other companies.⁵³ No substantive action, however, has been taken to legitimately regulate the industry. Rather, mining operations have been proliferating in the surrounding area. “Mining

in conflict zones,” the Molo Women Mining Watch Network warned, is a “new form of military offensive”.⁵⁴

Six years later, the ownership of companies and structure of the mining business presents a compelling picture of ceasefires as an elite bargain between Tatmadaw commanders, politicians, Karenni armed groups and influential business interests. Local community workers complain that “war lord” rivalries between Tatmadaw and armed group leaders have changed from the military to economic field. Most obviously, several KNSO leaders continue to have close relations with Tatmadaw commanders in Mawchi. They vie for preferential treatment in the face of competition by the armed KNPP, KNPLF, Karenni National Peace and Development Party and Karenni National Democratic Party for licensing permission to work with prospective Chinese companies.⁵⁵ Each organisation is currently gaining enough of the proceeds to maintain a relative balance of power and sustain their end of the ceasefire deals. Among these local companies, the larger operations are owned by Ye Htut Tin, a former Tatmadaw commander in Hpasawng Township and ex-MP for the Union Solidarity and Development Party, as well as KNSO and KNPLF leaders. The KNPP also has interests (see box: “Mining in Mawchi: A Ceasefire in Microcosm”).

Overall administration of the mining industry continues to be controlled by the KMPC, which is also managed by Ye Htut Tin and oversees all mining. The KMPC is owned by the Tatmadaw conglomerate, the Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited. It shares a percentage of the profits with the No. 2 Mining Enterprise in the newly-renamed Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment Conservation. With the exception of KNSO companies that can operate separately, the KMPC allows other companies to work in selected areas. It also sells them dynamite, detonators and shaft transportation on the agreement that all products are sold back to KMPC at their office in Taung Paw village for a set price. As evidence of the inter-connected ownership of the KMPC and Tatmadaw, it is reportedly also possible for



companies to collect payments for product at the Tatmadaw regional command in Loikaw. In reality, much of the product is sold by individuals after paying off checkpoints to export from the area. Most tin and also tungsten is then transported to China via Muse in Shan State.

The mining industry continues to pose many risks for local communities. Following a landslide in October 2015 at a mine in Mawchi owned by the KMPC, at least 28 people were killed and more than 500 displaced.⁵⁶ After this, operations were briefly paused, and religious leaders warned of the hazards in the industry. However according to the environmentalist Ah Mu Htoo: “Local people are worried to say no because of their livelihood and do not want mines to shut. The main livelihood for local people is mining and it is difficult to explain the risks to them because it gives income.”⁵⁷

After years of delay, the government finally introduced amendments to the Mines Law

in March 2018. While encouraging foreign investment, these also allowed some decision-making to state and region-level administrations to manage “small and medium scale” mines.⁵⁸ But given the conflict landscape, there are few expectations of meaningful reforms in mining practices in Kayah State at any time soon. This echoes the need for reform of the mining industry in the country at large. As the Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business argued in a recent analysis of the industry, there is a need for a “fundamental rethink” to address past problems and attract responsible investment.⁵⁹

In the meantime, the Molo Women Mining Watch Network and Karen Civil Society Network are continuing their calls for a moratorium on mining until there is political dialogue and an inclusive peace settlement. “Without genuine peace, the mining expansion by companies and the government will fuel renewed armed conflict and bring further suffering to local people,” the Molo Network warned.⁶⁰

Mining in Mawchi: A Ceasefire in Microcosm

A closer look at the ownership of some of the main mining companies operating in Mawchi reveals the extent of “ceasefire capitalism” in Kayah State. There are many companies and detailed information is hard to find. However, the five companies listed below are owned by an ex-USDP MP and former military commander, two leaders of the KNSO, a KNLPF leader and the KNPP respectively, demonstrating the spectrum of interests invested in the Mawchi area. It is one of most tangible and striking aspects of the ceasefire in Kayah State since 2012. It highlights the extent of the challenge that Karenni peoples face to avoid having their resources carved up and military exploitation being replaced by economic exploitation.

Ye Htut Kyaw Mining Company is owned by Ye Htut Tin, who was the Tatmadaw commander in Mawchi until 2009. During 2010–2015, he was the USDP Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House) MP for Hpasawng Township. During his time in parliament, he was a member of the “Committee of Fundamental Rights, Democratic Rights and Human Rights of Citizens”.

Kayah Ngwe Kyae Company is owned by Tel Neh, Vice Chair of the KNSO. The KNSO has been active in Mawchi since its 2002 ceasefire. Tel Neh has a close relationship with U Win Myint, who was previously regional military commander in Loikaw and is the current USDP State Hluttaw MP for Hpasawng Township.

Ler Mu Kho Company is owned by U Richard, Chair of the KNSO. Richard reportedly has better relations with the KNPP than Vice Chair Tel Neh.

Mawsaki Company is managed by Tun Kyaw, commander of the KNLPF, which in 2009 transformed into a Border Guard Force. Mawsaki is the name of a village under KNLPF control. Tun Kyaw owns several other companies as well as a hotel in Loikaw. Mawsaki Company gained a high profile through its association with the Myanmar actor Lwin Moe and Australian firm Eumeralla Resources, the latter of which owns 70 per cent of Mawsaki Company. According to a statement by the company: “The proposed lease is in an established primary tin and tungsten producing area of Myanmar. Kayah State is the home of the former British primary Tin and Tungsten mine ‘Mawchi Mine’ in Bawlake which was historically considered a significant source of Tungsten throughout Asia. Based on historical data and geological mapping, EUM believes this concession has the potential for a primary tin and tungsten discovery.”⁶¹ The company applied for a license to survey 400 km² across Kayah and Karen States in July 2013. It received Kayah State government approval but, after continuous delays in receiving union level approval from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment Conservation, Eumeralla Resources reportedly pulled out in April 2017.⁶²

Kayah Htar Ni Company is owned and run by a KNPP committee with the claimed purpose of funding the organisation rather than individuals. It began operating in Mawchi following the 2012 ceasefire and is currently managed by Daniel Reh, a former member of the CSO Karenni Evergreen.

Infrastructure

Infrastructure development has, until now, been a less contentious outcome of the ceasefires and economic transition in Kayah State. Roads and electricity supply have been a central feature of the development policies of both the Thein Sein and NLD governments so far. Progress in these areas has long been badly needed. Certainly, the last five years have witnessed improved movement, communication and access to markets and services for a growing number of communities across the state.

There remain, however, concerns over government planning, policy implementation and the lack of rights for citizens. Infrastructure alone does not address the political marginalisation of Kayah State and the Karenni peoples. For many communities, it is a case of “too little, too late”. Good intentions will not compensate for decades of what is perceived as “targeted under-

development”. As a tour guide in Demoso expressed: “They will come to ask you: you have electricity, are you happy? No, we are not happy, just a little bit less angry. We have electricity just two years ago, but there has been a hydropower plant in Lawpita for fifty years.”⁶³

The KNPP is also very sensitive to the extension of the government’s presence in areas under their influence, especially the building of roads that improve Tatmadaw access. Security apprehensions will continue until there is permanent peace. So far, the KNPP has blocked road construction in a number of strategic areas, notably between Shadaw and Ywarthit. But it has also allowed other initiatives to go ahead, including the Japanese-funded road-upgrading project from Taunggoo via Mawchi to Loikaw. KNPP officials generally say that their response to government road and electricity proposals is to say “we want it everywhere”, but they are sceptical that the government can deliver.⁶⁴

Upgrading of the road from Loikaw to Taunggoo (TK)





The most significant reduction in journey time to date has been north to south across the state from Loikaw to the Thai border in Mese Township. This is due to road-upgrading and the construction of a bridge across the Thanlwin River at Hpasawng, which opened in July 2015. If peace develops, this has the potential to bring long-divided communities together socially and economically. Such communication can provide a boost to locally-based skills and enterprises. The Ministry of Construction also wants to build a second bridge over the Thanlwin in Shadaw Township, and there have been recent negotiations between the government, Tatmadaw and KNPP on this issue.

Also problematic is the process by which government projects are decided and implemented. There has been little progress in terms of transparency or addressing risks that create land disputes so far. In some cases, armed groups have been able to profit. For example, the business company of the KNPDP has been accused of using construction contracts as a justification to clear areas for logging. Meanwhile the number of outside companies winning contracts has sparked complaints that they often bring in an outside workforce, are profiting from the ceasefire, and forcing change in society while local

communities are left behind. According to Gay Nay Paw from the KSWDC:

“Many Burmese are coming to Bawlakhe, coming with the military, also to Lawpita, and bring their families. Chinese are also coming and many town houses belong to them. Some migrants came for projects, like road construction. But when the project is finished, these Burmese do not go back. Labour salary is high here compared to central Myanmar. Companies call labourers from outside Kayah State.”⁶⁵

Such a lack of clarity and consultation are regarded threatening to local communities and raise the risk of ceasefire breakdown. During the past six years, such issues have already fuelled a return to conflict in Myanmar’s northeast (see Chapter 3). In the case of Kayah State, a particular focus of controversy has been the Pa Kyal Taung Thone Lone cement factory in Loikaw. The KNPP and local CSOs have been jointly protesting together against this project as a violation of the ceasefire. The Square Power Group (SPG) Company Limited was granted a license for a 4,000-ton cement factory by the Myanmar Investment Commission in November 2011. It received a prior license to operate a limestone quarry in the area

in 2008 from the then Ministry of Mines. It appears that the company, partnered with Shwe Kantarawaddy, a local company owned by KNPLF commander Tun Kyaw, then attempted to move forward with these projects following the KNPP's 2012 ceasefire. But explained Khu Nye Reh, the KNPP's liaison officer in Loikaw:

“According to the agreement between the KNPP and the government, such big projects are supposed to be suspended as long as the two parties have not reached an agreement in the political dialogue. Another point in the agreement is to negotiate with us before carrying out regional development tasks.”⁶⁶

In a more hopeful sign of change, officials of the Kayah State government have recently met with the KNPP and local CSOs to hear criticisms and agree to conduct the project transparently. According to the Kantarawaddy Times, the chief minister said that “public opinion will be collected again and the project will be revealed to the public. It will only be built if the public agrees to it.”⁶⁷ In defence of the factory, the operations director of the Square Power Group claimed that the project would help the state and the country to develop. But he also said that “the State government will only allow us when it is agreed to by the public.”⁶⁸

Despite these promises, the company has already been allocated 98 acres of land to build the factory on and 292 acres of land to carry out rock quarrying. Farmers who were asked to relocate to make way for the project were reportedly granted compensation in December 2013. But it is still not clear how this process took place. Local CSOs and political parties have therefore issued another statement repeating objections to the factory on the grounds that the SPG has failed to conduct adequate environmental and social impact assessments.⁶⁹

In consequence, the cement factory has become an important test-case in public opinion in Kayah State today. The fact that the KNPP, political parties and CSOs can engage the government, protest publicly, make

their voices heard and potentially trigger a reassessment suggests that the space for public debate and negotiation is improving. Potentially, this marks an important step forward. There are many other projects initiated under previous governments across the country that were never subject to local consultation or legitimate processes of approval. Rather, land grabbing, community displacement and other negative consequences were too often the case.

During the past two years, however, concerns have been growing that the NLD leadership shows little interest in engaging CSOs themselves in discussion about development issues that concern their lives. Following its election victory, the new government appears to see itself as the legitimate representative of the community and thus there is no need to engage with civil society organisations. As with the hydropower, timber and mining industries, the question remains: will planning reform and consultation with local communities really take place?

Opium Cultivation

Opium cultivation in Myanmar is strongly linked with poverty and conflict. For many decades, the country has been the second largest opium producer in the world after Afghanistan. Until the mid-2000s, the main poppy growing areas were the Wa and Kokang regions in northern Shan State. Since this time, the main cultivation areas have moved to southern Shan State. This includes Pekon Township, where many Kayan farmers have grown poppy to sustain their livelihoods. In recent years, the lack of peace and development has also contributed to the spread of opium cultivation in Kayah State.

Traditionally, Kayah State did not have many opium fields. But local experts say that poppy cultivation increased following a drought in 1997 that caused great stress for local farmers. Explained Khun Myint Naing from Metta Development Foundation:

“Because of this, farmers sold their animals and other assets, others went to

Thailand to find work, and some people moved to work as day labourers on poppy farms in Shan State to earn a living. Their livelihood changed because of this drought. Those farmers who went to the poppy fields learned how to grow opium, and when they came back to their village they spread the knowledge. At the same time, those who invested in this business followed them, and offered credit for those who would grow opium.”⁷⁰

Opium cultivation was then observed to further increase in Kayah State, but still remains relatively small at around 500 hectares. This represents less than 10 per cent of total cultivation nationwide.⁷¹ Opium cultivation in Kayah State currently takes place in Loikaw, Demoso and Hpruso Townships. “This is close to Pekon Township, where they grow opium already for 30–40 years,” said Khun Myint Naing.⁷²

Opium-growing communities in Kayah State stress that they grow opium as a cash crop to address food shortages, and because it is hard to grow other crops. “We grow opium to support our living; it is our main source of income,” said a Kayah poppy farmer at a concerned forum. “We have no other work to get enough income besides growing opium. Other crops could not be grown in our land and climate.”⁷³ Another Kayah poppy-grower explained that opium also has other uses: “Opium is used to treat health problems such as diarrhoea and dysentery. It is also used for animals to make them fat. And it is also used for protection of sickness in buffalo, cows, pigs and chickens. Hunters use it for protection against dangerous animals. It is also used as an antidote for insect bites and some snake bites.”⁷⁴

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) also agrees that opium cultivation is associated with such factors as difficult living conditions, disease, household debt and poor accessibility to markets.⁷⁵ According to the UN agency, opium-growing villages usually have fewer alternative sources of income and receive less external agricultural assistance than non-opium growing villages. Indeed many poppy-growing farmers seem to be “primarily

covering subsistence needs with poppy income.”⁷⁶ Khun Myint Naing from Metta Development Foundation confirms this picture: “The livelihood of farmers who grow opium is not good, and is still not developed, even if they grow opium. Some of them have more debts now. The farmers are poor in health and education, and the political and business people abuse them for their own profit.”⁷⁷

Myanmar has very strict drug laws, and opium cultivation is punishable with imprisonment of up to ten years.⁷⁸ While few farmers in Kayah State have been arrested, the government carries out the eradication of poppy fields and uses the law as a threat to extort money from local communities. According to a local Kayah farmer: “Opium farmers were threatened by notification letters warning them not to grow opium, as their fields would be destroyed and eradicated. Some were told to sign an agreement not to grow opium. However, often this was not implemented, and farmers were asked to pay bribes and unofficial taxation.”⁷⁹

The KNPP also says that it has taken action against drug traffickers. After the KNPP arrested several drug dealers in Demoso Township, there was a disagreement with the state government. “They told us do not get involved in this, just inform who it is and give us evidence,” said the KNPP spokesperson Khu Nye Reh. “But we worry that if we do this, they might lie and create misunderstanding. For us it is very difficult to cooperate with the government to reduce the drug problem. They just want us to do awareness activities.”⁸⁰

Complicating the difficulties in making progress, there are many links between drugs and conflict. As elsewhere in Myanmar, some of the armed groups in Kayah State are also involved in the drug trade. A 2016 statement by the Myanmar Opium Farmers’ Forum put the issue into sharp focus: “We have to pay opium tax to many armed groups, government officials and the Myanmar army. Some armed groups are involved in the drugs trade. This is the ‘golden era’ for the militia groups. They have the mandate from the Myanmar army to trade and produce drugs. Many drug dealers have arms and are linked to armed groups.”⁸¹

The next steps in addressing the local drug problem are very unclear. Nationwide peace has yet to be achieved. In other parts of the country, ceasefires in the past have not in themselves resulted in a reduction in drug production.⁸² Very few development programmes to address the needs of poppy growing communities have been implemented. But Kayah State farmers are certain about what they need after decades of conflict and marginalisation: peace and political reforms that genuinely guarantee equal rights to the local peoples. As the Myanmar Opium Farmers' Forum warned:

“Peace is very important for us. Many of us live in areas affected by conflict. In these areas it is very difficult to grow other crops. Our regions are very undeveloped and lack basic government services. We want to be treated as equal citizens. As long as there is no equality, there will be no peace in the country. And as long as there is no peace, there will be no development.”⁸³

Tourism

After decades of being a forbidden area for foreigners, the KNPP's 2012 ceasefire has opened up the possibility for tourism in Kayah State. According to Loikaw's Department of Hotels and Tourism, there were 30,000 local visitors and more than 9,000 foreign tourists in 2017.⁸⁴ Challenges of infrastructure, capacity, access and landmine contamination remain serious limitations in many areas. But although hesitant about outsiders, the local population people can see the potential benefits. “Tourism is opening,” said a local representative working for an international aid organisation. “The need for responsible tourism is big, as we do not want to change our social values.”⁸⁵ During the past few years, there has been new investment in hotels and restaurants. But the extent to which local people benefit from tourist business, such as the high-end Kayah Resort built by the Myanmar actor Lwin Moe, is so far limited.

Kayan woman playing guitar at special village for tourists (TK)



In the development of tourism and trade, there is a growing official link between Loikaw and Mae Hong Son in Thailand. The two places became sister cities on 9 March 2017 and signed a Memorandum of Understanding, agreeing to work together to improve agriculture and bilateral trade.⁸⁶ While the local populations have been connected for years through the Karenni refugee camps on the border and relations with ethnic armed groups, this agreement marks a new stage in international cooperation.

Governments on both sides are eager to move forward quickly, most immediately by the opening up of Border Point 13 as a “border trade zone”.⁸⁷ The location was chosen for its relative ease of access through Kayah State and also its proximity to the Thai town of Mae Hong Son. Although Border Points 9 and 10 in Shadaw Township are closer to Mae Hong Son town, the infrastructure is worse and the area remains sensitive for the KNPP. In contrast, the road to the border in Mese Township was improved following the KNPLF’s 1994 ceasefire. The new bridge over the Thanlwin at Hpasawng has also quickened connections north towards Loikaw, making Border Point 13 the best location for the connection. The KNPP reportedly agreed to the location during 2012 ceasefire negotiations. The KNPP Kayah Htar Ni Company has since built part of the upgraded road and the customs inspection centre. For the moment, however, Border Point 14 in KNPLF–Border Guard Force territory remains the busiest border–crossing. The KNPLF remains indignant that this location was not selected for the opening and continues to lobby for it. Border Point 14 also connects more directly with the northern Thai city of Chiang Mai rather than the provincial town of Mae Hong Son.

Since colonial days, both Mae Hong Son Province and Kayah State have been regarded as remote outposts in the two countries. Administrative officials in the two territories therefore see the benefit in developing tourism and trade to compete with more prosperous neighbours in adjoining states and provinces. The KNPP and other nationality parties generally support this view. The Thai government is currently trying to address conservation requirements but road upgrades

and facilities are expected to be ready during 2018, and this could open the way for more rapid progress. As an apparent precursor, on Kayah State Day on 15 January this year the border gate was temporarily opened to allow a tour caravan from the Thai side to cross.⁸⁸

Thai officials see tourism linking Kayah State with Mae Hong Son and Chiang Mai as more valuable than trade. Therefore, they want the crossing to be open to third–country nationals rather than only Thai and Myanmar citizens. The Myanmar government is hesitant to do so, in the short–term at least, and would prefer a border trade zone.⁸⁹ Current trade at the border posts in Kayah State is mostly focused around Myanmar’s export of cows and buffaloes and the import of food and drinks.⁹⁰ But as relationships look set to increase, some local leaders have questioned whether opening border trade further will really help or hinder Myanmar farmers. “Can Myanmar farmers compete in corn and rice?”, asked Khun Bedu of the Kayan National Party.⁹¹

For tourism, the outcome is likely to depend on the socio–economic approach. Thai officials have seen benefits from tourism in remote parts of their country and believe that it can be the same for Kayah State. “If we have a good plan, everyone can benefit,” said the diplomat Jatuchatra Chomma.⁹² Somewhat remarkably, for the past three decades one of the best–known tourist attractions in northern Thailand has been “long–necked” women of Kayan ethnicity. They either came from refugee camps or were brought across the Kayah State border for tourism (see Chapter 7, box: “Kayan Territory and Identity”). Few of the tourists will have been aware of their origins nor the circumstances of conflict and displacement by which these women arrived in a neighbouring country. Some of them were trafficked.⁹³

At present, there are efforts in Kayah State to help local people gain from tourism. A Community Based Tourism initiative, run by the International Trade Centre, has tried to work with local communities to design a programme that allows them to make a living from tourism in a way that is respectful and empowering. To do this, it has tried to establish a network of community–run projects celebrating local customs, foods and

traditional artisanal skills. Targeted areas include Kayan villages in Pan Pet village tract in Demoso Township where some of the women still wear brass neck rings that have been objectified around the world for tourism promotion.

The Community Based Tourism project has had some success, increasing tourism to the area and income for local members involved. But not all participants have been satisfied and reports of disagreement within communities have arisen. This suggests that models to promote “inclusive income” for local peoples need to be improved. A new restaurant being opened on the way to Pan Pet village tract by the KNPLF-Border Guard Force commander Tun Kyaw also highlights the difficulty in avoiding elite capture of economic development. The greater arrival of tourists has also increased local resentment at the ways

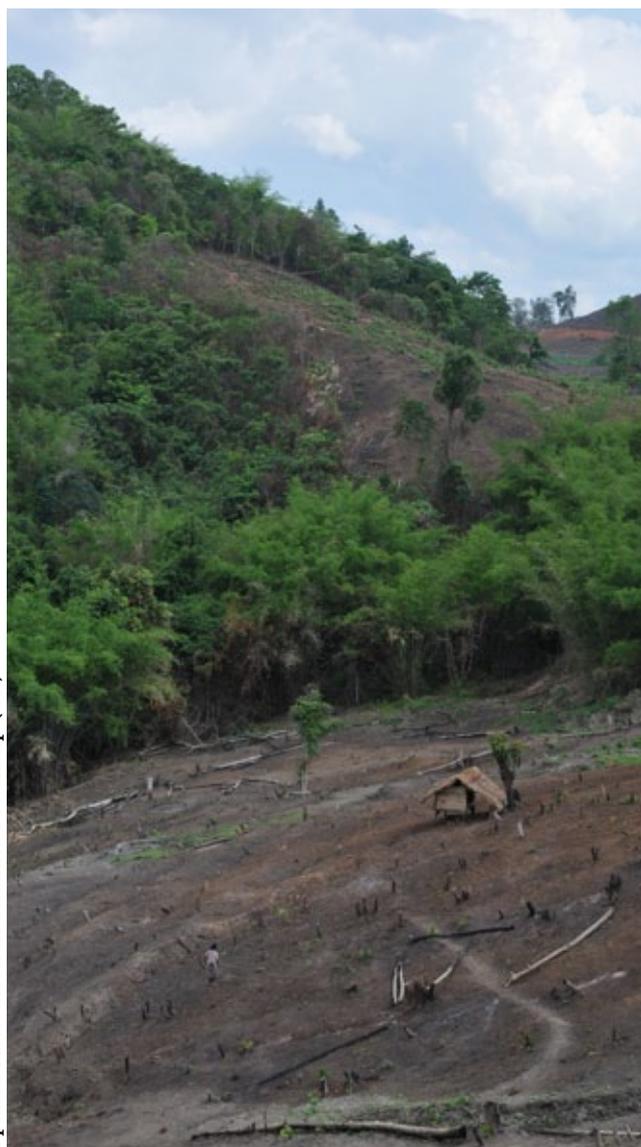
in which Kayan women have been used and portrayed in the tourism industry. Mu Gloria, a Kayan community leader, reflected: “Even in Thailand at airports, they show images of Kayan people, but they picture us like a human zoo. This is very pitiful for Kayan people.”⁹⁴

Tourism has the potential to become an important industry in Kayah State in the future. On the crossroads between Myanmar and Thailand, it remains a land of great promise, attraction and beauty. But as unbridled tourism elsewhere in the world has shown, it is also vital that local peoples benefit from tourist development rather than face ever greater marginalisation in their own lands. As the 2002 Cape Town Declaration on Responsible Tourism warned, responsible tourism should minimise “negative economic, environmental, and social impacts”, generate “economic benefits for local people”, involve local communities “in decisions that affect their lives”, and contribute to “the conservation of natural and cultural heritage”.⁹⁵

International Aid

For the Karenni peoples, another notable feature of the KNPP ceasefire has been the striking increase in international development projects in Kayah State. “Prior to the ceasefire, there were a lot of restrictions on development workers, and international NGOs could only operate in and nearby Loikaw,” said Father Albino from the Karuna Myanmar Social Services in Loikaw. “But now they can go almost everywhere.”⁹⁶

During the past six years, funding for international and local organisations in government-controlled areas has increased dramatically, moving away from aid agencies working in the refugee camps. The Myanmar Information Management Unit currently lists 25 international non-governmental organisations, 12 national NGOs, 7 UN or international organisations, 3 Red Cross, 4 donor and 12 border-based organisations working in Kayah State – a total of 63 organisations.⁹⁷ This includes 21 organisations working on 31 different health projects, which has become the most crowded sector.



Upland cultivation in Shadaw Township (TK)

In general, the arrival of international agencies has been appreciated on the ground. The social and economic needs among the Karenni peoples are great, and the presence of international witnesses can be seen as protection against the worst human rights abuses and arbitrary misrule.

The sudden influx of INGOs, however, has also brought negative consequences in their wake. As in other parts of the country, local organisations complain that international agencies often do not properly coordinate with them, have a tendency to follow their own priorities rather than those of local communities, and can sometimes undermine the capacity of local NGOs instead of supporting them. “So many INGOs are coming now,” said a member of the local Kay Htoe Boe organisation. “But some of them are not really interested in community development; they just focus on the sustainability of their

own organisation.”⁹⁸ Representatives of local CSOs claim that there is also a lack of coordination between international organisations themselves, with activities often overlapping in the same fields.

Local CSOs, political parties and KNPP representatives stress that sustainability and local awareness are the most important aspect of development activities. There is a strong perception that international aid agencies and NGOs arrive in Kayah State with a fixed work plan that is not adapted to the political context and without recognising the existing work already being carried out by local organisations. They thus risk undermining self-reliance. According to Ah Mu Htoo of Karenni Evergreen: “International NGOs don’t recognise work already done. Karenni State is small and needs the right approach. We don’t want them to create dependency from handing out per diems.”⁹⁹

Landscape in Demoso Township (OR)



Aside from the quality of projects, Karenni community organisations and politicians are also concerned that projects risk enforcing a centralised government agenda, both in terms of policy and area coverage. As Sai Naing Naing Htwe of the Kayah State Democratic Party explained: “International development projects are not suitable for people because they are controlled from Nay Pyi Taw. We need to build political institutions to help democratise decision-making.”¹⁰⁰ The KCSN has also expressed concerns that internationally-backed resettlement programmes could put the security of returning peoples at risk by locating them in areas that are under Tatmadaw control.¹⁰¹

Meanwhile Kayan organisations are also frustrated that INGOs reinforce government state boundaries and do not include Kayan-inhabited areas beyond the official border in their Kayah State projects. According to U Saw Lwin of the ceasefire Kayan New Land Party: “Many INGOs arrive but are not concerned with the Kayan region. They should find a new way. Now INGOs only go to central areas.”¹⁰² Kun Soe of the Kayan New Generation Youth has no doubt that greater inter-action would be possible if they would “connect to local CSOs”.¹⁰³

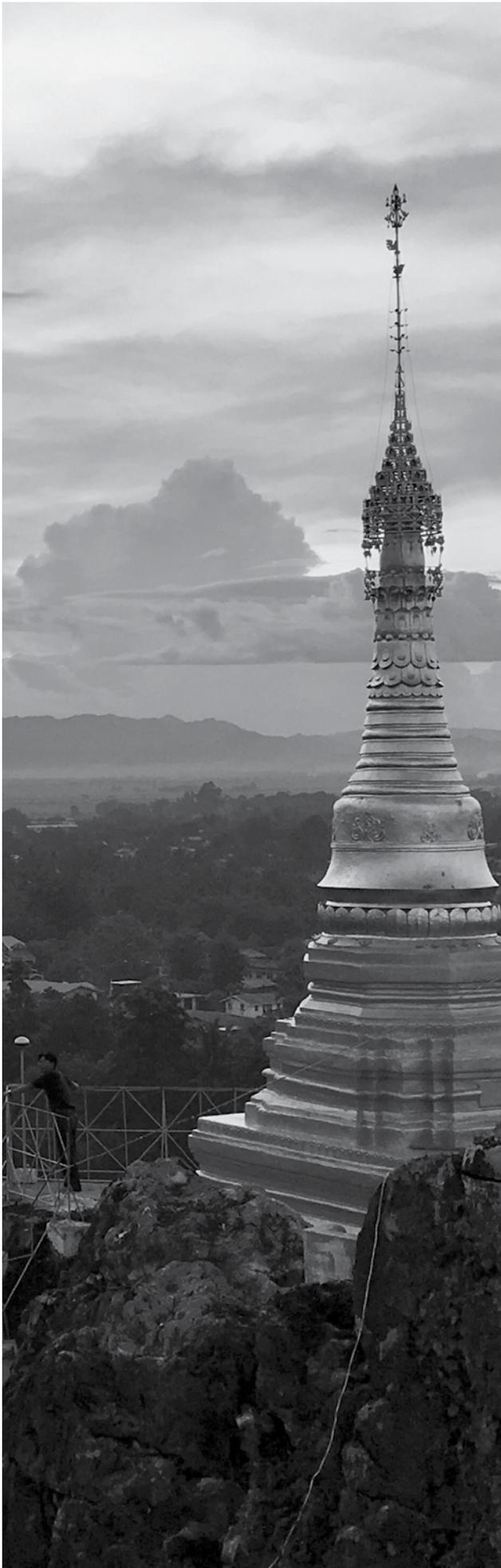
These challenges have done little to assuage concerns among Karenni leaders that development initiatives can undermine local ownership and progress towards a genuine political settlement. The aid dilemmas, however, in Kayah State are not unique. In recent years, there has been much greater recognition around the world of the need for international aid organisations to understand the local context of countries that they are working in. This is essential in situations of conflict, before embarking on programmes that may not be neutral but actually deepen divisions in politics and society rather than heal them.¹⁰⁴ Aid in itself does not solve conflict. Indeed, it can result in the paradox in many conflict-divided countries of “aid rich, people poor”, often furthering the centralisation rather than reform of government.

For these reasons, as in other conflict-divided countries, of utmost importance is promotion

and adherence by international agencies to the principles of “do no harm” and “conflict sensitivity”.¹⁰⁵ Aid interventions must bring people together and facilitate dialogue – not undermine peace initiatives and create competition.¹⁰⁶ At the same time, it is vital that peace and development programmes take account of service delivery and governance structures already established by local organisations. They should not simply focus on strengthening the central state, which may have a very different set of political priorities and socio-economic agendas.¹⁰⁷ Indeed the activities of the central state may well be an integral element responsible for impoverishment and the lack of service provision, past and present, in different parts of the country.

In such situations of conflict or division, many international agencies have pledged to promote the four humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence.¹⁰⁸ It is crucial that these approaches are not simply lip-service or an afterthought, but are a central part of the design and implementation of interventions from the outset. There is little excuse for not beginning in this manner. If unaddressed, it will be much harder to change the local narrative around international aid organisations as a result.

In the coming years, it is vital that international aid and development programmes in Kayah State reach to the most needy and vulnerable people, supporting the resolution of crises that have always been political at root. Since civil war started at Myanmar’s independence in 1948, the cycles of conflict have long needed to be broken.



9. Conclusions

Kayah State today stands at a critical crossroads. Since the 2012 ceasefire between the KNPP and Thein Sein government, the territory and its peoples have experienced the longest period of hopes for political reform and peace since the country's independence from Great Britain in 1948. After decades of conflict and division, this is a welcome relief. It provides the first opportunity in many decades for communities to seek a better future by working together in common cause.

Enormous challenges still remain. It is essential not to under-estimate the scale of marginalisation and impoverishment among local peoples that must be addressed. Meaningful steps must still be taken to resolve the very deep imbalances in representation in national politics, economic affairs and public life that have long underpinned conflict and state failure in the country.

A land of undoubted potential, Kayah State has not become one of the poorest territories in one of the poorest countries in Asia without political reason. Discrimination, dislocation, militarisation, resource exploitation and neglect have all become closely inter-linked during the decades of conflict, political impasse and unrepresentative government. The outcome is a landscape of alienation and disadvantage in which many local peoples feel that they have become second-class citizens in their own lands. The promises of autonomy and equal union at Myanmar's independence in 1948 appear long forgotten today.

Many recommendations can be made for safeguards and roadmaps to support long-needed change. These include the establishment of a system of inclusive government that genuinely represents the Karenni peoples and their interests; guaranteed protections of the right to life, the right to land, the right to health and the right to education; a comprehensive programme of demilitarisation that includes the Tatmadaw and all armed organisations in the state; inclusive discussion and settlement on questions of nationality identity and whether, in line with the 1947 constitution,

“Karenni State” should return to its original name and also consider the issue of Kayan representation; consultative participation in decision-making by local communities in economic projects that have impact on their lives; a moratorium on mining, logging, hydropower and other intrusive business or development schemes until political reforms are agreed; conflict sensitivity by international agencies and adherence to the humanitarian principles of “do no harm”; and the return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their homes in voluntary conditions that ensure safety and dignity. Peace and representative inclusion of the Karenni peoples in decision-making are imperative if trust is to be built and essential reforms achieved.

Under military governments after 1962, discussion – or even acknowledgement – of many of these issues was previously taboo. But during the past six years, the language of progressive change has tentatively increased. This has been fostered in Kayah State by the KNPP ceasefire and steps towards democratisation. Leaders of the different sides in the current impasse – the National League for Democracy, Tatmadaw, Karenni National Progressive Party and other nationality parties – have all said that they are committed to seeking “federal” solutions to the country’s political challenges. Since the outbreak of conflict in 1948, such an alignment in stated goals is unprecedented. There is a general consensus that, based upon these principles, just resolutions could be found if all parties are truly willing, able and committed.

The difficulty for the Karenni peoples is that, just as in the other borderlands, the political impasse in Kayah State cannot be separated from the continuing crises within the country at large. Even after the NLD’s advent to government in 2016, inclusive political dialogue has not started and constitutional reforms are not on the drawing boards. There has been no breakthrough moment of peace and reform change, whether through the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement of President Thein Sein or the 21st Panglong Conference initiated by State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi.

In the meantime, Kayah State very much remains an example of the twin stasis of ethnic conflict and political deadlock that still exists in many other parts of the country. Kayah State may be the country’s smallest ethnic state and also have historic claims to independence. But there is little that is unique about the socio-political challenges within the territory.

The situation is not without hope. In recent years, the start of political liberalisation, the KNPP ceasefire, revival of civil society organisations and spread of inter-community dialogue have all provided the potential for new avenues to achieving national peace and reform. These are opportunities that the Karenni peoples have long wanted. Most recently, expectations reached a peak with the initiation of the 21st Century Panglong Conference in August 2016. But from that highpoint, optimism has begun to decline. Unsettling shadows have spread across the country. These include continued militarisation, delays in peace negotiations, the slow pace of reform, the increase of conflict in the Kachin, Rakhine and Shan States, restrictions on the independent media and peaceful assembly, and accelerating resource exploitation in which local peoples once again feel left behind.

In particular, Buddhist-Muslim tensions and most recently the disproportionate military crackdown and violence in northern Rakhine State, and the subsequent outpouring of Rohingya refugees into Bangladesh, have shocked international opinion and confidence about the political direction of Myanmar. In April 2018, similar concerns were expressed about the escalation in conflict in Kachin State, with the Tatmadaw stepping up military operations. There were also worries about the stability of ceasefires on the Karen and Shan State borders with Kayah State.

In the run-up to the next general election in 2020, broader ceasefire dialogue is still expected under the present NLD government as both the NCA and 21st Panglong Conference continue to make their uncertain ways. But after decades of conflict and failed political initiatives, public frustrations are building.

In the case of Kayah State, ceasefires in one form or another have existed since the mid-1990s. But the political landscape remains as militarised and fragmented as ever. For this reason, many nationality organisations are starting to question whether the ceasefire initiatives of the past three decades are really meant to bring political inclusion and national reconciliation. They feel that these are rather a “war or peace” stratagem by the country’s Tatmadaw leaders to increase central state control. Both tactics are regarded different sides of the same coin.

In Kayah State, two perceptions are fuelling this concern. First, the feeling is growing that the historic Karenni State has twice been

colonised: first by the British and, now, by the accelerating expansion of a Bamar-dominated state into the territory even before political reforms have been agreed. And second, while the local peoples are waiting, neither the NLD government nor Tatmadaw appear urgent, or even serious, about moving on to inclusive negotiations about constitutional reform. Since the outbreak of conflict in 1948, such “political dialogue” has been considered the key to achieving sustainable peace and national reform.

Disillusion with the contemporary peace process has therefore been deepening during the past year. Despite the primacy of ethnic peace in government publicity, both the

Thanlwin River at Hpasawng Township (OR)



Tatmadaw and NLD appear to have been approaching the challenge in ad hoc ways that do not support national inclusion. Rising Buddhist nationalism among the Bamar-majority population has also revived long-standing fears of “Burmanisation” among non-Bamar peoples.

Critics argue that Tatmadaw leaders only used negotiations with ethnic armed organisations as a means to gain domestic and international legitimacy during the uncertain times after President Thein Sein assumed office. Following the 2016 change in government, the Tatmadaw has reverted to security-first tactics in many parts of the country. Defence of the military-authored 2008 constitution is its primary goal.

Similarly, having won the 2015 general election by a landslide, NLD leaders also do not appear to see any need to negotiate with other parties – whether armed, electoral or civil society. They believe that the election result has won them national legitimacy. Accommodation with the Tatmadaw’s objectives rather than political reform has often seemed to be the main concern of the NLD leadership after the party assumed office.

Ethnic nationality forces are also not blameless. As so often in the country’s recent past, they are not united. Whether as NCA signatories, members of the United Nationalities Federal Council or Federal Political Negotiation and Consultative Committee, they are yet to achieve a common platform or negotiating position that brings all parties together. In their defence, they argue that the present peace process has become so complicated, with the government and Tatmadaw treating different parties differently, that it is difficult to unite around or even understand what the next steps forward might be. In consequence, the nationality voice has become more fragmented. The question remains whether new peace initiatives and ethnic electoral parties will address this imbalance before the next general election.

Government supporters, and some international actors, argue that the present

challenges are essentially procedural issues. They say that, with time and effective strategies, these can be addressed. They also see development as a solution for conflict and political problems. However, theories and promises are little consolation to marginalised and long-suffering communities who continue to experience deprivation in the conflict-zones. Their demands are for political rights and reforms today, not at some uncertain time in the future in some of the longest-running internal conflicts in the modern world.

International agencies also need to be cautious about the social and political context. The present opportunities for progressive change are not in doubt and are to be supported. But there is also a thin line between complicity and engagement in countries in conflict. The past six years have seen the greatest increase in foreign aid and international investment since independence in 1948. But they have also witnessed the greatest upsurge in conflict and displacement in several decades. In many nationality communities, talk of the “peace process” sounds very hollow indeed.

If Myanmar is ever to find peace, it is essential that endeavours towards peace and reform deliver a political destination of liberty, hope and security that includes all peoples rather than another cycle of failure in the country’s long history of civil war. In pursuit of these goals, Kayah State should become a centrepiece for enlightened and inclusive change, ending the decades of ethnic conflict, political marginalisation and social-economic neglect.

Overview of Karenni Armed Organisations

Organisation	Background	Location	Status
<p>Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP)</p> <p>Leader: Abel Tweed</p> <p>Estimated strength: 700-800 soldiers</p>	<p>Formed in 1957</p> <p>Main ethnic armed organisation in Kayah State</p> <p>Member of pro-federal NDF alliance</p> <p>Founding member of UNFC</p>	<p>Strong presence in Shadaw, Hpruso and Hpasawng Townships</p> <p>Some presence in other townships</p> <p>Controls strategic Ta Khu mountain range running parallel to the Pawn River</p> <p>Strategic post at Nya Mu Kone mountain top near Thai border in southeast of Shadaw Township (north of BP10)</p>	<p>Ceasefire with SLORC government during March 1995</p> <p>Ceasefire breakdown in May 1995</p> <p>Bilateral ceasefire with Thein Sein government in March 2012</p> <p>Member of UNFC</p> <p>Non-signatory to NCA</p> <p>Attended first 21st Panglong Conference in August 2016 but refused to attend the second in May 2017</p> <p>Continuing to consider NCA and Panglong-21 processes</p>
<p>Karenni Nationalities Peoples' Liberation Front (KNPLF)</p> <p>Leader: U Tun Kyaw</p> <p>Estimated strength: 600 soldiers</p> <p>Locally also known as Kye Ni ("Red Star") or by its Burmese acronym KaLaLaTha</p>	<p>Formed in 1978</p> <p>Breakaway group from KNPP</p> <p>Formerly member of pro-China CPB alliance</p> <p>Allied with KNLP and SNPLO</p>	<p>Loi Nam Pha in northwest Demoso Township</p> <p>BGF 1004 at Hose near BP 14 in Mese Township</p> <p>BGF 1005 in Ywarthit sub township in Bawlakhe Township (south of BP 10)</p> <p>Areas in southeast Hpruso Township</p>	<p>Ceasefire with SLORC military government in 1994</p> <p>Granted Kayah State Special Region-2</p> <p>Attended National Convention in SPDC era</p> <p>Forced to transform into BGF 1004 and BGF 1005 in November 2009</p> <p>Some troops remain independent</p> <p>Not allowed to join NCA or Panglong-21 processes</p>
<p>Karenni National Democratic Party (KNDP)</p> <p>Leader: U Li Reh</p> <p>Estimated strength: 100 soldiers</p> <p>Locally known as Naga ("Dragon") Group</p>	<p>Formed in November 1995</p> <p>Breakaway group from KNPP</p>	<p>Daw Ta Ma Gyi village in eastern Demoso Township</p>	<p>Ceasefire in 1995</p> <p>Attended National Convention in SPDC era</p> <p>Transformed into pyithusit (militia) in November 2009</p> <p>Not allowed to join NCA or Panglong-21 processes</p>
<p>Karenni National Peace and Development Party (KNPDP)</p> <p>Leader: U De Mo</p> <p>Estimated strength: 50 soldiers</p> <p>Locally known as Kayaw Ni ("Red Kayaw")</p>	<p>Formed in 1999</p> <p>Breakaway group from KNPP</p> <p>Initially known as "KNPP Hoya"</p> <p>Most members are ethnic Kayaw</p>	<p>Hoya region in western Hpruso Township (adjacent to Thandaung Township in Karen State)</p>	<p>Ceasefire in 1999</p> <p>Attended National Convention in SPDC era</p> <p>Forced to transform into pyithusit (militia) in November 2009</p> <p>Not allowed to join NCA or Panglong-21 processes</p>

Organisation	Background	Location	Status
<p>Karenni National Solidarity Organisation (KNSO)</p> <p>Leader: U Richard</p> <p>Estimated strength: 50 soldiers</p> <p>Locally known as Kye Phyu (“White Star”)</p>	<p>Formed in 2002</p> <p>Breakaway group from KNPP</p> <p>Most members are ethnic Karen (Paku)</p> <p>Informal links with KNU</p>	<p>Khe Ma Phyu village tract in in Hpasawng Township and Mawchi region</p>	<p>Ceasefire in 2002</p> <p>Attended National Convention in SPDC era</p> <p>Forced to transform into pyithusit (militia) in November 2009</p> <p>Not allowed to join NCA or Panglong-21 processes</p>
<p>Kayan New Land Party (KNLP)</p> <p>Leader: U Than Soe Naing</p> <p>Estimated strength: 200 - 300 soldiers</p> <p>Locally known by its Burmese name Kayan Pyi Thit Party</p>	<p>Formed in 1964</p> <p>Initial member of NDF</p> <p>Formerly member of pro-China CPB alliance</p> <p>Allied with KNPLF and SNPLO</p> <p>Main Kayan-based ethnic armed organisation</p> <p>Most members are ethnic Kayan</p>	<p>Pekon Township in Shan State and northern Kayah State</p>	<p>Ceasefire with SLORC military government in 1994</p> <p>Granted Kayah State Special Region-3</p> <p>Attended National Convention in SPDC era</p> <p>Government claims KNLP transformed into pyithusit (militia) in November 2009</p> <p>KNLP says it has refused to accept militia or BGF status</p> <p>Observer at the UNFC and have attended some UNFC meetings</p> <p>Attended November 2015 UWSA summit</p> <p>Not allowed to join NCA or Panglong-21 processes</p>
<p>Kayan National Guard (KNG)</p> <p>Leader: U Htay Ko</p> <p>Estimated strength: 20-50 soldiers</p>	<p>Formed in 1992</p> <p>Break-away group from KNLP</p>	<p>Moebye Village Tract in Pekon Township, Shan State</p>	<p>Ceasefire with SLORC military government in 1992</p> <p>Granted Kayah State Special Region-1</p> <p>Attended National Convention in SPDC era</p> <p>Forced to transform into pyithusit (militia) in November 2009</p> <p>Not allowed to join NCA or Panglong-21 processes</p>

Notes

1. Introduction

1. In 1989 the then military government changed the official name from Burma to Myanmar. They are alternative forms for the same name in the Burmese language, but their use has become a politicised issue. Myanmar is mostly used within the country and in international diplomacy, but it is not always used in the English language abroad. For consistency, Myanmar will be used in this report. Bamar (or Burman) today usually refers to the majority ethnic group, while Burmese is still often used as a general adjective for the language and aspects of the peoples and country.

2. Ethnic Conflict and Changing Eras of Government

1. The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census Report (Volume 3-B) calculated the population of Kayah State at 286,627 (virtually equal male and female), but this did not include all internally-displaced persons and refugees. The census was also controversial because of its citizenship and ethnic designations, including “135 national races” that confuse or conflate identities. See e.g., Transnational Institute (TNI), “Ethnicity without Meaning, Data without Context: The 2014 Census, Identity and Citizenship in Burma/ Myanmar”, TNI-BCN Burma Policy Briefing No.13, February 2014; Mary Callahan, “Distorted, Dangerous Data? Lumyo in the 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census”, *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, Vol.32, No.2, July 2017, pp.452-478. To date, neither the ethnic statistics from the 2014 census nor an explanation for the designation of the “135 national races” have been published. See e.g., San Yamin Aung, “Still No Date for Release of Census Findings on Ethnic Populations”, *The Irrawaddy*, 21 February 2018. For contemporary Karenni identities, see Chapter 7, and box: “Karenni Ethnicity”.

2. F.K. Lehman, “Burma: Kayah Society as a Function of the Shan-Burman-Karen Context”, in J.H. Steward J. (ed.), *Contemporary Change in Traditional Societies* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1967), pp.1-104; Ronald Renard, “The Delineation of the Kayah State Frontiers with Thailand”, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol.XVIII, No.1, March 1987, pp.81-92; *Shan States and Karenni: List of Chiefs and Leading Families (Corrected up to 1939)* (Simla: Government of India Press, 1943).

3. In Shan and Karenni politics, there were various titles, with Sawbwa (“lord of the sky”) generally referring to hereditary rulers and Myosa to lesser princes.

4. The 1875 agreement between the “British and the Burmese Governments” guaranteed the independence of the “State of Western Karenni”

(Kantarawadi), but subsequently came to cover all the Karenni sub-states: “It is hereby agreed between the British and Burmese Governments that the State of Western Karenni shall remain separate and independent, and that no sovereignty or governing authority of any description shall be claimed or exercised over that State.” See, *Report of the Frontier Areas Committee of Enquiry* (Rangoon: Government Printing and Stationery, 1947), Chapter 1.5.

5. For an account of Karenni politics under British rule and after independence, see, Martin Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity* (London: Zed Books, 1991 & 1999), pp.42-3, 50-52 and passim.

6. See note 4.

7. Until the British “pacification”, local unrest also continued in the Karenni-Mongpai borderlands. During this time, Siam also made claims on eastern Karenni territory, which resurfaced during the Second World War when parts of the Shan and Karenni states were briefly annexed under Japanese occupation into Siam (from 1948 known as Thailand).

8. Smith, *Burma: Insurgency*, p.46.

9. *Ibid.*, pp.60-64.

10. For an account, see, H. Fecitt, “Raising the Karens-Force 136 parachute insertions into the Karen Hills, Burma, 1945”: <http://www.kaiserscross.com/304501/586001.html>

11. See, *Report of the Frontier Areas Committee of Enquiry*, Part II, Appendices, p.111. These decisions were reached following a mass meeting in Loikaw.

12. Two KNU members attended as observers but, given that the majority of the Karen population lived in Ministerial Burma, it was never resolved as to where Karen political demands could be effectively represented and addressed. For a recent analysis of the Panglong legacy, see, TNI, “Beyond Panglong: Myanmar’s National Peace and Reform Dilemma”, TNI Myanmar Policy Briefing No.21, September 2017.

13. Sao Wunna of Kantarawadi became head of Kayah State after independence while Saw (Sao) Shwe of Kyebogyi joined the armed opposition.

14. At the time, disagreements were often characterized as disputes between the nationalist leaders U Bee Tu Re (the Bawlakhe administrator, who was close to the KNU) and Thai Ba Han (the Mongpai administrator and an ethnic Kayan, who was close to the AFPFL leader U Nu). Both took part in the Karenni delegation to the 1947 Frontier Committee of Enquiry where it was proposed that Mongpai join with Kantarawadi, Kyebogyi and Bawlakhe as the “fourth” state in the reconstituted Karenni State. In recent decades, Baptist-Catholic differences have declined in importance. Among Kayahs, Baptists form the majority. See also, Chapter 7, box: “Kayan Territory and Identity”.

15. “The Constitution of the Union of Burma” (Rangoon: Govt. Printing and Stationery, 1947).

16. For a recent analysis of the Shan and Karenni States through the prism of Sawbwa histories, see, Sao Sanda Simms, *Great Lords of the Sky: Burma's Shan Aristocracy* (Asian Highlands Perspectives, 2017).
17. See e.g., TNI, "Beyond Panglong", pp.4-6.
18. Some KMT units also made their way into Karenni, Karen and Mon territories. For an account, see, Richard Gibson with Wenhua Chen, *The Secret Army* (Singapore: John Wiley & Sons, 2011), pp.121-9.
19. The historian Hugh Tinker wrote: "A racial distinction as between the Karens and the Red Karens or Kayahs has now been invented." Hugh Tinker, *The Union of Burma: A Study of the First Years of Independence* (Oxford University Press, 1957), p.75.
20. In the early years of conflict, there were often close connections between the KNU, Karenni and Pa-O nationalist forces. At the time, KNU forces were often known by their local militia name as the Karen National Defence Organisation.
21. In recent years, "Kayin" has become more used in official terminology, but Karen remains the most common term in the English language and political discussion.
22. Construction did not start moving forward until 1954; see e.g., "Balu Chaung Hydroelectric Power Generation Project", Japan Society of Civil Engineers, 2014.
23. Simms, *Great Lords of the Sky*, p.369.
24. The NDF members were the CPB, New Mon State Party (NMSPP), Chin National Vanguard Party (CNVP) and the Karen National United Party (KNUP) faction of the KNU.
25. See e.g., TNI, "Beyond Panglong", pp.7-9; Sai Wansai, "Jump-starting the stalled peace process: Is Revitalization of the 1961 Federal Amendment Proposal the Way to Go?", Transnational Institute Commentary, 4 May 2017.
26. *The Times*, 3 March 1962.
27. Smith, *Burma: Insurgency*, pp.196-7.
28. *Ibid.*, pp.206-13.
29. See note 19.
30. Smith, *Burma: Insurgency*, pp.206-13. The only exception was a breakaway KNU faction, led by Saw Hunter Thahmwe, which agreed a formal ceasefire with the government in 1964.
31. *Ibid.*, pp.258-62.
32. *Ibid.*, pp.218, 353-4; Ye Mon, "Kayan summon fallen warriors to mausoleum", Myanmar Times, 23 June 2014.
33. For a discussion, see, Tadayuki Kubo, "Karenni and Kayah: The Nature of Burma's Ethnic Problem over Two Names and the Path to Resolution", Asia Peacebuilding Initiatives, 5 February 2014.
34. Other alliances included the Nationalities Liberation Alliance (1960-63), Nationalities United Front (1967-75) and Revolutionary Nationalities Alliance (1973-75). Like the NDF, the latter two included the KNLP. See, Smith, *Burma: Insurgency*, Chart 2 and *passim*.
35. Unlike the KNU, the KNPP did not join the National United Liberation Front (1970-74) with the PDP, U Nu and several of his former government colleagues.
36. Smith, *Burma: Insurgency*, pp.344-7.
37. *Ibid.*, p.347.
38. *Ibid.*
39. *Ibid.*, p.381.
40. For an account of these events and Kayan culture and history more generally, see, Pascal Khoo Thwe, *From the Land of the Green Ghosts* (London: Flamingo, 2003), pp.168-267, and *passim*.
41. Khun Marko Ban, MP for Pekon Township, "Personal Statement Regarding the SLORC's National Convention", Shan State, 5 April 1993. For a contemporary description by Khun Marko Ban, see, "Human Rights in Northern Karenni (Kayah State)", Karen Human Rights Group, 10 April 1994.
42. *Ibid.*; V. Bamforth, S. Lanjouw & G. Mortimer, "Conflict and Displacement in Karenni: The Need for Considered Approaches", Burma Ethnic Research Group, May 2000, pp.33-4.
43. *Working People's Daily*, 8 May 1992.
44. *Bangkok Post*, 14 October 1992.
45. Yan Nyein Aye, *Endeavours of the Myanmar Armed Forces Government for National Reconsolidation* (Yangon: U Aung Zaw, 2000), pp.69-74.
46. For a report on the logging background, see, Bamforth, Lanjouw & Mortimer, "Conflict and Displacement", pp.40-2.
47. Khin Nyunt was arrested and deposed a year later as a result of an internal power struggle.
48. San Yamin Aung, "New National Defense and Security Council Formed", *The Irrawaddy*, 30 March 2016.
49. The reserved list in full: Bamar (5), Karen (5), Chin (3), Shan (3), Pa-O (2), Rakhine (2), Lisu (2), Akha, Intha, Kachin, Kayan, Lahu, Mon, Rawang (1). See also, Chapter 6, note 15.
50. TNI, "A Changing Ethnic Landscape: Analysis of Burma's 2010 Polls", TNI-BCN Burma Policy Briefing No.4, December 2010.
51. Carole Oudot & Matthieu Baudey, "Kayan party looks for unity amid election race", Myanmar Times, 6 November 2015.
52. See, TNI, "Burma's Ceasefires at Risk: Consequences of the Kokang Crisis for Peace and Democracy", Peace & Security Briefing No.1, September 2009, pp.6-7.
53. "Individuals and organizations in the nation that have different views from the government should not take account of disagreements", *New Light of Myanmar*, 18 August 2011.

54. TNI, "Ending Burma's Conflict Cycle? Prospects for Ethnic Peace", TNI Burma Policy Briefing No.8, February 2012.
55. Communication with representative of armed group attending talks with U Aung Min, November 2011.
56. Saw Yan Naing, "Govt Peace Delegation meets Ethnic Rebels in Thailand", The Irrawaddy, 6 February 2012.
57. See e.g., TNI, "Beyond Panglong", p.19.
58. "President Thein Sein's Speech at Chatham House (The Royal Institute of International Affairs)", London, 15 July 2013.
59. See e.g., TNI, "The Kachin Crisis: Peace Must Prevail", TNI-Burma Centrum Nederland, Burma Policy Briefing No.10, March 2013; Mandy Sadan (ed.), *War and Peace in the Borderlands of Myanmar: The Kachin Ceasefire 1994-2011* (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute for Asian Studies, 2016).
60. See e.g., International Crisis Group, "The Dark Side of Transition: Violence Against Muslims in Myanmar", Asia Report No.251, 2013; International Crisis Group, "Myanmar: The Politics of Rakhine State", Asia Report No.261, 2014; Marie Lall & Ashley South (eds.), *Citizenship in Myanmar: Ways of Being in and from Burma* (Chiang Mai University Press & ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore, 2018). See also, Chapter 4.
61. "Suu Kyi reiterates call for 'Second Panglong'", DVB, 7 September 2015.
62. Hnin Yadana Zaw, "Myanmar's Suu Kyi says peace process will be government's priority", Reuters, 4 January 2016.
63. "Aung San Suu Kyi Urges Efforts Toward a 'Lasting Peace' in Myanmar", RFA, 12 January 2016.
64. Timothy Mclaughlin, "Myanmar ethnic leader calls on Suu Kyi to clarify stance on peace process", Reuters, 12 January 2016.
65. Interview with Khu Nye Reh, KNPP Loikaw Liaison Office Coordinator, 23 March 2017.

3. Karenni Ceasefire Negotiations

1. "Statement by Emergency Meeting of the Central Committee of Democratic Alliance of Burma", General Headquarters (Manerplaw), 14 January 1994.
2. The Nation, 27 November 1993.
3. Yan Nyein Aye, *Endeavours of the Myanmar Armed Forces Government for National Reconsolidation* (Yangon: U Aung Zaw, 2000), p.45.
4. Ibid, pp.57 & 62.
5. Interview with Peter Gathui, KNPLF Youth, 2 February 2016.
6. Interview with Khun Myint Naing, 2 February 2016.

7. Aye, *Endeavours of the Myanmar Armed Forces Government*, p.74.
8. Martin Smith, "Paradise Lost? The Suppression of Environmental Rights and Freedom of Expression in Burma", Article 19, September 1994, pp.12-16; V. Bamforth, S. Lanjouw & G. Mortimer, "Conflict and Displacement in Karenni: The Need for Considered Approaches", Burma Ethnic Research Group, May 2000, pp.40-2.
9. Interview with Gen. Aung Mya, KNPP Deputy Army Commander, 11 January 1998.
10. Interview with Khu Hteh Bu Peh, KNPP Prime Minister, 11 January 1998.
11. Amnesty International, "Myanmar Aftermath: Three Years of Dislocation in Kayah State", AI Index: ASA 16/14/99, June 1999.
12. For reports, see the monthly and annual reports of the Thailand Burma Border Consortium, today The Border Consortium.
13. See e.g., Sandra Dudley, *Materialising Exile: Material Culture and Embodied Experience Among Karenni Refugees in Thailand* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010).
14. Free Burma Rangers, "Southwest Karenni State, Burma Report with Map", 7 November 2007.
15. See e.g., Karen Human Rights Group, "Karenni (Kayah) State: Update on Relocations", 12 February 1997.
16. For the list of EAOs at the National Convention in 2006, see, Kyaw Zaw Moe, "Burma's National Convention Resumes", The Irrawaddy, 10 October 2006.
17. Communication with representatives of local NGOs in Loikaw, 22, 24 and 25 April 2017.
18. Karen Human Rights Group, "Without Respite: Renewed Attacks on Villages and Internal Displacement in Toungoo District", 13 June 2006, p.11.
19. Communication with representative of local NGO in Loikaw, 24 April 2017.
20. Interview with representative of local organisation in Loikaw, 3 February 2016.
21. Interview with Mahn Thet Paw, KNPLF Joint General Secretary, 2 February 2016.
22. In August 1998, the KNPLF, KNLP and SNPLO also issued a joint statement calling for tri-partite dialogue between the military government, NLD and ethnic parties, and in March 2001 the three parties joined with the NMSP, SSA/SSPP, Palaung State Liberation Organisation (PSLO) and Shan State National Army (SSNA) in issuing a statement calling for a more inclusive negotiating process for democracy and national unity. For a timeline of events, see, Human Rights Watch, "Chronology of Burma's Constitutional Process", 2008.
23. Interview with Mahn Thet Paw, KNPLF Joint General Secretary, 2 February 2016.
24. See e.g., Martin Smith, "Ethnic Participation

and National Reconciliation”, in Trevor Wilson (ed.), *Myanmar’s Long Road to National Reconciliation* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2006), pp.61–7.

25. For the full list of organisations attending, see, “Proceedings of the National Convention: 24 June 2004”, *New Light of Myanmar*, 25 June 2004.

26. Tom Kramer, “Neither War Nor Peace: The Future of the Ceasefire Agreements in Burma”, *Transnational Institute*, Amsterdam, July 2009, pp.32–3. The other main submission by ceasefire EAOs was by a three-party “Wa-Kokang-Mongla” alliance of former CPB groups that proposed autonomous territories similar to neighbouring China.

27. Interview with Mahn Thet Paw, KNPLF Joint General Secretary, 2 February 2016. One KNPLF project that attracted media attention was a 2005 initiative with the Karuna Foundation to bring back for resettlement in Kayah State about 300 Kayan “long-necked” women and girls from Thailand where they had been working in the tourist industry: see, Louis Reh, “Padaung in Northern Thailand to return to Burma”, *The Irrawaddy*, 18 October 2005.

28. See also, Chapter 5, box: “Karenni Armed Organisations 2018”; and Appendix: “Overview of Karenni Armed Organisations”.

29. Min Lwin, “KNPLF to Split?”, *The Irrawaddy*, 21 October 2009.

30. Interview with Mahn Thet Paw, KNPLF Joint General Secretary, 2 February 2016.

31. Ceasefire events involving the KNPP and other EAOs are documented by the Myanmar Peace Monitor. See e.g., the 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016 reports by Burma News International, *Deciphering Myanmar’s Peace Process: A Reference Guide* (Chiang Mai, BNI), available via the Myanmar Peace Monitor website. For the KNPP see: <http://www.mmpeacemonitor.org/stakeholders/myanmar-peace-center/160-knpp>

32. Ibid.

33. Interview with Kyaw Htin Aung, UKSY, 3 February 2016.

34. Interview with Banya Khung Aung, Karenni Social Welfare Development Committee (KSWDC), 5 February 2016.

35. Interview with Plu Reh, Shalom Foundation, 3 February 2016.

36. Interview with KEAN representative, 22 March 2017.

37. Communication with Plu Reh, Shalom Foundation and KSPMN, 5 May 2017.

38. Interview with Khu Nye Reh, KNPP Loikaw Liaison Office Coordinator, 4 February 2016.

39. “The Unlawful Associations Act, India Act XIV, 1908”, 11 December 1908.

40. Interview with Kyaw Htin Aung, UKSY, 3 February 2016.

41. Interview with Khu Nye Reh, KNPP Loikaw

Liaison Office Coordinator, 4 February 2016.

42. “Karenni peace talks must include two key points to preserve ceasefire”, *Kantarawaddy Times*, 4 October 2012.

43. Karenni Civil Society Network, “Karenni civil society warns Myanmar government to stop undermining peace process”, Press Release, 31 October 2012.

44. Ibid.

45. Interview with Plu Reh, Shalom Foundation and KSPMN, 3 February 2016.

46. Nan Lwin Hnin Pwint, “KNPP to withdraw troops amid tension with Burma Army”, *The Irrawaddy*, 15 May 2015.

47. TNI, “Beyond Panglong: Myanmar’s National Peace and Reform Dilemma”, *TNI Myanmar Policy Briefing No.21*, September 2017, p.21.

48. Ariana Zarleen, “We are not hardliners – we are the ones who want peace the most”: Khu Oo Reh, General Secretary of UNFC”, *Mizzima News*, 3 August 2015.

49. See e.g., TNI, “Beyond Panglong”, pp.17–26.

50. See e.g., Karen Human Rights Group, “Losing Ground: Land conflicts and collective action in eastern Myanmar”, March 2013; Land in Our Hands Network, “Destroying People’s Lives: The Impact of Land Grabbing on communities in Myanmar”, December 2015; Global Witness, “Guns, Cronies and Crops: How Military, Political and Business Cronies Conspired to Grab Land in Myanmar”, London, 2015; Global Witness, “Jade: Myanmar’s ‘Big State Secret’”, London, October 2015.

51. See e.g., Nang Shining, “Hydropower in Myanmar: For Whose Benefit?”, *TNI Commentary*, December 2016.

52. TNI, “The Kachin Crisis: Peace Must Prevail”, *TNI-Burma Centrum Nederland, Burma Policy Briefing No.10*, March 2013.

53. See e.g., Chapter 2, note 60. See also, Chapter 4.

54. See e.g., David Scott Mathieson, “Shadowy rebels extend Myanmar’s wars”, *Asia Times*, 11 June 2017.

55. TNI, “Beyond Panglong”, p.20.

56. Zarni Mann, “UNFC Reiterates Call for Suu Kyi’s Voice in Peace Talks”, 26 November 2013.

57. “The Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement between the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and Ethnic Armed Organizations”, 15 October 2015.

58. Arakan National Council (ANC), Lahu Democratic Union (LDU) and Wa National Organisation (WNO). The three parties are mostly representatives of formerly larger forces: TNI, “Beyond Panglong”, p.23. Later, under the NLD government, this limitation against the LDU appeared to be removed when the party signed the NCA in February 2018.

59. KNU Vice President Naw Zipporah Sein, “A Brief NCA History, The NCA’s Flaws and Failings”, 14 January 2016: <http://www.burmapartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/KNU-VP-on-NCA-History-Recommendations-.pdf>
60. TNI, “Beyond Panglong”, pp.23–4.
61. Carole Oudot & Matthieu Baudey, “We want a real peace, not a fake one”, Myanmar Times, 21 October 2015.
62. Aung Naing Oo, “The time for waiting is over in Myanmar”, Nikkei Asian Review, 13 October 2015.
63. The previous February, to try and encourage momentum, a separate “Deed of Commitment for Peace and National Reconciliation” had been signed on Union Day in Nay Pyi Taw to build a “Union based on democratic and federal principles in the spirit of Panglong”. Only four EAOs, however, signed: the SSA/RCSS, KNU and two breakaway factions, the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army and KNU/KNLA Peace Council.
64. The ABSDF is Bamar-majority and was initially set up by pro-democracy students who took refuge in the ethnic borderlands following the SLORC’s assumption of power in 1988.
65. Lawi Weng, “Non-Signatory Armed Leaders Float New Ethnic Alliance at Panghsang”, The Irrawaddy, 3 November 2015.
66. Interview with Khu Nye Reh, KNPP Loikaw Liaison Office Coordinator, 23 March 2017.
67. “Myanmar Military, Shan Army Launch Offensive Against Ta’ang Rebels”, RFA, 1 December 2015.
68. Aik Sai, “Non-NCA signatories won’t attend Union Peace Conference”, Mon News Agency, 11 January 2016.
69. See e.g., TNI, “The 2015 General Election in Myanmar: What Now for Ethnic Politics?”, Myanmar Policy Briefing No.17, December 2015.
70. Interview with Khun Bedu, KNP Chair, 4 February 2016.
71. Interview with U Soe Naing, KNLP Central Committee member, 4 February 2016.

4. Karenni Armed Organisations and National Peace

1. Sai Wansai, “EAOs’ Plenary Meeting: Successful but need time to iron out common positions”, S.H.A.N., 1 August 2016. This was a successor to previous EAO meetings at Laiza and Law Khee Lar (see Chapter 3). The missing parties from the 21 recognised groups in the national peace process were: the UWSA, MNDAA, TNLA and National Socialist Council Nagaland–Khaplang (NSCN–K).
2. UNFC, “United Nationalities Federal Council Members’ Proposal (Draft)”, August 2016. There

- were essentially eight principles, with the ninth indicating that signing will take place when the other points are agreed. For an analysis, see, Sai Wansai, “Framework for Political Dialogue: UNFC’s boycott leads to peace process deterioration”, S.H.A.N., 21 September 2016. For an update, see, UNFC, “Briefing Paper: The Status of the Delegation for Political Negotiation Talks with the Peace Commission and the Way Forward”, August 2017.
3. “Official Translation of the Speech Delivered by State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi on the Opening Day of the Union Peace Conference–21st Century Panglong”, State Counsellor’s Office, 31 August 2016.
 4. Ei Ei Toe Lwin, “Not without wrinkles, peace conference lauded for taking landmark ‘first steps’”, Myanmar Times, 5 September 2016.
 5. See e.g., Institute for Security and Development Policy, “Myanmar’s Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement: Backgrounder”, October 2015.
 6. Amnesty International, “Myanmar: “All the Civilians Suffer’: Conflict, Displacement, and Abuse in Northern Myanmar”, 14 June 2017.
 7. See e.g., International Crisis Group, “Myanmar: A New Muslim Insurgency in Rakhine State”, Asia Report No.283, 2016; “More than 1,000 feared killed in Myanmar army crackdown on Rohingya – U.N. officials”, Reuters, 6 February 2017.
 8. The exact circumstances behind U Ko Ni’s assassination remain unclear, but those arrested point to military connections and “extreme nationalism”: see e.g., Aung Zaw, “Who Was Behind U Ko Ni’s Assassination?”, The Irrawaddy, 27 February 2017.
 9. For a study on Buddhism and politics, see, Matthew Walton, *Buddhism, Politics and Political Thought in Myanmar* (Cambridge University Press, 2016). See also, International Crisis Group, “Buddhism and State Power in Myanmar”, Report No.290/Asia, 5 September 2017.
 10. Nyein Nyein, “UNFC Calls Meeting with State Counselor ‘A Success’”, The Irrawaddy, 1 March 2017.
 11. “UNFC prepares for 21CPC and other challenges”, S.H.A.N., 6 April 2017.
 12. Sai Wansai, “UNFC and State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi’s desperate move”, S.H.A.N., 2 April 2017. The other groups were the ANC, LDU and WNO.
 13. Another UNFC member and non-ceasefire group, the WNO, also appeared to have joined with the UWSA in the FPNC. But its status in Wa politics is presently unclear.
 14. Interview with Khu Nye Reh, KNPP Loikaw Liaison Office Coordinator, 23 March 2017.
 15. Nyein Nyein, “KNPP: We Will Not Attend Panglong Peace Conference”, The Irrawaddy, 18 May 2017.
 16. “State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi’s

speech at the Opening Ceremony of the Union Peace Conference – 21st Century Panglong 2nd Session”, Ministry of Information, 25 May 2017.

17. Nyan Hlaing Lynn, “Accord or discord at Panglong?”, *Frontier Myanmar*, 6 June 2017.

18. “37 points signed as part of Pyidaungsu Accord”, *Global New Light of Myanmar*, 30 May 2017.

19. In private, nationality representatives spoke of feeling “railroaded” into endorsing the 2008 constitution rather than negotiating new principles for political dialogue and reform.

20. Aung Naing Oo, “Building Trust at Panglong”, *Frontier Myanmar*, 29 June 2017.

21. Stella Naw, “‘Four cuts’ strategy deepens Myanmar’s war wounds”, *Asia Times*, 15 July 2017; see also, Chapter 7, box: “‘Pya Lay Pya’ Campaigns and ‘Su See’ Villages”.

22. “End of Mission Statement by Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar”, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 21 July 2017.

23. Anthony Davis, “Foreign support gives Rohingya militants a lethal edge”, *Asia Times*, 15 August 2017.

24. “Nearly 400 die as Myanmar army steps up crackdown on Rohingya militants”, *Reuters*, 1 September 2017.

25. See e.g., *Ibid*; Human Rights Watch, “Burma: Satellite Images Show Massive Fire Destruction”, 2 September 2017; “Rohingya crisis: Civilians ‘maimed by landmines’”, *BBC*, 11 September 2017; “Rohingya abuses: Myanmar army report clears itself of blame”, *BBC*, 14 November 2017; Amnesty International “Briefing: Myanmar forces starve, abduct and rob Rohingya, as ethnic cleansing continues”, 7 February 2018. Wa Lone, Kyaw Soe Oo, Simon Lewis & Antoni Slodkowski, “Massacre in Myanmar: A Reuters Special Report”, *Reuters*, 8 February 2018.

26. “Myanmar refuses access to UN Special Rapporteur”, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 20 December 2017.

27. “Sixth UNFC–Government Meeting: ‘Is the glass half empty or half full?’”, *S.H.A.N.*, 15 August 2015.

28. These are the 21 organisations usually recognised in the national peace process since 2011. There are considerable variations in size, history, outreach and influence. The list should not be considered as final, and further change can be expected. There are also numerous Tatmadaw-backed pyithusit (militias) and Border Guard Forces, some of which are former ceasefire groups, such as the Pa-O National Army Pyithusit and Kaung Kha Pyithusit (ex-KIO 4th Brigade). In the northern Shan State, the most important groups include the Kutkai, Pansay and Tar Moe Nye pyithusits. The BGFs include the former Democratic

Karen Buddhist Army and Karenni Nationalities People’s Liberation Front.

29. Naw Noreen, “Northern ethnic armed bloc makes peace conference overture”, *DVB*, 25 August 2017.

30. Min Min, “Non-signatory EAOs always welcome to join the peace process, Daw Suu says”, *Mizzima*, 31 October 2017.

31. Chan Thar, “Peace commission, DPN fail to agree at seventh meeting”, *Myanmar Times*, 25 October 2017.

32. Lawi Weng, “It Will Not Be a Good Situation if We Are Forced to Sign the NCA”: NMSPP Vice Chairman”, *The Irrawaddy*, 8 November 2017.

33. Soe Thu Aung, “UNFC says only needs nod from organizations to sign NCA”, *Mizzima*, 10 November 2017. Subsequently, UNFC members were frustrated when the government cancelled another meeting at the last minute. Nyein Nyein, “Official Peace Talks with UNFC Cancelled Amid Stalemate Fears”, *The Irrawaddy*, 17 November 2017.

34. Lawi Weng, “KNPP Says 4 of Its Troops ‘Executed’ While in Army Detention”, *The Irrawaddy*, 22 December 2017; Amnesty International, “Myanmar: Independent investigation into military killing of four Karenni men essential for truth and justice”, 20 February 2018.

35. *Ibid*.

36. Nyein Nyein, “Public Urged to Report Corruption at Latest Peace Talk”, *The Irrawaddy*, 29 December 2017.

37. Nyein Nyein, “Karenni Police Ready More Lawsuits Against Protesters”, *The Irrawaddy*, 18 January 2018.

38. See e.g., “Karenni CSOs denounce warning made by Loikaw Township Management Committee”, *Karen Information Center*, 12 January 2018.

39. See e.g., Sai Khuensai, “Learning to share #29: The PPST Emergency”, *S.H.A.N.*, 16 January 2018.

40. “Press conference on NMSPP and LDU signing NCA”, Ministry of Information, Republic of Union of Myanmar, 13 February 2018.

41. *Ibid*.

42. Nyan Hlaing Lynn, “UNFC moves to re-admit former members”, *Frontier Myanmar*, 26 February 2018.

43. *Ibid*. Since its 1988 founding, the CNF has a small operational presence on the India border, and become the best-known EAO advocating the Chin cause since independence.

44. “UNFC will keep its existence and accept two new members”, *Network Media Group*, 26 February 2018. Since its 1999 foundation, the KNO has mostly been known as an advocacy group among exiles and in international circles. On occasion, its relationship – whether inside or outside the KIO – has also been unclear.

45. Wa Lone, “Myanmar sees ‘bad consequences’ if U.S. imposes sanctions on military”, 3 Reuters, November 2017.
46. Interview with KNPP Vice-Chair Khu Oo Reh, 5 December 2016.

5. Ethnic Armed Organisations and Political Representation

1. See e.g., Martin Smith, *State of Strife: The Dynamics of Ethnic Conflict in Burma* (East-West Center Washington, 2007), Policy Studies No.36, pp.20-5 and passim. For a contemporary analysis of armed groups in military transformation, see, John Buchanan, “Militias in Myanmar”, Asia Foundation, July 2016.
2. V. Bamforth, S. Lanjouw & G. Mortimer, “Conflict and Displacement in Karenni: The Need for Considered Approaches”, Burma Ethnic Research Group, May 2000, p.39.
3. Ibid.
4. See Note 1.
5. Kevin Woods, “Ceasefire capitalism: military-private partnerships, resource concessions and military-state building in the Burma-China borderlands”, *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 2011, Vol.38.4, pp.747-70.
6. Interview with Khun Myint Naing, Metta Development Foundation, 2 February 2016.
7. See e.g., Mandy Sadan (ed.), *War and Peace in the Borderlands of Myanmar: The Kachin Ceasefire 1994-2011* (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute for Asian Studies, 2016).
8. Bamforth, Lanjouw & Mortimer, “Conflict and Displacement in Karenni”, p.98.
9. Interview with Saw Eh Say, Kayah Earthrights Action Network, 5 February 2016.
10. Interview with Plu Reh, Shalom Foundation, 3 February 2016.
11. It is difficult to gain a statewide picture, and natural resource statistics are unreliable. But in the six months following the 2017 opening of an office of the Directorate of Investment and Company Administration in Kayah State, 163 companies were reported to have registered, mostly in construction and trade. Lin Thant/Phe Buu, “32 companies register with Kayah State’s DICA office”, *Kantarawaddy Times*, 5 December 2017.
12. Interview with Plu Reh, Shalom Foundation, 3 February 2016.
13. Ibid.
14. Interview with Khu Nye Reh, KNPP Loikaw Liaison Office Coordinator, 23 March 2017.
15. Interview with Plu Reh, Shalom Foundation, 3 February 2016.
16. In May 2014, for example, KNPP Vice-Chair Khu Oo Reh explained the latest stage of the peace process at a meeting organised by the UKSY in Loikaw attended by over 100 delegates from the KNPP, KNPLF, KNLP, KNPDP, political parties, Karenni Women’s Organisation, youth organisations and other community-based organisations.
17. The KNPP, KNPLF, KNSO, KNPDP, KNLP and KNG.
18. Interview with Evelyn, CHDN, 24 March 2017.
19. Matthieu Baudey & Carole Oudot, “KNPP-backed conference hits the road in Kayah”, *Myanmar Times*, 26 November 2015.
20. See Chapter 6 for details on political parties.
21. Interview with Khu Nye Reh, KNPP Loikaw Liaison Office Coordinator, 4 February 2016.
22. Ibid.
23. KNUJC members are the KNPLF, KNPDP, KNSO, KNLP, KNG and Yaung Chi Oo, a registered local NGO consisting of retired KNPP army veterans.
24. Interview with Evelyn (CHDN), KNUJC Secretary, 24 March 2017.
25. Ibid.
26. Interview with representative of local organisation, 19 March 2017.
27. Chrissie Gittens, “The Karenni Speak Out: Interview with Abel Tweed and Teddy Buri”, *Burma Debate*, Vol.III, No.6, November/December 1996. Abel Tweed is currently KNPP Chair.
28. Interview with Khu Nye Reh, KNPP Loikaw Liaison Office Coordinator, 23 March 2017.
29. Interview with Mahn Thet Paw, KNPLF Joint General Secretary, 2 February 2016.
30. Ibid.
31. Khun Sam, “Karenni Group Forced Out”, *The Irrawaddy*, 6 January 2006.
32. “Kayan rebels mark 50 years since birth of armed struggle”, *The Irrawaddy*, 6 June 2014.
33. Interview with U Saw Lwin, KNLP Joint General Secretary-1, 4 February 2016.
34. Ibid; Lawi Weng, “Ethnic Rebel Summit in Panghsang Redux, But Dynamics Differ”, *The Irrawaddy*, 30 October 2015.
35. Ye Mon, “Kayan summon fallen warriors to mausoleum”, *Myanmar Times*, 23 June 2014.
36. Interview with U Saw Lwin, KNLP Joint General Secretary-1, 4 February 2016.
37. Maung Zaw, “Kayan New Land Party plots USDP downfall”, *Myanmar Times*, 1 December 2014.
38. See e.g., Matthieu Baudey & Carole Oudot, “Villagers afraid to break silence over militia murder allegations”, *Myanmar Times*, 3 June 2015.
39. Interview with KNPDP regional administrator from Hpruso Township, 4 February 2016.

40. Interview with Myint Maung Maung, KNPDP Chairman, 4 February 2016.
41. Interview with Peter Gathui, KNPLF Youth, 2 February 2016.
42. Interview with KNPP representative, 4 February 2016
43. Interview with U Solomon, ANDP Vice Chairman, 22 March 2017.
44. Interview with Sai Naing Naing Htwe, 2 February 2016; “New Kayah State party officially registered”, Kantarawaddy Times, 14 August 2017.
45. Karen Information Center, “Karenni CSOs denounce warning made by Loikaw Township Management Committee”, 12 January 2018.
46. Laphai Seng Raw, “Strengthening civil society in peace building: evolving perspectives from South East Myanmar”, Aid & International Development Forum, 13 February 2015.

6. General Elections and Political Reform

1. All Burma Students Democratic Front, “To Stand and Be Counted, The Suppression of Burma’s Members of Parliament”, Documentation and Research Centre, Bangkok, June 1998.
2. The SNLD won 23 seats (out of the 57 it contested), and the ALD won 11 seats. In total, the NLD won 392 of the 485 seats countrywide (about 80 per cent of the total seats, representing around 60% of the vote), and the NUP just 10 seats (for 21% of the vote). See e.g., ABSDF, “To Stand and Be Counted”: Khin Kyaw Han MP-NLD, “1990 Multi-Party Democracy General Elections”: http://www.ibiblio.org/obl/docs/1990_elections.htm
3. A Yangon University graduate and Second World War veteran, U R. P. Thaug subsequently had a long career in local government. See, ABSDF, “To Stand and Be Counted”.
4. Ibid., pp.252 & 111. Khun Marko Ban had previously worked in both the Kayah State and Pekon Township administrations. See also, Chapter 2, note 41. A Yangon University English graduate, Teddy Buri was a former teacher, Lawpita employee and BSPP Kayah State Council member.
5. Ibid. A veteran of Force 136, Saw Oo Reh had been a candidate in the previous 1960 general election and served as a representative for Hpruso Township in the national assembly under BSPP government in the 1970s.
6. See e.g., “Burma: Military Party Guaranteed to Dominate Elections”, Human Rights Watch, 19 July 2010.
7. Chrissie Gittens, “The Karenni Speak Out: Interview with Abel Tweed and Teddy Buri”, Burma Debate, Vol.III, No.6, November/December 1996.
8. Ibid.
9. See note 4.
10. Mon National Democratic Front (MNDF) and Zomi National Congress (ZNC).
11. The full list: ALD, KSANLD, MNDF, SNLD, ZNC, Chin National League for Democracy, Kachin State National Congress for Democracy, Karen National Congress for Democracy and Mara People’s Party.
12. “Myanmar ratifies and promulgates Constitution”, State Peace and Development Council Announcement No. 7/2008, 29 May 2008.
13. See e.g., National League for Democracy (Liberated Area), “Referendum Campaign Committee, Constitutional Referendum in Burma”, June 2008, Thailand.
14. Human Rights Watch, “Vote to Nowhere: The May 2008 Constitutional Referendum in Burma”, 30 April 2008.
15. See Chapter 2, note 49. Population statistics and the basis on which these seats were allocated remain contentious. To date, the final results from the 2014 census have not been released because the ethnic delineations and counting exercise were unreliable; see Chapter 2, note 1. According to section 161 of the 2008 Constitution, any minority group with a population over 60,000 (0.1 per cent of Myanmar’s estimated population at that time) in a region/ state – not including any group that already has a self-administered area in that region/state – can elect an additional representative to the regional/ state legislature. The current list of 29 reserved seats for what have become ethnic affairs ministers is as follows: Ayeyarwady Region: 2 seats (Karen, Rakhine), Bago Region: 1 seat (Karen), Chin State: no seats, Kachin State: 4 seats (Bamar, Lisu, Rawang, Shan), Kayah State: 1 seat (Bamar), Karen State: 3 seats (Bamar, Mon, Pa-O), Magway Region: 1 seat (Chin), Mandalay Region: 1 seat (Shan), Mon State: 3 seats (Bamar, Karen, Pa-O), Rakhine State: 1 seat (Chin), Sagaing Region: 2 seats (Chin, Shan), Shan State: 7 seats (Akha, Bamar, Intha, Kachin, Kayan, Lahu, Lisu), Tanintharyi Region: 1 seat (Karen), and Yangon Region: 2 seats (Karen, Rakhine). See also, TNI, “Unlevel Playing Field: Burma’s Election Landscape”, TNI-BCN Burma Policy Briefing No.3, October 2010.
16. See Chapter 2, note 1.
17. TNI, “A Changing Ethnic Landscape: Analysis of Burma’s 2010 Polls”, TNI-BCN Burma Policy Briefing No.4, December 2010.
18. TNI, “Unlevel Playing Field”.
19. TNI, “A Changing Ethnic Landscape”.
20. “Peace-talks in Karenni State to be proposed to USDP”, Kantarawaddy Times, 16 May 2011.
21. Interview with U Solomon, 4 February 2016.
22. The ANDP is also sometimes referred to as the All Nationals’ Democracy Party.
23. Interview with U Solomon, ANDP Vice-Chair, 4 February 2016.
24. Interview with Sai Naing Naing Htwe, KUDP Secretary-1, 2 February 2016.

25. Ibid.
26. Interview with U Nyunt Shwe, KUDP Secretary-2, 2 February 2016.
27. See e.g., The Carter Center, "Observing Myanmar's 2015 General Elections: Final Report", 2015. For an analysis of state-society relations in the development of political parties, see, K. Stokke, Khine Win & Soe Myint Aung, "Political Parties and Popular Representation in Myanmar's Democratisation Process", *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 3/2015, pp.3-35.
28. Interview with Sai Naing Naing Htwe, KUDP Secretary-1, 2 February 2016.
29. Ma Htoe Hmyar, "Karenni State candidates struggle with lack of funds", BNI, 28 October 2015.
30. Interview with Sai Naing Naing Htwe, KUDP Secretary-1, 2 February 2016.
31. Interview with U Solomon, ANDP Vice-Chair, 4 February 2016.
32. The ethnic-based parties were the ANDP, KUDP, KNP, Karen People's Party, Lisu National Development Party, SNLD and Shan Nationalities Democratic Party. The national Bamar-majority parties were the NLD, USDP, NUP (the former BSPP) and National Development Party (led by an ex-advisor to President Thein Sein).
33. Interview with Kyaw Htin Aung, UKSY, 3 February 2016.
34. In total, the KNP contested 13 parliamentary seats, including Demoso and Loikaw in Kayah State, Pekon in Shan State and Thandaung in Karen State. "Local Karenni parties ready to face NLD, USDP", DVB, 16 September 2015.
35. Interview with U Solomon, ANDP Vice-Chair, 4 February 2016. See also, note 32.
36. Interview with Khu Nye Reh, KNPP Loikaw Liaison Office Coordinator, 4 February 2016.
37. Interview with U Solomon, ANDP Vice-Chair, 4 February 2016.
38. Interview with Kyaw Htin Aung, UKSY, 3 February 2016.
39. Interview with U Soe Naing, KNLP CC member, 4 February 2016.
40. "Suu Kyi reiterates call for 'Second Panglong'", DVB, 7 September 2015.
41. Interview with Plu Reh, Shalom Foundation, 3 February 2016.
42. "Aung San Suu Kyi Begins Campaign Rally in Eastern Myanmar", RFA, 10 September 2015.
43. "NLD leader seeks support in Kayah State", Eleven Media, 12 September 2015.
44. "Aung San Suu Kyi Begins Campaign Rally in Eastern Myanmar", RFA, 10 September 2015.
45. Lisu National Development Party.
46. Interview with Plu Reh, Shalom Foundation, 3 February 2016.
47. Interview with Samuel Khun Sha Mu Aye La, HCKNU President, 23 March 2017.
48. Interview with Khu Nye Reh, KNPP Loikaw Liaison Office Coordinator, 4 February 2016.
49. Interview with local staff of international organisation, 3 February 2016.
50. Interview with U Khun Maung Aye, Kayan Ethnic Affairs Minister for Shan State, 3 February 2016.
51. Interview with Kyaw Htin Aung, UKSY, 3 February 2016.
52. Interview with Khun Bedu, KNP Chair, 4 February 2016.
53. Nyein Nyein, "'We, the Kayah Ethnic Group, Have a History of Faction'", *The Irrawaddy*, 30 September 2015.
54. Interview with Peter Gathui, KNPLF Youth, 2 February 2016.
55. Interview with member of local political party, 4 February 2016.
56. Interview with a KNPDP leader, 4 February 2016.
57. Wa Lone, "The battle for Kayah State, an election litmus test", *Myanmar Times*, 4 November 2015.
58. Ma Htoe Hmyar, "Karenni State candidates struggle".
59. Nay Htun Naing, "Keep a watchful eye on Kayah State", *Eleven Media*, 20 July 2015. According to the 2014 census, Aung Min's constituency had fewer than 4,000 eligible voters, while Soe Thein's had fewer than 3,000. Yen Snaing & Sean Gleeson, "Analysis: Ministers' Election in Karenni State All But Certain", *The Irrawaddy*, 9 September 2015.
60. Interview with Solomon, ANDP Vice-Chair, 4 February 2016. The ANDP was reported to have contested 26 seats in six of the seven townships in Kayah State: "Local Karenni parties ready to face NLD, USDP", DVB, 16 September 2015.
61. Wa Lone, "The battle for Kayah State".
62. Snaing & Gleeson, "Analysis: Ministers' Election in Karenni State".
63. Wa Lone, "The battle for Kayah State".
64. Ibid.
65. Ibid.
66. Ibid.
67. Ibid.
68. Interview with Khu Nye Reh, KNPP Loikaw Liaison Office Coordinator, 4 February 2016.
69. Interview with member of KNGY, 4 February 2016.
70. Interview with Gay Nay Paw, KSWDC, 22 March 2017.

71. “Meet your chief ministers”, Myanmar Times, 4 April 2016.
72. Interview with Sai Naing Naing Htwe, KUDP Secretary 1, 2 February 2016.
73. Interview with Khu Poe Reh, Kayah Li Phu Youth Committee, 23 March 2017.
74. Interview with Bernard Bote, UKSY General Secretary, 22 March 2017.
75. Interview with Maw Myar, KNWO, 23 March 2017.
76. Interview with Khun Bedu, KNP Chair, 4 February 2016.
77. Interview with U Solomon, ANDP Vice-Chair, 4 February 2016.
78. Interview with Bernard Bote, UKSY General Secretary, 22 March 2017.
79. Interview with Samuel Khun Sha Mu Aye La, HCKNU President, 23 March 2017.
80. Interview with Khu Nye Reh, KNPP Loikaw Liaison Office Coordinator, 23 March 2017.
81. Gittens, “The Karenni Speak Out, Interview with Abel Tweed and Teddy Buri”.
82. Interview with Khu Nye Reh, KNPP Loikaw Liaison Office Coordinator, 23 March 2017.
83. Interview with Saw Maw Maung, KNGY, 22 March 2017.
84. Interview with Khu Nye Reh, KNPP Loikaw Liaison Office Coordinator, 23 March 2017.
85. Interview with Saw Maw Maung, KNGY, 22 March 2017.
86. Interview with Bernard Bote, UKSY General Secretary, 22 March 2017.
87. Interview with Khu Lay Reh, Kayah Li Phu Youth Committee, 23 March 2017.
88. Interview with Saw Maw Maung, KNGY, 22 March 2017.
89. Interview with Khu Nye Reh, KNPP Loikaw Liaison Office Coordinator, 23 March 2017.
90. Interview with representative from local CSO, 19 March 2017.
91. See e.g., David Scott Mathieson, “Suu Kyi overbuilds her father’s golden legacy”, Asia Times, 18 July 2017.
92. Htun Khaing, “NLDs gilded Bogyoke building spree prompts ethnic backlash”, Frontier Myanmar, 6 March 2018.
93. See e.g., Joint statement by 61 Myanmar and international human rights organizations, “Myanmar: Repeal Section 66(d) of the 2013 Telecommunications Law”, 29 June 2017.
94. Interview with a Karenni development worker, 22 March 2017.
95. The NLD won eight out of the twelve seats contested for the upper and lower houses (most in central Myanmar) and one seat for the Shan State parliament. The SNLD won two upper house and four Shan State Parliament seats; the USDP one upper house and one Shan State Parliament seat; the Arakan National Party one upper house seat; and the ANDP one Kayah Parliament seat. “Results of 2017 by-elections”, Global New Light of Myanmar, 3 April 2017.
96. Thae Reh ran for No.1 Kayah State Parliament Hpruso Township. “NLD Wins 9 Seats out of 19 in By-election”, Myanmar Times, 3 April 2017. For the ANDP’s election manifesto, see, “All Nationalities Democracy Party (Kayah State) presents policy and programmes”, Global New Light of Myanmar, 15 February 2017.
97. “Voices of the 2017 By-elections Winners”, Global New Light of Myanmar, 3 April 2017.
98. Interview with Sai Naing Naing Htwe, KUDP Secretary 1, 22 March 2017.
99. Interview with Khun Bedu, KNP Chair, 22 March 2017.
100. Union Election Commission, “Political party permitted to register, Notification 22/2017, 8 September 2017”, and “Revoking the registration of political party and abolishing the party, Notification 23/2017, 8 September 2017”, Global New Light of Myanmar, 9 September 2017.
101. Pyae Thet Phyto, “NLD Removes Two Party Officials after by-election bungle”, Myanmar Times, 4 April 2017.
102. See e.g., Hein Ko Soe, “The ethnic parties’ dilemma: Merger or strategic alliance?”, Frontier Myanmar, 18 April 2018.
103. Chan Thar, “Over 2000 Kayah villagers join NLD”, Myanmar Times, 20 February 2018.
104. Kyaw Phyto Tha, “Peace, Charter Reform Take Back Seat as Myanmar President Stresses Social Issues”, The Irrawaddy, 18 April 2018.

7. Communities in Transition

1. Interview with Banya Khung Aung, KSWDC, 5 February 2016
2. Interview with local staff from international organisation, 3 February 2016.
3. Interview with Banya Khung Aung, KSWDC, 5 February 2016.
4. Martin Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity* (London: Zed Books, 1991 & 1999), pp.258-62.
5. See e.g., Amnesty International, “Myanmar: Ethnic minority rights under attack”, July 1997; Amnesty International, “Myanmar Aftermath: Three Years of Dislocation in Kayah State”, June 1999; UN General Assembly, “Situation of human rights in Myanmar”, Interim report of the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights

on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, A/58/219, 5 August 2003.

6. Interview with a local NGO leader, 2 February 2016.

7. Amnesty International, “‘No Law At All’: Human Rights Violations Under Military Rule”, November 1992, pp.28–29.

8. V. Bamforth, S. Lanjouw & G. Mortimer, “Conflict and Displacement in Karenni: The Need for Considered Approaches”, Burma Ethnic Research Group, May 2000, p.6.

9. See e.g., Amnesty International, “Myanmar Aftermath”.

10. Ibid.

11. Chrissie Gittens, “The Karenni Speak Out: Interview with Abel Tweed and Teddy Buri”, Burma Debate, Vol.III, No.6, November/December 1996.

12. The Border Consortium, “Refugee Camp Populations: February 2018”. The two main Karenni camps are Ban Mai Nai Soi and Ban Mae Surin.

13. UNHCR, “Return Assessments – Kayah State”, April 2017.

14. TBC, UNHCR, “Burmese Border Refugee Sites with Population Figures”, December 2008. For experiences in the USA, see, Tadayuki Kubo, “Transnational ‘Myanmar’-Karenni Societies in United States: Experiences of Karenni Refugee Resettlement”, *Journal of Sophia Asian Studies*, No.32, 2014, pp.97–112.

15. Interview with Shah Reh Du, Kantarawaddy Times, 17 February 2016.

16. Karenni National Women’s Organisation, “About KNWO”: <https://karenni-women.org/about-knwo-4/>.

17. Smith, *Burma: Insurgency*, pp.258–62.

18. See note 5; Amnesty International, “‘No Law At All’”, pp.28–29; and Bamforth, Lanjouw & Mortimer, “Conflict and Displacement in Karenni”, *passim*.

19. Interview with a local development worker, 22 March 2017.

20. Amnesty International, “Myanmar: Ethnic minority rights under attack”.

21. Interview with Luiz Kaypoe, 1st Secretary Karenni Refugee Committee, 18 February 2016.

22. Interview with Gay Nay Paw, KSWDC, 22 March 2017.

23. TBC, “Changing Realities, Poverty and Displacement in South East Burma/Myanmar”, 31 October 2012.

24. Interviews with representatives of CSOs and an international organisation in Loikaw, February 2016.

25. UNHCR, “Return Assessments – Kayah State”, April 2017.

26. Interview with Khu Oo Reh, 15 February 2016.

27. Ibid.

28. Interview with Banya Khung Aung, KSWDC, 5 February 2016.

29. Interviews with village members in Hpasawng and Bawlakhe Townships, February 2015.

30. Myanmar Information Management Unit, “Townships with Known Landmine Contamination”, 2015.

31. In 2014, not including other units, Tatmadaw deployment stood at 24 army battalions; Karenni Civil Society Network, “Analysis Paper”, December 2014, p.6.

32. Karenni Civil Society Network, “KCSN calls for Burma Army troop withdrawal, stopping of mega development projects, and adequate humanitarian aid for refugees to promote peace in Karenni State”, Statement, 20 June 2017.

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid.

35. See, TNI, “Access Denied, Land Rights and Ethnic Conflict in Burma”, TNI & BCN Burma Policy Briefing No.11, May 2013.

36. A report by Land in Our Hands (LIOH), a multi-ethnic network of more than 60 local farmer and community-based organisations in Myanmar, found that half of the cases of land grabbing involved people who had officially registered their lands. LIOH, “Destroying People’s Lives, The Impact of Landgrabbing on Communities in Myanmar”, December 2015.

37. Participants of TNI workshop on the right to land, Loikaw, 16 February 2016.

38. Participant in TNI workshop on the right to land, Loikaw, 17 March 2016.

39. Interview with Banya Khung Aung, KSWDC, 5 February 2016.

40. The government acknowledged that it confiscated at least 2,700 acres of land to build the No. 14 Military Training School, construction of which started in August 2011. According to local communities, more than 3,000 acres of ancestral lands were seized. The government paid 50,000 kyats per acre compensation for only 500 acres of the taken lands. “Karenni peace talks must include two key points to preserve ceasefire”, Kantarawaddy Times, 4 October 2012.

41. Karenni Civil Society Network, “Karenni civil society warns Myanmar government to stop undermining peace process”, Press Release, 31 October 2012.

42. Karenni Civil Society Network, “Analysis Paper”, December 2014, p.11.

43. Nang Mya Nadi, “Farmers Plough on in Karenni Land Grab Case”, DVB, 28 May 2014.

44. TNI, “The Meaning of Land in Myanmar”, TNI, Amsterdam, November 2015. See also Chapter 8.

45. Interview with farmer from Dawlawku village,

- Hpruso Township, Kayah State, 17 February 2016.
46. Interview with farmer from Dawsoshay village, Demoso Township, Kayah State, 18 February 2016.
 47. Interview with Khun Athai, KNGY, 22 March 2017.
 48. Participant in TNI workshop on the right to land, Loikaw, 17 March 2016.
 49. Interview with Mo Bu, KnMHC, 23 February 2015.
 50. Ibid.
 51. UNDP, "The State of Local Governance: Trends in Kayah", 2014. For other studies by international agencies since the KNPP's 2012 ceasefire, see e.g., UNHCR South-East Myanmar Information Management Unit, "Kayah State Profile", June 2014; Mercy Corps et al., "Conflict Analysis Kayah State: Paung Si Lett (PROSPER, Promoting Sustainable Peace and Resilience in Kayah)", August 2015; Mercy Corps et al., "Kayah State Socio-Economic Analysis", September 2013.
 52. Interview with Plu Reh, Shalom Foundation, 29 August 2013.
 53. Interview with Bishop Sotero Phamo, 30 August 2013.
 54. Interview with Mo Bu, KnMHC, 23 February 2015.
 55. Ibid.
 56. Kim Joliffe, "Ethnic Conflict and Social Services in Myanmar's Contested Regions", The Asia Foundation, 2014. See also Chapter 5.
 57. Interview with Khu Philip, Karenni Health Department, 30 August 2013.
 58. CHDN's mission as presented to group of international organisations and donors, Yangon, June 2015.
 59. Interview with Khu Philip, Karenni Health Department, 30 August 2013.
 60. Interview with Mo Bu, KnMHC, Loikaw, 23 February 2015.
 61. Interview with Banya Khung Aung, KSWDC, 21 February 2015
 62. Interview with local NGO official, 22 March 2017.
 63. Interview with Banya Khung Aung, KSWDC, 5 February 2016.
 64. Interview with Khun Bedu, KNP Chair, 4 February 2016.
 65. Ibid.
 66. See e.g., Tom Kramer, "Civil Society Gaining Ground: Opportunities for Change and Development in Burma", Transnational Institute, Amsterdam 2011.
 67. Interview with Lee Myar, Kayah Phyu Baptist Association, 30 August 2013.
 68. Interview with Father Robert, KMSS, 29 August 2013.
 69. Interview with Bishop Sotero Phamo, 30 August 2013.
 70. Shalom Foundation, "Shalom (Nyein) Foundation 2009 Annual Report", 2009.
 71. See e.g. reports of the Thailand Burma Border Consortium, since 2012 known as The Border Consortium.
 72. See e.g., "KNWO-Loikaw holds Karenni-State Women's Voice Conference", 14 September 2016: <https://karenni-women.org/2016/09/14/knwo-loikaw-holds-karenni-state-womens-voice-conference/>
 73. See, "About Karenni Evergreen": <https://kevergreen.wordpress.com/about/>.
 74. See, "About Kantarawaddy Times": <https://www.idealists.org/en/nonprofit/6a87a0926aa242d591bb445908e12cd9-kantarawaddy-times-thai-office-nai-soi-village?>
 75. Interview with UKSY representatives, 3 February 2016.
 76. Interview with Khun Bedu, KNP Chair, 4 February 2016.
 77. According to the late Naga leader: "Only subjugated people learn a common language." Quoted in, Smith, *Burma: Insurgency*, p.39.
 78. The Karen language is variously ascribed, with Karen-speakers also in neighbouring Thailand. It is considered to derive from the Sino-Tibetan language family but the relationship is not close.
 79. See e.g., ANDP election manifesto, "All Nationalities Democracy Party (Kayah State) presents policy and programmes", Global New Light of Myanmar, 15 February 2017: "Shan, Bamar, Kayin, Pa-O and other nationalities are living in the state in addition to nine nationalities. In forming a political party it should not be based on local, national and religious cults. As Kayah state is sparsely populated, it is important to form a party of all nationalities who know well about the situation of the state and conform to lifestyles of the local people."
 80. With the exception of Paku, the usually-recognised "Karenni" groups were listed (though not always accurately by name) in the 2014 census recording for Kayah State. But, as one of many inconsistencies in the list of territories and identities, other nationalities, such as Pa-O and Shan, were not included in the section for Kayah State. See Chapter 2, notes 1 and 2. The ethnic-based results of the census are yet to be released.
 81. Interview Khun Bedu, KNP Chairman, 4 February 2016.
 82. Interview with Plu Reh, Shalom Foundation, 19 March 2017.
 83. Interview with Bernard Bote, General Secretary UKSY, 22 March 2017

84. See e.g., Denis Gray, “Myanmar forces Burman culture on minorities, erases identity”, AFP, 16 March 2018.
85. Bennison, J.J. *Census of India, 1931: Volume XI Burma Part One-Report* (Rangoon: Government Printing and Stationery, 1933), p.205. The British also had difficulty with language classifications in the country, counting 17 designations in the “Karen” group of which “Karenni” (Kayah) was the fourth largest after Sgaw, Pwo and Pa-O (Taungthu). *Ibid.*, p.204.
86. Mratt Kyaw Thu, “The disappearing tribe of Kayah”, *Frontier Myanmar*, 10 June 2016.
87. Interview with Khun Bedu, KNP Chairman, 22 March 2017.
88. Interview with Plu Reh, Shalom Foundation, 19 March 2017
89. The conference took place at the Memorial Hall of the Kayah Baptist Association in Demoso Township. The first had been in April 2000 in Pan Pet village, Demoso Township.
90. Interview with Samuel Khun Sha Mu Aye, HCKNU President, 23 March 2017.
91. *Ibid.*
92. Interview with Hsa Eh Ywar from the Kayan Literature and Cultural Committee, 23 March 2017.
93. Interview with Samuel Khun Sha Mu Aye, HCKNU President, 23 March 2017.
94. Interview with Plu Reh, Shalom Foundation, 19 March 2017.
95. The conference took place at the Baptist Church in Tay Su Lae village in Demoso Township.
96. Interview with Poe Reh, Kayah Li Phu Youth Committee, 23 March 2017.
97. *Ibid.* “Lu-myō” is a Burmese term that has its own implications in terms of ethnicity. For a discussion, see, TNI, “Ethnicity without Meaning, Data without Context: The 2014 Census, Identity and Citizenship in Burma/Myanmar”, TNI-BCN Burma Policy Briefing No.13, February 2014, pp.3-7.
98. Interview with Poe Reh, Kayah Li Phu Youth Committee, 23 March 2017.
99. The conference was held at the Htee Ta Re Hall in Hpruso Township.
100. Interview with Dee Dee, Pre Kayaw Committee, 23 March 2017.
101. *Ibid.*
102. *Ibid.*
103. Interview with CSO representative, March 2017.
104. See e.g., TNI, “Ethnicity Without Meaning: Data Without Context”.
105. Interview with Plu Reh, Shalom Foundation, 19 March 2017.
106. Tadayuki Kubo, “Karenni and Kayah: The Nature of Burma’s Ethnic Problem over Two Names

and the Path to Resolution”, *Asia Peacebuilding Initiatives*, 5 February 2014.

107. The adjoining sub-state of Sakoi also had a Kayan-majority population.
108. Smith, *Burma: Insurgency*, pp.91, 473.
109. Interview with Andrew, KNP, 4 February 2016.
110. Interview with Kun Soe, KNGY, 4 February 2016.
111. Interview with U Saw Lwin, KNLP Joint General Secretary-1, 4 February 2016.
112. *Ibid.*
113. Interview with Rosemary, Kayan Women’s Organisation, 4 February 2016.
114. Interview with Plu Reh, Shalom Foundation, 19 March 2017.
115. Interview with Samuel Khun Sha Mu Aye, HCKNU President, 23 March 2017.
116. See e.g., Edith Mirante, “Hostages to Tourism”, *Cultural Survival Quarterly Magazine*, March 1990.

8. Development Directions and Dilemmas

1. V. Bamforth, S. Lanjouw & G. Mortimer, “Conflict and Displacement in Karenni: The Need for Considered Approaches”, *Burma Ethnic Research Group*, May 2000, pp.40-2.
2. For a recent analysis of development challenges in Myanmar’s conflict landscape and proposed solutions by CSOs, see, Burma Environmental Working Group, “Resource Federalism: A Roadmap for Decentralised Governance of Burma’s Natural Heritage”, 2017. For further suggestions, see also, A. Burke, N. Williams, P. Barron, K. Jolliffe & T. Carr, “The Contested Areas of Myanmar: Subnational Conflict, Aid, and Development”, *Asia Foundation*, 2017; *Natural Resource Governance Institute*, “Natural Resource Federalism: Considerations for Myanmar”, January 2018. For an analysis of ceasefire history among Kachin communities during the SLORC-SPDC era, see, Mandy Sadan (ed.), *War and Peace in the Borderlands of Myanmar: The Kachin Ceasefire 1994-2011* (Copenhagen, Nordic Institute for Asian Studies, 2016).
3. Burma Environmental Working Group, “Resource Federalism”, pp.8-10.
4. *Ibid.*, p.76.
5. Lawpita hydropower plant provides 24 per cent of Myanmar’s total hydropower capacity, according to the Burma Rivers Network: http://burmariversnetwork.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=69&Itemid=84
6. Santipap, “Damning Hope: Development on the Salween River”, *Burma Issues*, Vol.15, No.3, March 2005.

7. Ibid. See also, TNI, “The Meaning of Land in Myanmar: A Primer”, 28 January 2016.
8. Agreement 6, “KNPP Union and State Level Ceasefire”, June 2012.
9. Point (h), “8 Point Agreement”, UPWC–KNPP, June 2013. The UPWC is the government’s Union Peacemaking Work Committee. For a chronology of agreements during 2011–13, see, <http://www.mmpeacemonitor.org/background/160- knpp>
10. Ibid., Point (d).
11. Ibid.
12. For recent recommendations in the light of proposed “federal” reforms in national governance, see e.g., Burma Environmental Working Group, “Resource Federalism”, pp.86–8; Natural Resource Governance Institute, “Natural Resource Federalism”, pp.6 & passim.
13. Statement by Burma Rivers Network, Save the Salween Network and Burma Environment Working Group, “Countrywide gatherings on International Rivers Day to oppose large dams in Burma’s conflict zone”, International Day of Action for Rivers, 14 March 2017.
14. For a recent analysis, see, Burke, Williams, Barron, Jolliffe & Carr, “The Contested Areas of Myanmar”.
15. Interview with Ah Mu Htoo, Molo Women Mining Watch Network, 6 March 2016. For a recent political analysis of development and resource challenges in the national context, see, Burma Environmental Working Group, “Resource Federalism”.
16. Interview with Kyaw Htin Aung, UKSY, 3 February 2016.
17. Mratt Kyaw Thu, “Fallen Timber, Uneasy Officials”, *Frontier Myanmar*, 30 May 2016.
18. KNPP has two main businesses: Tamaw Htar deals with imports and exports, including logging; Kayah Htar Ni covers mining, construction, travel and tours.
19. See Chapter 3; and, Bamforth, Lanjouw & Mortimer, “Conflict and Displacement”, pp.40–2.
20. Interview with Khun Myint Naing, Metta Development Foundation, 2 February 2016.
21. Interview with Saw Eh Say, Kayah Earthrights Action Network, 5 February 2016.
22. “Fallen Timber, Uneasy Officials”, *Frontier Myanmar*, 30 May 2016.
23. Interview with Khun Myint Naing, Metta Development Foundation, 2 February 2016.
24. “Myanmar bans lucrative logging in bid to preserve forest”, *Reuters*, 28 April 2016; Su Phyo Win, “Timber group replaces sub-contractors with service providers”, *Myanmar Times*, 28 July 2017.
25. “Myanmar’s log export ban to hurt businessmen but help forests”, *Reuters*, 12 March 2014.
26. Interview with Jatuchatra Chommai, First Secretary, Royal Thai Embassy, Yangon, 28 September 2017.
27. “With Logging Ban Lifted, Myanmar Timber Policy Fall Flat”, *Coconuts Yangon*, 28 April 2017.
28. Thazin Hlaing, “Government Orders Cut in Teak Production, Bans Private Timber Operations”, *The Irrawaddy*, 29 January 2018.
29. Interview with Khun Myint Naing, Metta Development Foundation, 2 February 2016.
30. Interview with Khu Nye Reh, KNPP Loikaw Liaison Office Coordinator, 23 March 2017.
31. See e.g., “Illegal logging continues to plague Kayah State amid raft of bribery cases”, *Kantarawaddy Times*, 5 May 2017; “Karenni armed group accused of obstructing arrests in illegal logging case”, *Kantarawaddy Times*, 10 May 2017.
32. As quoted in, “Fallen Timber, Uneasy Officials”, *Frontier Myanmar*.
33. Interview with Shah Reh Du, *Kantarawaddy Times*, 18 February 2016.
34. Interview with Banya Khung Aung, KSWDC, 5 February 2016.
35. Amnesty International, “Myanmar: Independent investigation into military killing of four Karenni men essential for truth and justice”, 20 February 2018. See also, Chapter 4.
36. Htoe Myar, “100 pieces of illegal padauk timber seized in Kayah State’s Htee-thea-ka-loe”, *Kantarawaddy Times*, 23 February 2018.
37. Bamforth, Lanjouw & Mortimer, “Conflict and Displacement in Karenni”, p.64.
38. See e.g., Karenni Civil Society Network, “Karenni civil society warns Myanmar government to stop undermining peace process”, Press Release, 31 October 2012.
39. Karenni Civil Society Network, “Press release on International Day of Action for Rivers”, 14 March 2016.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid.
43. Burma Environmental Working Group, “Resource Federalism”, p.50.
44. “Statement of Karenni Civil Society Organizations on International Rivers Day”, 14 March 2016.
45. Ibid.
46. Karenni Civil Society Network, “Press release on International Day of Action for Rivers”, 14 March 2016.
47. Nyein Nyein, “Karen Villagers Protest Hatgyi Dam, Other Projects on Salween River”, *The Irrawaddy* 14 March 2018.
48. Ibid. Ironically, the historic lack of

transparency over economic and development affairs has been undermining public confidence during a time when electricity supplies are finally reported to be increasing: see, Burke, Williams, Barron, Jolliffe & Carr, "The Contested Areas of Myanmar", p.41. The 2014 Population and Housing Census claimed that 48.6 per cent of households questioned now use electricity for lighting. But given community displacement and lack of access to remote areas, this figure is not considered by local people to provide a statewide picture. In April this year, local residents also criticised plans by the Kayah State Ministry of Finance and Planning to use the increased power generation to revive a failed industrial zone in Loikaw as a false promise: see, Hein Ko Soe, "Kayah residents slam 'fake industrial zone'", *Frontier Myanmar*, 12 April 2018.

49. Interview with Saw Eh Say, Kayah Earthrights Action Network, 5 February 2016.
50. Interview with Ah Mu Htoo, Molo Women Mining Watch Network, 6 March 2016.
51. Ibid.
52. Molo Women Mining Watch Network, "Lost Paradise: Damaging Impact of Mawchi Tin Mines in Burma's Karenni State", December 2012, p.23.
53. Interview with Ah Mu Htoo, Molo Women Mining Watch Network, 6 March 2016.
54. For a snapshot report on the 2013 landscape, see, Molo Women Mining Watch Network, "Mining in Conflict Zones: A New Form of Military Offensive", 3 October 2013.
55. Interview with Banya Khung Aung, KSWDC, 5 February 2016.
56. "Mawchi Mines to Reopen Following Deadly Landslide", *Myanmar Times*, 22 October 2015.
57. Interview with Ah Mu Htoo, Molo Women Mining Watch Network, 6 March 2016.
58. Kyaw Lin Htoon, "Long-delayed mines law comes into effect", *Frontier Myanmar*, 2 March 2018.
59. Chan Mya Htwe & Thompson Chau, "Myanmar's approach to mining needs a rethink", *Myanmar Times*, 9 March 2018.
60. Seamus Martov, "Australian Mining Firm Faces 'Continuous Delays' in Karenni State", *The Irrawaddy*, 17 February 2017. See also, "Human rights shelved as Burma's Gov't awards mining contracts", *Karen News*, 4 October 2013.
61. Eumeralla Resources Limited, "Approval for Exploration Permit from Kayah State Government, Myanmar", ASX RELEASE [ASX:EUM], Australia, 1 July 2013.
62. See e.g., Seamus Martov, "Australian Mining Firm Faces 'Continuous Delays' in Karenni State", *The Irrawaddy*, 17 February 2017.
63. Interview with Philips Phoo Kae, Independent Tour Guide, 16 September 2017.
64. Interview with Pluh Reh, KNPP Liaison Officer, 24 February 2015.
65. Interview with Gay Nay Paw, KSWDC, Loikaw, 22 March 2017.
66. As quoted in *Kantarawaddy Times*, "KNPP objects to planned Loikaw cement factory as a breach of the ceasefire", 18 August 2017.
67. Htoe Mya, "KNPP objects to planned Loikaw cement factory as a breach of the ceasefire", *Kantarawaddy Times*, 18 August 2017.
68. Ibid.
69. Ibid.
70. Interview with Khun Myint Naing, Metta Development Foundation, 2 February 2016.
71. UNODC, "Southeast Asia Opium Survey 2015, Lao PDR, Myanmar", UNODC Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, Bangkok. In 2016 no opium survey was carried out in Myanmar, and in the 2017 survey data for Kayah State were not available. UNODC, "Myanmar Opium Survey", UNODC Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, Bangkok, December 2017.
72. Interview with Khun Myint Naing, Metta Development Foundation, 2 February 2016.
73. "Report from Third Myanmar Opium Farmers' Forum", Pyin Oo Lwin, 11–12 September 2015.
74. Ibid.
75. UNODC, "Southeast Asia Opium Survey 2015, Lao PDR, Myanmar".
76. Ibid.
77. Interview with Khun Myint Naing, Metta Development Foundation, 2 February 2016.
78. In February 2018 the Union Parliament enacted an amended version of the 1993 Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Law. The most significant change in the amended law is the elimination of the previous obligation for drug users to register at the Ministry of Health to undertake medical treatment. The amended law does not introduce any change to the situation of small-scale subsistence opium farmers. Poppy cultivation remains punishable with a minimum of 5 to 10 years of imprisonment. A month later, the government also introduced a National Drug Control Policy, which recognises that most people who grow opium in Myanmar are not criminals. The policy states that reduction of opium should be primarily carried out through the implementation of rural development. TNI, "Will Myanmar complete its transition towards an evidence-based approach to drug control?", 21 March 2018.
79. "Report from Third Myanmar Opium Farmers' Forum", Pyin Oo Lwin, 11–12 September 2015. There are various ways that money is demanded: for example, to prevent eradication or a form of "opium tax".
80. Interview with Khu Nye Reh, KNPP Loikaw Liaison Office Coordinator, 23 March 2017.

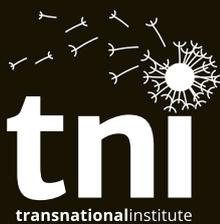
81. "Statement of the 4th Myanmar Opium Farmers' Forum", Loikaw, Kayah State, 9 May 2016.
82. See e.g., TNI, "Bouncing Back: Relapse in the Golden Triangle", TNI, Amsterdam, June 2014; S.H.A.N, "Druglords in Parliament", Shan Drug Watch Newsletter Issue 4, October 2011.
83. "Statement of the 4th Myanmar Opium Farmers' Forum", Loikaw, Kayah State, 9 May 2016.
84. Ei Ei Thu, "Kayah State re-opens some areas to tourists", Myanmar Times, 22 January 2018.
85. Interview with local representative of international organisation, Loikaw, 4 February 2016.
86. "Loikaw, Mae Hong Son sign sister-city deal to foster cooperation", Kantarawaddy Times, 18 March 2017.
87. "New Thai-Myanmar border trade zone nears completion", Frontier Myanmar, 6 May 2016.
88. Ei Ei Thu, "Kayah State re-opens some areas to tourists".
89. Interview with Jatuchatra Chommai, First Secretary, Royal Thai Embassy, Yangon, 28 September 2017.
90. The Border Points 9 to 16 run from north to south down the Kayah State border with Thailand. Some are much more active and accessible than others: notably points 9, 10, 13 and 14.
91. Interview with Khun Bedu, Kayan National Party, Loikaw, February 2016.
92. Interview with Jatuchatra Chommai, First Secretary, Royal Thai Embassy, Yangon, 28 September 2017
93. See e.g., Edith Mirante, "Hostages to Tourism", Cultural Survival Quarterly Magazine, March 1990.
94. Interview with Mu Gloria, HCKNU Secretary, 23 March 2017.
95. "The Cape Town Declaration on Responsible Tourism", International Conference on Responsible Tourism in Destinations, 2002.
96. Interview with Father Albino, KMSS Loikaw, 29 August 2013.
97. "Overview of the Sep 2017 3W", (Who is doing What, Where), Kayah State, Myanmar Information Management Unit (MIMU), September 2017. International projects include: the EU-funded "Promoting Sustainable Peace and Resiliency in Kayah (PROSPER)", a consortium led by the Mercy Corps that includes International Rescue Committee, The Border Consortium, Nyein (Shalom) Foundation, Karuna Myanmar Social Services Loikaw and the Association of Volunteers in International Service; the National Community Driven Development Project, which is financed by the World Bank; the 3MDG Fund, which works on health system strengthening in projects implemented in Kayah State by the International Organization for Migration and International Rescue Committee; and Pact Myanmar which works on community development and, it was reported in February 2018, will receive funding from the United States Agency for International Development.
98. Interview with members of Kay Htoe Boe, 30 August 2013.
99. Interview with Ah Mu Htoo, Karenni Evergreen Coordinator (at that time), 25 February 2015.
100. Interview with Sai Naing Naing Htwe, 2 February 2016.
101. "Karenni Community Organisations hit out at Norwegian Led Peace Program", Karen News, 11 December 2014.
102. Interview with U Saw Lwin, KNLP Joint General Secretary 1, 4 February 2016.
103. Interview with Kun Soe, KNGY, 4 February 2016.
104. See e.g., Mark Duffield, *Global Governance and the New Wars: the Merging of Development and Security* (London: Zed Books, 2014).
105. These principles are, in theory, supported in Myanmar by many INGOs and the multi-donor 3MDG fund: <http://www.conflictsensitivity.org/donno-harm-local-capacities-for-peace-project/>
106. See e.g., "Myanmar: Health Care in a Changing National Landscape: Lessons, Challenges and Aspirations on the Way Forward", Mahidol-Oxford Tropical Medicine Research Unit, March 2017: http://www.shoklo-unit.com/sites/default/files/reports/special-report/healthcare_in_a_changing_national_landscape_seminar_report.pdf
107. For an analysis in the Myanmar context, see, Ashley South, "'Hybrid Governance' and the Politics of Legitimacy in the Myanmar Peace Process", *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, November 2017.
108. See e.g., "OCHA on Message: Humanitarian Principles", June 2012. See also, "The Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement", announced in Vienna in 1965 by the 20th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

Kayah State, historically known as “Karenni State”, is an example of the reform dilemmas that the ethnic nationality peoples in Myanmar face today. Although the country’s smallest state, it reflects many of the challenges in peace-building and socio-political transition that need resolution in Myanmar at large: political impasse, a multiplicity of conflict actors, contested natural resources, land grabbing, humanitarian suffering, and divided communities seeking to rebuild after more than six decades of civil war.

The pressures on Kayah State are presently immense. After decades of conflict, the Karenni peoples are determined that their struggle for political and ethnic rights keeps pace with countrywide endeavours for national peace and democratic change. They have been too often forgotten in the past. But as transitional challenges deepen, there is a real risk of the emergence of a new generation of grievances that could undermine the limited achievements of reform so far even before real political dialogue has begun.

This report seeks to analyse the challenges now facing Kayah State at a critical moment in the transition from military rule. As always in Myanmar, a balanced understanding of local perspectives and realities is vital in a territory that reflects different ethnic, religious and political perspectives. In the case of Kayah State, the difficulties are exacerbated by the territory’s isolation from outside engagement during the long decades of civil war. This lack of access has resulted in a dearth of research and reporting on the political conflicts that have had a devastating impact on the ground. As initiatives continue to build a better future, the impoverishment and socio-economic challenges facing many communities in Kayah State are little documented or understood.

Kayah State should not be considered an exceptional or peripheral land on a remote frontier in Asia but an integral example of the failures of post-colonial Myanmar. It is vital that, in the coming years, Kayah State becomes a model for informed and progressive change rather than a symbol for marginalisation and neglect into yet another era of divided and unrepresentative government.



The Transnational Institute (TNI) is an international research and advocacy institute committed to building a just, democratic and sustainable planet. For more than 40 years, TNI has served as a unique nexus between social movements, engaged scholars and policy makers.

TNI Myanmar Programme:

The advent of a new civilian government in Myanmar has raised hopes for fundamental reforms and an end to one of the longest running armed conflicts in the world. TNI’s Myanmar Programme aims to strengthen (ethnic) civil society and political actors in dealing with the challenges brought about by the rapid opening-up of the country, while also working to bring about an inclusive and sustainable peace. TNI has developed a unique expertise on Myanmar’s ethnic regions. In its Myanmar programme TNI’s work on agrarian justice, alternative development and a humane drugs policy come together.

www.TNI.org