

Burma's Ethnic Challenge: From Aspirations to Solutions

The present time of political transition in Burma/Myanmar¹ is the most hopeful in terms of aspirations and potential since independence from Great Britain in 1948. Many outcomes, however, remain possible. There is still no inclusive political framework or national consensus that guarantees future peace, democracy and progress for all citizens.

As in any troubled country in transition, it appears good strategy to concentrate on the positives. Certainly, this has been the response of the international community towards the quasi-civilian government of President Thein Sein that assumed office in March 2011 from its military predecessor, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). As the doors to the country opened, international perceptions of Burma's government rapidly transformed from pariah status in the West to a pro-democracy model for the developing world. In the past eight months, Thein Sein – a former general and SPDC leader – has been welcomed as a state guest to the USA, Australia, UK, France, Norway and other European countries.

Of key importance, the start of the release of political prisoners, the relaxation of censorship, and the admission of Aung San Suu Kyi and National League for Democracy (NLD) candidates to parliament have instigated hopes that the new political system might be made to work. At the same time, new cease-fire agreements with a majority of the armed ethnic opposition groups in the country's borderlands have furthered expectations that real reform could be underway. Equally striking, economic change has fostered excitement that, after decades of conflict and humanitarian suffering, Burma could be on the brink of an economic boom on one of Asia's most strategic but impoverished crossroads.

Recommendations

To end the legacy of state failure, the present time of national transition must be used for inclusive solutions that involve all peoples of Burma. The most important changes in national politics have started in many decades. Now all sides have to halt military operations and engage in socio-political dialogue that includes government, military, ethnic, political and civil society representatives.

Political agreements will be essential to achieve lasting peace, democracy and ethnic rights. National reconciliation and equality must be the common aim. The divisive tradition of different agreements and processes with different ethnic and political groups must end.

In building peace and democracy, people-centred and pro-poor economic reforms are vital. Land-grabbing must halt, and development programmes should be appropriate, sustainable and undertaken with the consent of the local peoples.

Humanitarian aid should be prioritized for the most needy and vulnerable communities and not become a source of political advantage or division. As peace develops, internally displaced persons and refugees must be supported to return to their places of origin and to rebuild divided societies in the ethnic borderlands.

The international community must play a neutral and supportive role in the achievement of peace and democracy. National reform is at an early stage, and it is vital that ill-planned strategies or investments do not perpetuate political failures and ethnic injustice.

Such optimism and markers of reform by no means suggest that distressing events or regressive trends should be overlooked. After decades of political and ethnic conflict, the sentiment is widespread that the present time of state transition must be built upon to truly deliver peace and inclusive socio-political reform for all Burma's peoples. In a break from the repressive malaise under military rule, a new sense of energy and openness has begun in parts of the country.

After two years of the Thein Sein government, however, a cautious mood is also beginning to set in. There have been too many disappointments and injustices in Burma's past for simple optimism now. Despite many promises of reform, progressive change for many citizens has either not happened or is on the drawing boards and yet to be implemented.

For the moment, there are different centres of authority in national politics between the president, government, Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), armed forces and new legislative assemblies, while military officers and units still dominate many aspects of daily life in the field. Meanwhile many citizens continue to feel excluded from political representation and influence at both the community and national levels where the NLD and ethnic opposition parties are struggling to make impact. In essence, political change remains top-down after five decades of military rule, and democratic and ethnic reforms are still in their infancy.

Against this unsettled backdrop, regressive trends have continued. These include economic inequalities, land-grabbing, continued militarization and ethnic conflict² – the latter, most especially in the Kachin and Shan states but also Rakhine state and other parts of the country where violent Buddhist-Muslim communalism has taken place.³ A further 240,000 civilians have been internally displaced from their homes since the Thein Sein government assumed power⁴; loss of life and humanitarian suffering have continued; and, although confrontations have lately reduced, there seem no immediate solutions to political challenges that, in many cases, have existed since independence.

Thus, halfway through the life of Burma's first

elected parliament in five decades, a crucial stage has been reached. With the next general election not due until 2015, there are growing questions about reform direction and momentum. Government officials seek to project the present political, ethnic and economic difficulties as teething problems that will dissipate over time. In reality, history has long warned that their resolution is integral to future peace and democracy in the country. In particular, for domestic and international confidence to build, two key issues remain to be resolved: how the new political system will evolve and how the military's control over politics will devolve.

For this reason, while political manoeuvrings and ethnic ceasefire talks continue, it is essential that state failure and national divisions do not become sustained under a new incarnation of military-backed government. Important steps have been made in national reconciliation during the past two years. But promises and ceremonies will never be enough. The long-standing aspirations of Burma's peoples for peace and justice must find solutions during the present time of national transition. This can only be achieved through transparent and inclusive processes that truly address long-standing political and ethnic needs. Challenges must be faced up to – not downplayed or ignored.

Warnings from history

A lack of political experience or knowledge is often blamed for Burma's difficulties in national reform. In reality, the country has one of the most contested ethnic and political histories of all post-colonial territories in Asia. In a land of obvious natural and human resource potential, the present time of political transition is far from the first time that hopes have been raised of a stable and prosperous future. There have been four previous occasions of national expectation and dialogue. On each occasion, however, division and exclusion continued, providing the backdrop under which internal conflicts and military-dominated government developed and ultimately set in.

The consequences have been deep and must not be repeated. After over six decades of violence and political impasse, crises exist in

every area of national life, from the economy and environment to health and education. But among many failings, the marginalisation and suppression of different political and ethnic interests have become the most fundamental in a country where minority peoples make up an estimated third of the 60 million population. Nationwide peace and inclusive democracy have yet to be established.

The first lost opportunity in political transition was at independence in 1948. National hopes of a co-operative future had been raised by the 1947 Panglong conference where ethnic principles for the new Union were agreed. But with key parties already outside the new political system, the 1947 constitution was riddled with inconsistencies and never sufficient to bind the new Union together.⁵ The new parliamentary system was federal in intention but not in name. As socialist and communist supporters battled for control of government, armed conflict swept across the country to include Karen, Karenni, Mon, Rakhine and other ethnic groups who felt marginalised and took up arms to press for ethnic rights and self-determination. Thousands of lives were lost, the economy collapsed and a divided state of conflict took root. It was a devastating blow from which the country never recovered.⁶

A factionalised parliamentary system struggled on through the 1950s. But with insurgent groups (principally communist and ethnic) controlling much of the countryside, national authority and important sectors of the economy were increasingly taken over by the national armed forces, known as the Tatmadaw.

There was nevertheless a second period of hope for national political change following the first period of Tatmadaw rule, the “Military Caretaker” administration (1958-60). This occurred during 1960-62 when civilian government was returned in Burma’s third general election after independence. Prior to the military hand-over, Tatmadaw officers held peace talks with the insurgent Karen National Union (KNU: formed 1947) and, in a manner reminiscent of present political flowerings, a Federal Movement galvanised amongst ethnic politicians that led to a federal seminar in the then capital Rangoon.

Tensions, however, were rising in other parts of the country, especially among Shans and Kachins – the latter even more after Prime Minister U Nu promoted Buddhism as the official state religion (most Kachins are Christians). The status of Buddhism and religion is not a new or uncontested issue in Burma. Finally in March 1962, as U Nu made ready to address the federal seminar, Gen. Ne Win seized power in a military coup, ending Burma’s brief experience with parliamentary democracy. “Federalism is impossible,” he said. “It will destroy the Union.”⁷

A third opportunity for national political reform did briefly appear to occur under Gen. Ne Win’s “Burmese Way to Socialism” (1962-88). Despite the arrest of politicians and violent suppression of student protests, a nationwide Peace Parley took place in Rangoon during 1963-64 between the military government and different communist and ethnic forces. Socialist and non-aligned politics were then popular in the post-colonial world, and opposition groups were keen to hear the new government’s views. But once the totalitarian nature of Ne Win’s ambitions became clear, armed resistance quickly resumed. Subsequently, an Internal Unity Advisory Body to advise on a new constitution was formed that included U Nu and other political and ethnic leaders following their release from prison. But impasse soon followed, and U Nu went underground with political colleagues to launch an armed movement, allied with the KNU and other pro-federal ethnic forces in the Thai borderlands, to try and restore parliamentary democracy to the country.

U Nu’s campaign proved short-lived. It was not the first – or last – time that the attempt to join Burman and non-Burman forces in “united front” opposition would fail to bring down the central government.⁸ In 1974 a new constitution was imposed after a disputed national referendum. But Ne Win’s isolationist “Burmese Way to Socialism”, an odd mix of Buddhist, Marxist and nationalist principles, was never sufficient to resolve the country’s needs. As insurgencies and black markets flourished around the country’s borders, Burma declined even further over the next decade to Least Developed Country status at the United Nations as one of the world’s poorest states. The goals of “unity in diver-

sity” at Burma’s independence now seemed a very distant dream.

This backdrop of breakdown led to the fourth time of hope for national political change during 1988-90, which was inspired by the 1988 democracy uprising and remains fresh in national memory today.⁹ The initial protests, which were student-led, were suppressed with considerable loss of life, quashing the “hopes of an entire nation”.¹⁰ But, in their wake, they triggered a series of events that transformed the political landscape. Ne Win’s Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) and the insurgent Communist Party of Burma collapsed; a new military government, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC: reformed into SPDC in 1997), assumed power promising democratic and economic reforms; the new government offered ceasefires to ethnic opposition forces in the borderlands; and the newly-formed NLD and ethnic nationality allies won a landslide victory in the 1990 general election, Burma’s first in three decades. It was, said the NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi, Burma’s “second struggle for independence” – the first from colonial rule: the second from military dictatorship.¹¹

Repression, however, and political stasis soon set in again. For the next two decades Aung San Suu Kyi and democracy supporters were frequently arrested or imprisoned; the SLORC-SPDC government continued only slowly with a hand-picked National Convention to draw up a new constitution; the ruling generals created a new mass movement, the Union Solidarity and Development Association (reformed as USDP to participate in the 2010 elections) as a pro-Tatmadaw successor to the BSPP; economic reform largely remained on the drawing boards, with valuable business concessions mostly the reserve of regime favourites close to the SPDC chairman, Snr-Gen. Than Shwe; international opinion was divided between Western boycotts and Asian engagement; and, despite the spread of ethnic ceasefires, armed conflict continued in several borderlands. Fighting was especially acute in south and east Burma where student and Burman political activists who fled from urban areas had allied with the KNU and other pro-federal ethnic forces in a new cycle of anti-government fronts.¹²

As refugee numbers steadily rose, no decisive or inclusive moment arrived where all peoples and parties came together to politically discuss and agree Burma’s future. Eventually, the SPDC claimed that a new constitution was approved by a controversial referendum in May 2008 in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis in which over 130,000 people died. The pro-Tatmadaw USDP subsequently won the general election held in November 2010, widely regarded as not free and fair¹³, forming the basis for the Thein Sein government that assumed power in March 2011. But once again, political change was occurring in a nationally divided landscape. Due to repression and a lack of substantive reform, the NLD and its ethnic allies from the 1990 election had not taken part in drawing up the new constitution or general election; ethnic opposition forces – both with and without ceasefires – felt similarly excluded; and the new system of “disciplined democracy” was dominated by representatives of the USDP and Tatmadaw, the latter of which was reserved 25 per cent of all seats in the legislatures.

Thus, as Snr-Gen. Than Shwe prepared to transfer government leadership to President Thein Sein in March 2011, there were few domestic and international expectations of significant or rapid reform. Burma was still a far from united country, and political power remained in the hands of a Tatmadaw-backed and mostly ethnic Burman elite who had, in effect, ruled the country since 1962.

In fact, from this unpromising start, a fifth moment of countrywide aspiration for national change was just about to begin.¹⁴

Contemporary landscape

In the United Kingdom in July 2013, President Thein Sein made a historic promise that claimed international attention: “I guarantee to you that by the end of this year there will be no prisoners of conscience...the guns will go silent everywhere in Myanmar for the very first time in over sixty years”. In a carefully-scripted speech, he outlined three components in national transformation: political, from a state-centred to free market economy, and from armed conflict to a “just and sustainable peace”. “We are aiming for nothing

less than a transition from half a century of military rule and authoritarianism to democracy,” he said.¹⁵

Shortly afterwards, the killing of demonstrators by the security services during Burma’s short-lived democracy summer was mourned on the 25th anniversary of the symbolic “8-8-88” in a series of public events attended for the first time by ruling and opposition party members, many of whom had returned from exile.

As such events testify, there has been a remarkable change in the political climate in Burma during the past two years. Despite this, many citizens continue to question how deep and sustained the present state transformation will truly be. For the moment, although the national political system has apparently broadened, the same Tatmadaw-backed elite continues to control the government and transitional process.

This poses a central dilemma. Over two years into the life of the Thein Sein government, there is still no indication as to whether faster and more radical reforms can be brought about by immediate dialogue and constitutional change based upon ethnic and pro-democracy group views or whether a long-term process of evolutionary reforms is envisaged by government leaders that will maintain pro-Tatmadaw domination in the meantime. How this challenge is answered will have epoch-shaping implications for the course of Burmese politics in the coming decade.

As in previous times of national change, there is no pre-ordained script for political events. President Thein Sein’s leadership has generally been respected. But the present political landscape is confusing and often rife with speculation, spreading uncertainties among both ruling and opposition parties who recognise that many issues need to be resolved before the next general election in 2015. Among obvious emergencies, the upsurge in Buddhist-Muslim communal violence or renewed conflict in the Kachin region, in which uncounted lives have been lost, are reflective of deep crises within the country.¹⁶ One-party rule may be at an end. But a new consensus and institutional balance in political relationships are yet to be found between the three main groupings in post-independence

politics: military, pro-democracy and ethnic nationality. Burma’s destiny and their very political futures are at stake.

On the government side, leaders of the ruling USDP know that, on a free and fair vote, their party is unlikely to win the 2015 election now that the NLD and ethnic nationality movements are taking part in the new political system. Against expectation, the new legislatures in Nay Pyi Taw have taken on a broader range of political and economic issues for discussion and legislation than initially anticipated (although not in the ethnic states and regions¹⁷). But parliamentary processes, which are dominated by USDP and Tatmadaw members, have not, so far, led to significantly different reforms that reflect democratic hopes and ethnic aspirations. Instead, laws on such issues as land and investment, media and the formation of associations have remained restrictive or favoured the existing status quo, fuelling opposition criticism.¹⁸ In addition, although President Thein Sein won praise for suspending the China-backed Myitsone hydro-electric dam for the life of the current parliament, protests have continued – and been repressed – over other controversial economic projects agreed under the SPDC government, including the Letpadaung copper mine and the oil and gas pipelines to China.¹⁹

In general, however, President Thein Sein has achieved a far more stable and accepted transition in national government than even his most enthusiastic supporters expected when he assumed office in 2011. By reaching out to the NLD and ethnic opposition groups, Thein Sein has been able to win a vital breathing space for the post-SPDC government, which has been quickly rewarded by the loosening in Western sanctions. But while the international community has been testing new methods of engagement in a long-isolated country, Burma’s leading stakeholders have, in many respects, already moved on to a new generation of challenges and obstacles.

Many difficulties exist within the government, reflecting institutional and personal tensions as six decades of totalitarian rule begin to unwind. Different and often competing centres of authority have started to appear. Contradictory opinions and personal rivalries exist between supposedly reformist and hard-

A. Ethnic Political Parties

1. Elected to the legislatures (2010)

All Mon Regions Democracy Party^a
Chin National Party^a
Chin Progressive Party
Ethnic National Development Party^a
Inn National Development Party^a
Kayan National Party^a
Kayin People's Party
Kayin State Democracy and Development Party^b

Lahu National Development Party^c
Pao National Organisation^{a,b}
Phalon-Sawaw [Pwo-Sgaw] Democratic Party^a
Rakhine Nationalities Development Party^a
Shan Nationalities Democratic Party^a
Ta-ang (Palaung) National Party^{a,b}
Unity and Democracy Party of Kachin State^d
Wa Democratic Party^a

^a Nationalities Brotherhood Federation participant

^b ceasefire group connection

^c party from 1990 election

^d government-backed

2. Electoral parties that did not win seats (2010)

All National Races Unity and Development Party (Kayah State)^a
Asho Chin National Party^{b,c}
Danu National Democracy Party^{b,c}
Kachin State Progressive Party^d
Kaman National Progressive Party
Khami National Development Party
Kokang Democracy and Unity Party^e

Mro or Khami National Solidarity Organisation^e
Northern Shan State Progressive Party^d
Rakhine State National Force
Tai-leng (Red Shan) Nationalities Development Party^{b,c}
Wa National Unity Party^{b,e}

^a withdrew due to political pressures

^b Nationalities Brotherhood Federation participant

^c formed 2012

^d registration not accepted due to ceasefire group connection

^e party from 1990 election

3. Parties from 1990 election in 2002 United Nationalities Alliance (boycotted 2010 election)

Arakan League for Democracy^a
Chin National League for Democracy
Kachin State National Congress for Democracy
Kayah State All Nationalities League for Democracy

Kayin (Karen) National Congress for Democracy
Mon National Democratic Front^a
Shan Nationalities League for Democracy^a
United Nationalities League for Democracy
Zomi National Congress^a

^a allied in the 1998 Committee Representing the People's Parliament with the National League for Democracy

line officials in the capital Nay Pyi Taw²⁰; President Thein Sein has preferred to oversee such policy areas as the economy and ethnic ceasefires through his own advisors and committees²¹; the USDP chairman ex-Gen. Shwe Mann, who has ambitions to become the next President, has sought to promote political

change and ethnic peace through parliament where he is Speaker²²; economic cronyism and vested interests from the SPDC era have proven hard to shift²³; Tatmadaw officers have frequently appeared to be initiating their own operations in the field without regard to Presidential orders²⁴; and, in case there was

any doubt, commander-in-chief Snr-Gen. Min Aung Hlaing reminded the country on Armed Forces Day 2013 that the Tatmadaw would continue to play a leading role in national politics in accordance with the 2008 constitution in implementing the new system of democracy.²⁵

Eventually in August, to apparently clarify some of these ambiguities, President Thein Sein announced that, in future, he would lead the transitional process himself by creating a separate reforms committee because of the poor performance of the government.²⁶ Action, he said, would be taken against officials who were corrupt, lacked transparency, neglected the people's grievances or monopolized ministerial authority. The latter, he warned, "are still following the old system of central command and will not submit to devolution of their power and authority."²⁷

Such words appeared a bold statement of intent and, if implemented, would portend an important break with the centralised and undemocratic system of national government in the past. There is, however, a very long way to go, and it is still far from clear how government authority will be balanced between Burma's politicians and soldiers in the future. Indeed, while the USDP's electoral future may be uncertain, the Tatmadaw's national outreach actually looks greater in 2013 than in any time in post-colonial history through a combination of political change, ethnic ceasefires and military deployments and operations since Thein Sein assumed office. In short, in the new democratic era, the long-standing questions over the Tatmadaw's role in national life and politics have yet to be answered.

Many of the same ambiguities and difficulties over national organisation and politics have affected the NLD and Burma's re nascent democracy movement since the SPDC step-down. The NLD's advent to the legislatures in the 2012 by-elections, albeit with just 43 seats, has reflected the significant change in the political environment that has seen the gradual release of political prisoners and relaxation in media and political controls during the past two years. However, mirroring political experiences in the parliamentary era of the 1950s, greater societal freedom by no means indicates that Burma has suddenly

become a democratic arcadia. Unless new restrictions or emergencies intercede, the NLD is still expected to become the majority party in the next general election in 2015. But political opinion is growing that the road to victory – and potentially government – is by no means as smooth or certain as many citizens and international sympathizers once hoped that it would be.

A host of challenges face the NLD on the road to 2015, and pro-democracy and ethnic opposition supporters have voiced increasing criticisms of the party that has spearheaded the democracy movement since 1988. A number of challenges stand out. After years of suppression, the NLD's aging leadership has faced difficulties in re-forging a national party²⁸; the NLD is very dependent on changing the 2008 constitution in a parliament where it is out-numbered for future party progress, including for Aung San Suu Kyi to become President²⁹; by compromising with the Thein Sein government, the NLD has lost its credentials among many activists and communities as the leading hope for radical reform; in particular, Kachin, Muslim and other non-Burman groups have been disappointed by the apparent reluctance of the NLD to speak up for their interests and against abuses since entering parliament³⁰; Burman-majority communities, too, have criticised the NLD's reticent performance, including protestors against the Letpadaung copper mine³¹; and, with the party now represented in Nay Pyi Taw, rumours have flourished about political relationships in the "chess-games" between NLD and government leaders, especially Aung San Suu Kyi, Thein Sein and Shwe Mann.³²

Certainly, for the moment, the NLD has not made a significant parliamentary mark nor had popular impact on ameliorating the major political crises of the time, including land-grabbing, the Kachin conflict and Buddhist-Muslim communal violence. In this vacuum, Min Ko Naing and 88 Generation Student leaders have often been a more vocal presence in reflecting social and national concerns. In consequence, the likelihood has grown that members of the 88 Generation Students and other pro-democracy supporters will form their own party to stand in the 2015 polls, placing particular emphasis on political inclusiveness and ethnic reconciliation.³³

For their part, NLD leaders are quick to point out that, as yet, they have no real political power and, after six decades of military rule, the party has had to act very carefully to keep rapprochement with the government and Tatmadaw moving. A primary goal has been to ensure that there is no regression to the pervasive repression of the past and, they argue, the party's pragmatism in working with government and business realities has underpinned the improved socio-political environment in much of the country.³⁴ From time to time, too, NLD leaders have been very explicit in their criticisms of the slow pace of reform. Most obviously, Aung San Suu Kyi reflected public frustrations when she told the party's Central Executive Committee last May: "The last three years saw no tangible changes, especially in [the area of] the rule of law and the peace process." "Only a desire for change," she warned, "is not enough."³⁵

In summary, the NLD knows that it still has much to achieve – both nationally and internally – if it is to continue leading popular aspirations for democracy and determine the course of national politics through parliament and the 2015 general election.

Finally, the situation of the third key grouping in national politics – the ethnic nationality – is also uncertain and complex, as the national landscape undergoes its most significant transformation since the 1960s. Whether in parliament, ceasefires or not, many ethnic groups still feel excluded from national politics. The result is an array of actions by different parties, with many nationality leaders believing that government and Tatmadaw leaders are continuing to play a game of "divide and rule" rather than resolve the country's ethnic challenges during another key time of political change (see Charts, A, B and C).

In general, as in 1948, 1962 and 1988, ethnic parties have returned to demands for a federal union. Since the Thein Sein government assumed office, calls for a federal system of government have been increasingly expressed by different ethnic groups and parties – both inside and outside of parliament.

In voicing federal demands, three groups stand out: the 15-party electoral Nationalities Brotherhood Federation (NBF), which

has intentions to run as a single Federal Union Party in the next general election³⁶; members of the 9-party United Nationalities Alliance (UNA), which won seats in the 1990 general election but, like the NLD, did not stand in the 2010 polls³⁷; and the 11-party United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC), which includes both ceasefire and non-ceasefire groups that want a political agreement with the government before a nationwide ceasefire.³⁸ As the UNFC recently announced following a conference that included NBF, UNA and other opposition members, their goal is "to form the present Union of Burma/Myanmar into a Federal Union of national states and nationalities states, having national equality and self-determination".³⁹

Beneath this surface unity, however, the ethnic landscape is highly fragmented. Many examples can be highlighted. Ceasefires have yet to be formalised in northeast Burma where the Tatmadaw, sometimes in apparent contradiction of President Thein Sein's orders, has maintained military operations against the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) and its allies, the Shan State Army-North (SSA-N) and Ta-ang (Palaung) National Liberation Army (TNLA)⁴⁰; as result of conflict, another 240,000 civilians have been internally displaced since the Thein Sein government took office, principally in the Kachin, Rakhine and Shan states⁴¹; although relationships have been improving, there are political differences between nationality parties that won seats in the 2010 general election and those from the 1990 polls that did not stand in 2010⁴²; among armed opposition groups, there are also differences of strategy between the UNFC and a Working Group on Ethnic Coordination (WGEC), which is supported by the Euro-Burma Office, over whether political agreements with the government must precede a formal nationwide ceasefire⁴³; the Tatmadaw is continuing to promote local militia and ethnic Border Guard Forces against opposition groups in the field (see Chart C)⁴⁴; and there remain a host of issues of local importance that are the source of continuing tensions. Amongst these, the rights of Muslims, sometimes known as Rohingya, in the Rakhine state or the demand of Burma's strongest armed opposition force, the United Wa State Army, for a separate

B. Armed Ethnic Opposition Groups

Arakan Liberation Party ^{a,b}	National Socialist Council Nagaland (Khaplang faction) ^a
Arakan Army	National United Party Arakan/Arakan National Council ^c
Chin National Front ^{a,b,c}	New Mon State Party ^{b,c,d}
Democratic Karen Benevolent Army ^d	Pao National Liberation Organisation ^{a,c}
Hongsawatoi Restoration Party	Rohingya Solidarity Organization
Kachin Independence Organisation ^{b,c,e}	Shan State Army-North ^{b,c,d}
Karen National Union ^{a,b,c}	Shan State Army-South ^a
KNU/KNLA Peace Council ^d	Ta-ang (Palaung) National Liberation Army ^c
Karenni National Progressive Party ^{a,b,c}	United Wa State Army ^d
Kayan New Land Party ^{b,d}	Wa National Organisation ^c
Lahu Democratic Union ^{b,c}	All Burma Students Democratic Front ^{a,f}
National Democratic Alliance Army (East Shan State) ^d	

^a Post-2011 ceasefire

^b Present or former National Democratic Front member

^c United Nationalities Federal Council member

^d SPDC era ceasefire, continued post-2011

^e SPDC era ceasefire, broke down 2011

^f Non-nationality force, based in ethnic territories

state within Shan state presently stand out for their potential to cause instability within the country.⁴⁵

To answer such countrywide complexity, ethnic leaders returned during 2013 to the popular saying of the late Shan leader, Chao Tzang Yawngwhe: “Diverse actions: common aims”.⁴⁶ But, in private, concerns have been increasing that, until a common platform and opportunity for political agreements are achieved, there is little likelihood of a breakthrough moment in resolving the country’s ethnic crises. Equally disturbing, although the gradual decrease in armed conflict has been welcomed in communities around the country, a plethora of new crises has caused further worries during the past two years, reflecting the uncertain dynamics of change in the post-SPDC era. All political groupings – whether military, pro-democracy or ethnic – have been challenged as to how to respond.

Outstanding amongst these issues is the emergence of an assertive Buddhist nationalism, spearheaded by the monk-led “969” movement, which has been reflected in Buddhist-Muslim communal violence that originated in the Rakhine state but subsequently spread to Meiktila and other towns in central and southern Burma and Lashio in the Shan state. With the security services

often standing by, over 250 civilians have been killed (predominantly Muslim) and over 140,000 displaced from their homes (also mostly Muslim), raising fundamental questions about the achievement of multi-cultural democracy in Burma.⁴⁷

All leading political voices in the country have struggled to acknowledge the nature of the crisis and seek inclusive solutions. A government-appointed commission into the Rakhine state violence suggested the present “separation” of the communities be continued and the size of Muslim families be limited, while President Thein Sein himself defended the 969 movement leader, U Wirathu, as “a son of Lord Buddha” following criticisms in the international media⁴⁸; Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD have also echoed the government defence that the problem is essentially one of the law and citizenship⁴⁹; and while Christian and other minority groups fear what communal tensions might presage⁵⁰, the initial anti-Muslim impetus has come from Rakhine communities, themselves a nationality people claiming ethnic rights, who allege that the illegal immigration of “Bengalis” from India and Bangladesh into their lands is the underlying cause of communal conflict. The historic existence of Muslim communities in the territory is not in doubt. But with politi-

C. Border Guard Forces and Militia

1. Border Guard Forces (established 2009-10)

BGF Battalion Number	Former Name/Description
BGF 1001-3	New Democratic Army-Kachin ^{a b}
BGF 1004-5	Karenni Nationalities Peoples Liberation Front ^a
BGF 1006	Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army-Kokang ^{a b}
BGF 1007	Lahu militia, Mongton, Shan state ^c
BGF 1008	Akha militia, Mongyawng, Shan state ^c
BGF 1009	Lahu militia, Tachilek-Mongkoe, Shan state ^c
BGF 1010	Wa militia, Markmang, Shan state ^c
BGF 1011-22	Democratic Karen Buddhist Army ^{a b}
BGF 1023	Karen Peace Force (ex-KNU 16 th battalion) ^{a b}

^a former ceasefire group

^b connected party or leaders won seats in 2010 election

^c former Tatmadaw-controlled militia

2. Ceasefire groups or breakaway factions that have become militia (pyithusit)

Kachin Defence Army (ex-KIO): now Kaungkha Militia

Lasang Awng Wa Peace Group (ex-KIO)

Mon Peace Defence Group (ex-NMSP)

Mong Tai Army Homein (Homong) Region

Pao National Organisation^a

Palaung State Liberation Party^a

Shan State Army-North (3 and 7 Brigades)

^a Connected party or leaders won seats in 2010 election

3. Other militia under Tatmadaw Regional Commands

There are over 50 local militia, and their titles vary. The strongest are in the Shan state. The best-known include:

Common Name	Location
Pansay Militia ^a	Muse township
Kutkai Militia ^a	Kutkai township
Tar Moe Nye Militia ^a	Kutkai township
Mong Paw Militia ^a	Muse township
Mangpang Militia	Tangyan township
Monekoe/Phaunghsai Militia	Mongko township
Monhin/Monha Militia	Mongyai township
Ahdang Militia	Putao township, Kachin state

^a leader won seat in 2010 election

cal and economic grievances unaddressed, Rakhine leaders feel that their very identity is under threat.⁵¹

Similar alienation and humanitarian needs face other conflict-torn communities around the country. After decades of conflict, there are currently an estimated 650,000 internally-

displaced persons (IDPs) in Burma's ethnic borderlands, as well as over 130,000 refugees (mostly Karens) and as many as two million migrants, many of them unregistered, in Thailand.⁵² But at the very moment of ceasefires when displaced persons are hoping to return home, ethnic leaders fear that new obstacles are being put in their way that will

prevent political solutions and the rebuilding of damaged communities.⁵³

Such marginalisation is already having a negative impact on ethnic nationality perceptions of government change. In particular, new land laws and land-grabbing by business, Tatmadaw and other vested interests since Thein Sein assumed office have been underpinning further community displacement and impoverishment on a major scale.⁵⁴ Due to popular protests, the China-backed Myitsone dam in the Kachin state is currently suspended by President Thein Sein. But with domestic and international investors lobbying hard, both the Myitsone dam and such contested programmes as the Dawei Development Project with Thailand are eventually expected to go ahead. As isolation ends, the pressures on ethnic minority lands and resources are only increasing.

This, in turn, raises huge international questions that will have impact on internal events as Burma undergoes its most significant reorientation in regional geo-politics in a generation. The divisions between Asian engagement and Western boycotts are receding, but the consequences are still far from certain. Among international actors, China became dominant in Burma under the previous SPDC regime. As evidence of this relationship, the oil and gas pipelines to Yunnan province from the Rakhine state are both scheduled to come on-stream during 2013-14, bringing to fruition China's "two oceans" goal of access to both the Pacific and Indian Oceans. But in their wake, such mega deals are bringing to the surface a new sense of international competition over political and economic engagement in Burma. "Myanmar cleans house – China's worst nightmare?" the Financial Times questioned in April.⁵⁵ "No more irresponsible remarks", Xinhua countered in June as the first gas deliveries started. "Western criticism of the cross-border pipelines is totally irresponsible and ill-disposed."⁵⁶

Ethnic leaders, however, fear that, whoever the investors, few of the benefits from the host of economic projects currently envisaged or underway in their lands will go to the local peoples. Equally concerning, the government's intention to hold a national census in 2014, the most important since the

last British census in 1931, is only adding to concerns that minority groups could be further marginalised on Burma's social and political map.⁵⁷ Said the 2013 Magsaysay award winner, Seng Raw Lahpai of the Metta Development Foundation: "Of course, after decades of strife, the peoples of Myanmar want livelihood progress and social development. But, in a land of abundant human and natural resource potential, it is also vital that new projects are appropriate, sustainable and in consultation with the local peoples. The mistakes of the past should not be repeated."⁵⁸

Thus, as 2013 progressed, it was economic grievances that began to revive expressions of ethnic resentment under the Thein Sein government. Many ethnic parties called for a moratorium on large-scale investment projects until permanent political and ceasefire have been reached.⁵⁹ There were still hopes that peace talks could heal the political divisions. But in the community front-lines, there were also fears that economic tensions could spark the resumption of conflict. As the Irrawaddy magazine warned: "Peace be damned".⁶⁰

Outlook to the future

While the present political landscape is uncertain, there is no fundamental reason why peace and democratic transition should not take root in Burma. Precedent certainly suggests caution. But as UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Tomás Ojea Quintana has stressed, the challenge is to learn from the past to build a better future.⁶¹ And in Burma's case, the political lesson is quite outstanding: the recurring tragedy in post-colonial Burma is that no genuinely inclusive process of consultation and reform has ever been completed.

Importantly, then, although human rights violations have not ended, processes have been started under the Thein Sein government that mark a potentially significant change from previous eras. For a rare moment, formerly opposing parties have been talking about ways to address political and economic failings together. It is vital that this momentum should continue before new national divisions become entrenched. For this

to be achieved, significant compromise will be needed from leaders on all sides who have not often shown such qualities in the past.

At present, the framework for political transformation is following the seven-stage roadmap laid down by the former SPDC government of Snr-Gen. Than Shwe. Now in the seventh and final stage when parliamentarians are supposed to be building a “modern, developed and democratic nation”, both the government and Tatmadaw leaderships continue to be dominated by former and serving officers close to Than Shwe. As a result, although Thein Sein has won praise for appointing independent advisors (including exiles who have returned from abroad), the perception remains widespread that a continuity in reform cannot be guaranteed. There have been too many setbacks under military-backed governments in the past. As Harn Yawngnaw of the Euro-Burma Office recently summarised: “Can President Thein Sein be trusted?”⁶²

Against this backdrop, the identity of Burma’s next president following the 2015 general election remains a persistent subject of speculation, with three other ethnic Burman leaders also closely watched: parliament Speaker Shwe Mann, Tatmadaw chief Snr-Gen. Min Aung Hlaing and NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

Behind the personal politics, however, one undoubted advance is the more open social environment since Thein Sein took office. This provides much better opportunity for citizens to meet and discuss the many needs facing the country. Compared to the SPDC era when Burma was internationally bracketed with such repressed states as North Korea, there has been a sea-change in public discourse during the past two years that has been driven by a re-energised civil society and independent media – not the ruling elite.⁶³ Progress is not straightforward, and such crises as the Buddhist-Muslim violence have sometimes been blamed on excesses in the internet and new media.⁶⁴ But the ability for citizens to meet and exchange opinions about problems they must resolve together is a key step in building a peaceful and inclusive democracy. For far too long politics have been dominated by movements holding guns.

Diverse opinions can still be heard. But underpinning all debate is the very basic question as to whether the new political system is re-formable – and, if so, how? There have been arguments, for example, on the pros and cons of proportional representation to achieve political and ethnic balance in the legislatures⁶⁵; there is disagreement as to whether the 2008 constitution can really be changed by “amendment”, with the UNFC and ethnic allies preferring a “rewriting” start⁶⁶; some minority parties want to establish an ethnic state-based system, adding a new state for the Burman nationality as well⁶⁷; for its part, the NLD has pressed for changes to the constitutional qualifications for president by which Aung San Suu Kyi is currently barred⁶⁸; and last but not least, while opposition parties want to end reserved seats for military officers in the legislatures, Tatmadaw leaders have continued to assert their role as protectors of the 2008 constitution during the transition to democracy.⁶⁹

Importantly, then, although dominated by USDP and Tatmadaw representatives, a parliamentary committee has been formed to review the constitution. Furthermore, after many years of government taboo, discussions on the critical issue of federalism no longer appear to be barred. Parliament Speaker Shwe Mann has spoken of the need to achieve a federal system that is suitable for the country⁷⁰; Aung San Suu Kyi, the NLD and UNA leaders have agreed to work together for a federal system through parliamentary processes⁷¹; UNFC, NBF and UNA members have committed to work together for the achievement of federalism⁷²; community-based organisations have also backed these goals, with civil society groups marking the 25th year anniversary of the 8-8-88 protests by calling for a “democratic federal state”⁷³; and, during a time of religious tension, faith-based groups have expressed their support for pro-federal change. “This nation belongs to all and a true federalism will bring lasting peace and development,” the Catholic Bishops’ Conference recently stated.⁷⁴

It needs to be stressed, however, that, despite the growing discussion of political ideas, it presently remains far from clear what kinds of amendments or reforms will be allowed during the life of the current parliament to meet popular aspirations for change. Indeed

Aung San Suu Kyi has herself described the 2008 constitution as the “world’s most difficult” to amend⁷⁵, and concerns have been growing that parliamentary legislation on such issues as land, investment, media and the formation of associations will turn out to be regressive.⁷⁶ Meanwhile government and Tatmadaw leaders have asserted that decision-making authority on key national issues continues to stand with them.⁷⁷ Indeed a recent discussion of a parliamentary investigation into land seizures was halted by a Tatmadaw MP who claimed that such reports were “creating a divide between the army and the people”.⁷⁸

Fuelling opposition concerns, militarization and violence have continued in several ethnic borderlands at a very time when the government has been promoting peace and reform. In particular, continuing Tatmadaw offensives against Kachin, Shan and Ta-ang forces in northeast Burma – the largest since the mid-1980s – have renewed historic doubts about the true intentions of military officers and the central government. For example, despite ceasefires with the government, both the Shan State Army-South (SSA-S) and SSA-N have each reported over 100 clashes with Tatmadaw units since their peace agreements in December 2011 and January 2012. “Ceasefire does not mean only we should stop fighting,” said the SSA-S leader Sao Yawdserk. “It means the Tatmadaw must stop too.”⁷⁹

In consequence, suspicions have continued that the current ceasefires are only a tactic to increase Tatmadaw control, whether through parliament in Nay Pyi Taw or military expansion (including pro-government militia) in the borderlands. In response, ceasefire leaders have asserted that they will never “entrust” the future of their peoples to the government. “We have revolutionary and political experience, and we are always alert,” the KNU peace negotiator Mahn Nyein Maung recently warned.⁸⁰

Thus, as in other periods of constitutional change, the fundamental challenge remains as to how ethnic peace and political inclusion will actually be achieved. On a progressive note, there can be no doubt that, since its 2011-12 inception, the “Union-level Peacemaking” initiative of President Thein Sein has secured the most important halt in coun-

trywide conflict since the 1963-64 “peace parley”. This has allowed internationally-supported programmes on such issues as resettlement, de-mining and development to be discussed and, in some cases, initiated for the first time in decades.⁸¹

As the months have passed, however, ethnic disquiet has not lessened. At present, the government claims ceasefires with 14 armed opposition forces through talks coordinated through the President’s Union-level Peacemaking Work Committee (UPWC), headed by Union Minister Aung Min, and the government-backed Myanmar Peace Centre (MPC) (see Chart B).⁸² But other than a general notion that aid and development programmes should be started while peace talks proceed from the “state” to “union” levels, there is no common agreement about how to further proceed. Different strategies have been proposed by different sides, including the UPWC, MPC, UNFC and WGEC, often supported by foreign actors and institutions that have sought to become involved in conflict resolution initiatives during the past two years.⁸³

Against this backdrop, final political or demilitarisation details are yet to be discussed. But, in procedural terms, there are five key elements that ethnic organisations believe are needed if lasting solutions are to be achieved. First, the objective must be nationwide peace and an end to the government practice of separate arrangements. Second, given the divided condition of the country, there should be extra-parliamentary as well as parliamentary processes to ensure national inclusion – in essence, a new political roadmap. Third, there needs to be a political agreement – or, at the very least, political guarantees – before permanent ceasefires and a nationwide peace can truly be declared. Fourth, political talks need to be transparent and inclusive, involving the Tatmadaw, political parties, civil society groups and other stakeholders, otherwise it is feared that future agreements will not be unilaterally binding. For this reason, an eventual Panglong-style meeting – often dubbed “Panglong Two” – will be required to revitalise the spirit of ethnic equality agreed at the first conference back in 1947. And last, because of the failures to implement treaties in the past, there needs to be

international observation at key stages to ensure that agreements are adhered to by the different sides.

If these five elements are in place, then it is believed that most of the difficulties in implementation – and they are likely to be many – can be faced up to and dealt with as they occur. These include political transition, land use rights and tenure security, demilitarization, resettlement and the consolidation of ethnic parties to stand in future elections. Clearly, massive challenges in political reform and conflict transformation lie ahead.

It is important to highlight, then, that many of these needs have been reflected in rhetorical terms by leaders on the different sides during recent speeches. According to President Thein Sein: “Only an inclusive democratic society based on equality for all citizens will ensure peace and stability, especially in a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-faith country such as ours.”⁸⁴ The parliament Speaker Shwe Mann, too, has acknowledged the difficulties in achieving “peace” and “national unity” if “federal” reform is not introduced through public participation and constitutional review. “Don’t leave it to parliament alone,” he warned.⁸⁵ And Aung San Suu Kyi spoke at the August 8-8-88 commemoration of the need to respect diversity in the achievement of democracy. “I urge all of you to be brave and united and to do what you should do for the good of the nation,” she said. “We have to negotiate differences to seek common ground.”⁸⁶

For their part, ethnic leaders across the country have also urged that the present time of political transition is used to establish peace and democracy. On the latest Karen Martyr’s Day, the KNU chairman Gen. Mutu Say Po publicly pledged: “Now is the time...for the Karen people to participate and cooperate with unity and boldly express the aspirations of the Karen people. The Karen people want to live in dignity.”⁸⁷ The same hopes have been expressed by leaders of electoral parties. “Nobody wants to see democracy triumph more than Burma’s ethnic nationalities,” said Hkun Htun Oo, a former political prisoner and chairman of the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy. “It’s a common responsibility

of all citizens to promote democracy’s principles, to broaden democracy’s scope, and to support democracy itself.”⁸⁸ And Dr Tu Ja, an ex-KIO leader seeking parliamentary election, recently reminded: “Until and unless we get political rights, we cannot end the civil war.”⁸⁹

Such conciliatory words, however, are as far as conflict transformation initiatives have currently reached. With many eyes focused on the 2015 general election, there is a dangerous risk of drift – as in previous times of government change – that could leave vital political issues unaddressed. The result is very often mixed signals in which it is difficult to build trust in national reform and inclusion.⁹⁰ For example, in a change from the past, the government finally allowed significant international observation of peace talks – a key ethnic demand – when the UN’s special envoy Vijay Nambiar (as well as Chinese representatives) attended a government meeting to discuss a new ceasefire with the KIO in May.⁹¹ Subsequently, however, international criticisms revived after the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Tomás Ojea Quintana faced restrictions on visits to the Kachin and Rakhine states.⁹²

Similarly, the government is continuing to push for a major ceasefire meeting to sign a nationwide accord, attended by international dignitaries, that will have echoes of Panglong – another ethnic demand. October or November are the latest proposed dates.⁹³ Many nationality leaders, however, are reluctant to take part in such a large and symbolic ceremony until Tatmadaw attacks have stopped and political agreements have been reached that truly guarantee ethnic rights and autonomy. For the moment, different sides have different views on political roadmaps to peace⁹⁴, and UNFC and UNA members are presently completing their own constitutional draft, based on a federal model, which they intend to present to future meetings, whether with the government, in parliament or at a Panglong-style meeting.⁹⁵

Evidently, then, there remain many vital issues to be decided in both technical and political processes towards peace. In the background, too, are international pressures that are only likely to multiply as foreign engagement increases. With economic competition

intensifying, stability in the ethnic borderlands will become ever more essential, and long-standing crises in such trans-national issues as security, refugees, migrant flow and illicit narcotics will have to be addressed. As an indicator of progress, Burma's Chair of ASEAN in 2014 will become a very closely watched event.

In summary, as attention begins to turn towards the 2015 general election, there are many signs of recognition that far greater scope of political reform and inclusion are still needed. As yet, however, there have not been obvious agreements when a different political future is discussed and revealed that will resolve ethnic and political discontent within the country. All citizens hope that this transformation will come soon. In the meantime, a fundamental question is still being asked: is the country truly on a path towards inclusive peace and democracy in which all peoples enjoy equal rights together – or will hopes and aspirations once again be disappointed? These remain critical times in determining Burma's future.

Conclusion

Ultimately, it must be for Burma's peoples to decide their political future. As in previous times of change, the present landscape looks uncertain and complex. But for the first time in decades, the issues of peace, democracy and promises of ethnic equality agreed at Burma's independence are back for national debate and attracting international attention. This marks an important change from the preceding years of conflict and malaise under military rule, and expectations are currently high.

It is vital therefore that opportunities are not lost and that the present generation of leaders succeed in achieving peace and justice where others before them have failed. Realism and honesty about the tasks ahead are essential. Burma's leaders and parties, on all sides of the political and ethnic spectrum, still have much to achieve.

A Note on Charts: 2013

The charts in this report are only intended as a snapshot of the ethnic landscape during a time of historic change. Parties vary considerably in size, influence and age. Some organisations date back to the parliamentary era (1947-62), while others have only been formed since 2010. As political and military transformation continues, not all details will be exact, and more change is certain in the run-up to the 2015 general election. The complexity reflects the divided national backdrop, and it is only likely to stabilise when inclusive political agreements are achieved.

Notes

1. In 1989 the then military government changed the official name from Burma to Myanmar. They are alternative forms in the Burmese language, but their use has become a politicised issue. Although this is changing, Myanmar is not yet commonly used in the English language. For consistency, Burma will be used in this report. This is not intended as a political statement.
2. See e.g., John Buchanan, Tom Kramer and Kevin Woods, *Developing Disparity: Regional Investment in Burma's Borderlands*, BCN-TNI, Amsterdam, 2013; "Access Denied: Land Rights and Ethnic Conflict in Burma", TNI-BCN Burma Policy Briefing Nr 11, May 2013.
3. See e.g., "The Kachin Crisis: Peace Must Prevail", TNI-BCN Burma Policy Briefing Nr 10, March 2013; Physicians for Human Rights, "Patterns of Anti-Muslim Violence in Burma: A Call for Accountability and Prevention", August 2013; IRIN, "Rakhine sectarian violence – one year on", 13 June 2013; International Crisis Group, "The Dark Side of Transition: Violence Against Muslims in Myanmar", Asia Report Nr 251, 1 October 2013.
4. It is estimated that there are 140,000 displaced persons in the Rakhine state and 100,000 in the Kachin region: UNHCR, "UNHCR appeals for dialogue following IDP violence in Myanmar", 13 August 2013; UNOCHA, "Myanmar: Internal Displacement Snapshot – Kachin and northern Shan States (July 2013)".
5. For example, important Karen, Karenni and Mon groups, as well as communist, boycotted or were missing from the 1947 general election. In addition, the Panglong agreement only included Chin, Kachin and Shan leaders in the Frontier Areas.
6. For an analysis of conflict and post-independence history, see e.g., Martin Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Zed Books, London and New York, 1991 & 1999).
7. The Times, 3 March 1962.
8. Although other Burman politicians, including communist, remained in opposition in the borderlands, U Nu was never comfortable with armed struggle and also federalism, eventually returning to Burma under a 1980 amnesty.
9. Min Zin, "Paying the Debt: 25 Years Later, Burma's Struggle for Freedom Isn't Over", The Irrawaddy, 20 August 2013.
10. Aung Zaw, "What We Were Fighting For", The Irrawaddy, 5 August 2013.
11. Aung San Suu Kyi, BBC Reith Lecture, 5 July 2011.
12. The main united front was the National Council Union of Burma (formed 1992), which included the 11-party ethnic National Democratic Front (formed 1976 to seek a federal union), the All Burma Students Democratic Front (formed 1988) and the exile National Coalition Government Union of Burma of exile MPs (formed 1990).
13. See e.g., "A Changing Landscape: Analysis of Burma's 2010 Polls", TNI-BCN Burma Policy Briefing Nr 4, December 2010.
14. For the ethno-political landscape on the eve of the new government, see, "Ethnic Politics in Burma: the Time for Solutions", TNI-BCN Burma Policy Briefing Nr 5, February 2011.
15. "President Thein Sein's Speech at Chatham House (The Royal Institute of International Affairs)", London, 15 July 2013.
16. There are no reliable casualty figures since the Thein Sein government took office. The government has reported 256 deaths of people killed in communal "riots and incidents" while opposition groups claim as many as 5,000 deaths (including combatants) have occurred in the Kachin region alone. See e.g., "Riots and incidents since new government claim 256 deaths; 541 sentenced", Eleven Myanmar, 3 July 2013; Edward Chung Ho, "Time for Thein Sein to come clean about Burmese losses in Kachin state", Kachin News Group, 22 September 2012; Anthony Davis, "Pyrrhic victory in Myanmar", Asia Times, 31 January 2013.
17. See e.g., Asia Foundation and Myanmar Development Resource Institute, "State and Region Governments in Myanmar", September 2013.
18. See e.g., Buchanan, Kramer and Woods, *Developing Disparity*; Eleven Myanmar, "Myanmar journalists decry approved press bill", 6 July 2013; Nyein Nyein, "Activists Reject Bill on Associations as Legislation Goes to Parliament", The Irrawaddy, 7 August 2013.
19. See e.g., Buchanan, Kramer and Woods, *Developing Disparity*; Ei Ei Toe Lwin, "Fury over Letpadaung copper mine report", Myanmar Times, 18 March 2013; Shwe Gas Movement, "Drawing the Line: The Case against China's Shwe Gas Project, for Better Extractive Industries in Burma", September 2013.
20. See e.g., Aung Zaw, "Dangerous Days for Burma's

Age of Reforms”, The Irrawaddy, 25 June 2013.

21. For example, the Myanmar Development Resource Institute, National Economic and Social Advisory Council, and Myanmar Peace Centre.

22. Tha Lun Zaung Htet, “Shwe Mann Demands Parliament’s Involvement in Burma’s Peace Process”, The Irrawaddy, 3 July 2013.

23. See e.g., Buchanan, Kramer and Woods, *Developing Disparity*; William Boot, “Burma’s Busy Black Economy ‘Threatens Reforms’”, The Irrawaddy, 14 August 2013; Seamus Martov, “What Does the Future Hold for Aung Thaung & Sons?”, The Irrawaddy, 11 May 2012.

24. See e.g., Bertil Lintner, “A well-laid war in Myanmar”, Asia Times, 2 February 2013; “The Kachin Crisis”, TNI–BCN Burma Policy Briefing; Than Htike Oo, “Thein Sein Cannot Control Army, Shan Rebels Say”, The Irrawaddy, 3 July 2013.

25. New Light of Myanmar, 28 March 2013; Mizzima News, “Military will continue to play political role, says army chief”, 27 March 2013.

26. “President to lead reform process”, Mizzima News, 12 August 2013.

27. Ibid.

28. See e.g., Kyaw Hsu Mon, “Problems in the NLD?”, Myanmar Times, 4 February 2013.

29. See e.g., “Aung San Suu Kyi says Burma to amend ‘world’s most difficult’ constitution”, The Irrawaddy, 10 May 2013; Jared Ferrie (Reuters Writer), “Burma’s Constitution Likely to Dash Suu Kyi’s Presidential Hopes”, The Irrawaddy, 20 June 2013.

30. See e.g., “NGOs criticize Suu Kyi’s ‘failure’ to address Kachin conflict”, Mizzima News, 10 January 2013; “Myanmar unrest tests iconic status of Suu Kyi”, AFP, 21 April 2013.

31. Ei Ei Toe Lwin, “Fury over Letpadaung copper mine report”, Myanmar Times, 18 March 2013.

32. See e.g., Nirmal Ghosh, “High-stakes chess game ahead of Myanmar polls”, The Straits Times, 20 July 2013; “Ex-general from Myanmar’s junta considers Aung San Suu Kyi alliance”, Associated Press, 15 June 2013.

33. Snay Lin, “Burma’s 88 Generation Students to Form Political Party”, The Irrawaddy, 19 March 2013.

34. See e.g., Eric Randolph, “NLD Patriarch Defends Suu Kyi’s Copper Mine Position”, The Irrawaddy, 18 March 2013; Tha Lun Zaung Htet, “Give Cronies a Chance to Reform, Says Suu Kyi”, The Irrawaddy, 11 January 2013.

35. Kyaw Phyoo Tha, “Suu Kyi Slams Reforms, Says Govt

Introduced ‘No Tangible Changes’”, The Irrawaddy, 27 May 2013.

36. Kon Chan, “Ethnic parties to form the Federal Union Party”, Mizzima News, 10 August 2013. See Chart A.

37. Ibid. Several UNA members were allied with the NLD in the 1998 Committee Representing the People’s Parliament and continue to meet with the NLD on electoral strategy: see e.g., Kay Zin Oo, “NLD, ethnic parties unite in push for constitutional reform before 2015 election”, Mizzima News, 20 June 2013.

38. See Chart B.

39. “UNFC Statement of the Ethnic Nationality Conference”, 2 August 2013. Seven other armed ethnic groups attended, including the United Wa State Army, Democratic Karen Benevolence Army and Arakan Liberation Party.

40. See e.g., “The Kachin Crisis”, TNI–BCN Burma Policy Briefing. Fighting has reduced with the KIO since peace talks in May, and the TNLA also held talks in August. But no formal agreements were made. The SSA-N has had a renewed ceasefire since January 2012 but intermittent fighting has continued. The SSA-N has also reverted to a former name of SSA/Shan State Progress Party (SSA/SSPP).

41. See note 4.

42. For example, Mon, Rakhine and Shan parties from the 1990 and 2010 elections hope to integrate before the 2015 polls. But this is not yet guaranteed.

43. See, “Analysis of the UNFC Position”, EBO Briefing Paper, August 2013; “Riposte to Article in EBO Briefing Paper No. 8, dated August 2013”, 15 August 2013; Hanna Hindstrom, “Federalism debate fractures Burma’s armed ethnic groups”, DVB, 30 July 2013.

44. “Kachin Rebels Clash With Burma Army and Govt-backed Militia”, The Irrawaddy, 2 September 2013; “KIA/TNLA allied force fought against government troops and militias”, Kachinland News, 18 September 2013.

45. See e.g., note 3; Tomás Ojea Quintana, “Statement of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar”, 21 August 2013; “Founding of Wa State can spark confusion, say political analysts”, Eleven Myanmar, 15 May 2013.

46. “Non-Burmans are united”, S.H.A.N., 2 August 2013.

47. See notes 3, 4 and 16; International Crisis Group, “Myanmar: Storm Clouds on the Horizon”, Asia Report Nr 238, 12 November 2012, pp.1-6.

48. “Final Report of Inquiry Commission on Sectarian Violence in Rakhine State”, Union of Myanmar, 8 July

2013; Republic of the Union of Myanmar President Office, “Time Magazine Misinterpretation Rejected”, Nay Pyi Taw, 23 June 2013. The Inquiry Commission recommendations were variously reported. The Final Report (p.66) reflected the call of Rakhines for the government to promote family planning among “Bengalis” but also cautioned that it should be “voluntary”.

49. “Suu Kyi Pressed on Rohingya Citizenship”, *The Irrawaddy*, 16 November 2012.

50. Archbishop Charles Maung Bo and Benedict Rogers, “Myanmar’s religious diversity: Dialogue trumps violence”, *Myanmar Times*, 23 August 2013.

51. See e.g., IRIN, “Prospects for Rakhine reconciliation dim”, 2 May 2013; Thomas Fuller, “Ethnic Hatred Tears Apart a Region of Myanmar”, *New York Times*, 29 November 2012; Nyein Nyein, “Arakan Residents Push for More Benefits From State’s Resources”, *The Irrawaddy* 19 August 2013; Shwe Gas Movement, “Drawing the Line”. For a discussion of Burman and non-Burman identities, see, Matthew Walton, “The ‘Wages of Burman-ness’: Ethnicity and Burman Privilege in Contemporary Myanmar”, *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Vol. 43:1, 2013, pp.1-27.

52. See note 4 for figures in the Kachin region and Rakhine state. There are also an estimated 400,000 displaced persons in southeast Burma, mainly Karen, Karenni, Mon and Shan, and around 150,000 official refugees in neighbouring countries; see e.g., The Border Consortium, “Programme Report: July to December 2012”, pp.9, 13-14. In addition, there are several thousand displaced persons from Buddhist-Muslim violence in Meiktila district.

53. See e.g., Charlie Campbell, “Burmese Refugees Remain in Limbo by Thai Border Despite Political Reforms”, *Time Magazine*, 7 August 2013.

54. See e.g., “Access Denied”, TNI-BCN Burma Policy Briefing; Buchanan, Kramer and Woods, *Developing Disparity*; Htet Naing Zaw and Aye Kyawt Khaing, “Military Involved in Massive Land Grabs: Parliamentary Report”, *The Irrawaddy*, 5 March 2013; Karen Human Rights Group, “Losing Ground: Land conflicts and collective action in eastern Myanmar”, March 2013; Earthrights International, “There is no benefit, they destroyed our farmland: Selected Land and Livelihood Impacts Along the Shwe Natural Gas and China-Myanmar Oil Transport Pipeline from Rakhine State to Mandalay Division”, April 2013; Shwe Gas Movement, “Drawing the Line”.

55. “Myanmar cleans house – China’s worst nightmare?”, *Financial Times*, 15 April 2013.

56. “No more irresponsible remarks on Myanmar-China pipelines”, *Xinhua*, 29 June 2013. For a cautious assessment, see, Yun Sun, “Chinese Investment in Myanmar: What Lies Ahead?”, *Stimson Center*, Issue Brief No.1, September 2013.

57. “Shan leaders meet in Rangoon”, S.H.A.N., 14 June 2013; “Census for Mon ethnicity currently underway”, IMNA, 27 August 2013; “Myanmar prepares for first census in three decades”, *Radio Free Asia*, 19 September 2013.

58. Seng Raw Lahpai, “Advancing Peace through Inclusive Development”, *University of the Philippines Asian Center*, 28 August 2013.

59. See e.g., “Thein Sein and China must stop pipeline project to prevent escalation of conflict in northern Shan State”, S.H.A.N., 22 May 2013; Shwe Gas Movement, “Drawing the Line”.

60. Saw Yan Naing, “Peace Be Dammed”, *The Irrawaddy*, 17 August 2013.

61. See e.g., UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, “Myanmar: ‘Reforms continue apace, but key human rights issues remain unaddressed’ – UN expert”, 20 February 2013.

62. Harn Yawng hwe, “Can President Thein Sein be trusted?”, *DVB*, 16 August 2013.

63. See e.g., Tom Kramer, *Civil Society Gaining Ground: Opportunities for Change and Development in Burma* (TNI, Amsterdam, 2011).

64. See e.g., Thomas Fuller, “Internet Unshackled, Burmese Aim Venom at Ethnic Minority”, *New York Times*, 15 June 2012; Eleven Myanmar, “Opposition NLD dispels rumours amid growing online attacks”, 30 August 2013.

65. See e.g.; “Proportional representation for Burma?”, *Mizzima News*, 31 July 2012; Richard Horsey, “Shifting to a Proportional Representation Electoral System in Myanmar?”, *SSRC Conflict Prevention and Peace Forum*, 31 January 2013; Kay Zin Oo, “NLD, ethnic parties unite in push for constitutional reform before 2015 election”, *Mizzima News*, 20 June 2013.

66. Sai Wansai, “Amendment or rewriting: 51 years on Burma still overwhelmed by constitutional crisis”, S.H.A.N., 13 August 2013.

67. Kay Zin Oo, “New Constitution will be ready in a month: ethnic groups”, *Mizzima News*, 5 September 2013.

68. See note 29.

69. See note 25.

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Transnational Institute

PO Box 14656
1001 LD Amsterdam
The Netherlands
Tel: +31-20-6626608
Fax: +31-20-6757176
E-mail: burma@tni.org
www.tni.org/work-area/burma-project

Burma Centrum Netherlands

PO Box 14563
1001 LB Amsterdam
The Netherlands
Tel.: +31-20-6716952
Fax: +31-20-6713513
E-mail: info@burmacentrum.nl
www.burmacentrum.nl

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TNI - BCN Project on Ethnic Conflict in Burma

Burma has been afflicted by ethnic conflict and civil war since independence in 1948, exposing it to some of the longest running armed conflicts in the world. Ethnic nationality peoples have long felt marginalised and discriminated against. The situation worsened after the military coup in 1962, when minority rights were further curtailed. The main grievances of ethnic nationality groups in Burma are the lack of influence in the political decision-making processes; the absence of economic and social development in their areas; and what they see as Burmanisation policies by governments since independence that have translated into repression of their cultural rights and religious freedom.

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