

Open letter from 191 CSOs urging the Eight NCA-signatory EAOs to reconsider their proposal to negotiate with the Military's SAC Council

May 30th 2021

We, the 191 Civil Society Organizations send this open letter urging a serious rethink of the proposal from eight of the NCA signatories Ethnic Armed Organizations that was sent on May 11, requesting individuals and countries that stood witness to the NCA process to intervene and negotiate with the military council. We are convinced that this proposal goes in the wrong direction and will only lead to further political devastation with no good outcomes for the country.

The 10-year saga of the “peace process” initiated by the quasi-civilian government of U Thein Sein, followed by the return to dictatorship, has proven that the Burmese military has simply been implementing a political strategy to escape international pressure while upholding its (3) nationalistic objectives of “non-disintegration of the Union”, “non-disintegration of national solidarity” and “perpetuation of (military) sovereignty” in accord with its 2008 Nargis Constitution.

Since the NCA process started, substantial international pressure was lifted from the Burmese military, giving it opportunities to expand its businesses both domestically and internationally, putting the military in a better financial position to equip itself with advanced weaponry and surveillance tools. Using enhanced military surveillance systems and heavy weaponry in their combat strategies while using the pretext of “development,” they have been expanding their areas of control into territories of both signatory and non-signatory EAO's both throughout the NCA “peace process” and since the February coup d'état.

Throughout the NCA period the Burmese army continued to commit human rights violations in many ethnic areas, including wrongful arrests, torture, killings, looting and theft of civilians' property. Farmlands, schools and homes of civilians' have been damaged by deliberate semi-random artillery shelling. The Burma army continued to commit crimes of sexual violence against women and the genocide of the Rohingya. Statues of General Aung San have been forcibly built in ethnic states, disregarding wishes of local ethnic communities while their own sacred monuments have not been allowed. The NCA simply could not prevent gross human rights violations by the Burmese army, nor did it provide any remedy mechanisms for civilians whose human rights are violated. The NCA is not legally binding and thus it could not, and cannot, protect the people or prosecute perpetrators of abuses.

Since the peace process started consensus has been lacking among all the EAO's about the NCA agreement. In fact, the NCA “peace process” has mostly served the military's interests and has led to fragmentation and division among ethnic forces. Thus, we are far from forging ahead with the federal democratic union everyone wishes for. In the end only 10 EAOs signed the NCA. The 10 year journey of the peace process that happened around the tables of air-conditioned hotel rooms has proven to be nothing more than a pretense of a temporary peace.

It is an act of blasphemy to all the comrades and allies of the revolution for the (8) EAOs out of (10) signatories to demand from the witnesses of the NCA an intervention of negotiation with the military to solve the current political crisis which is a consequence of the military coup.

The proposal of such a demand ignores not only the multi-generational oppression and abuses committed by the military, but also its recent and ongoing crimes such as arbitrary arrests, beatings and killing of demonstrators and medics, airstrikes and bombings against civilian targets including villages, schools and clinics and the countless instances of torture, sexual violence and murder. It can be read as legitimizing the criminal human rights violations of the Tatmadaw military dictators and will only ensure their impunity.

To continue to act as though the NCA process also means EAOs effectively distancing themselves from their political goals which the process has repeatedly failed to address. To solve the political problems in Myanmar it is important to remember that the armed revolutions are rooted in demands for self-determination and equal rights for the non-Burman ethnic peoples. The NCA process will indeed lead to political suicide mission. It will create more factionalism and further derailment from the path to the goals of federal democracy and unity of the country. Aside from disregarding the painful lived experiences of the civilians, adherence to the military's NCA path will only create distrust toward the EAOs among the public and will result in their social punishment.

With loathing of the military at an all-time high across the nation, it is the best chance to work towards genuine federal democracy through elimination of the military dictatorship. We, the signatory CSOs, believe that by working together, the democratic forces and ethnic peoples can achieve our goal of mutual liberation. This is also the time for the EAOs to help facilitate understanding among the wider public about what federal democracy means, why EAOs have been fighting for decades, why they are allied to build a federal democratic system and why it is so important to work together.

Myanmar has gone through several military coups throughout its history and it is very clear that it is impossible to build a federal democracy through negotiation with military dictators. The only way to create a federal democracy is to fight against the racism and the military dictatorship together with the people's movements. We urge all the EAO's, including the signatories of the NCA to implement the following recommendations to uproot the common enemy and build federal democracy.

- In each EAO-controlled area to accelerate each organizations own implementation of security, good governance and rule of law by pronouncing its role as the only legitimate organization in those areas.
- To provide due protection to all civilians' lives and livelihood through the formation of a federal army as there are no organizations or governance structures able to adequately protect civilians under the military dictatorship.
- To provide protection and support to those in and working together with the CDM to halt the businesses and administration of the military dictatorship
- To develop and implement collaboration between democratic forces, ethnic liberation movements and all ethnic people, including Burmans, to work on a federal democratic constitution that guarantees human rights standards, equality and self-determination of the ethnic peoples and to create a stable system of federal democracy in the country.

Lastly, we urge the EAO signatories of the NCA to announce that the realization of a satisfactory peace process through the Tatmadaw-dominated NCA is impossible and that the NCA is now null and void. We urge the EAOs to instead join together with all

the forces fighting to uproot the military dictatorship through both political, economic and armed struggles.

Sincerely,

On behalf of the (191) CSOs
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Note: Due to serious security concerns, names of the civil society organizations who endorsed and signed this open letter cannot be disclosed. The signed CSOs are those working for human rights, child rights, women's rights, LGBTQs rights, rule of law, social justice, federalism, peace, political prisoners, education, health, community based development, environmental conservation, natural resources management, land rights, forest conservation and climate crisis.