

For Reconciliation in Myanmar: Bridging the Divides with Cultural Expression A Conflict Analysis

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

DKBA	Democratic Karen/Kayin Buddhist Army
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
KAB	Knowledge, Attitude and Behavior framework
KAF	Kawthoolei Armed Forces
KII	Key Informant Interviews
KIO	Kachin Independence Organization
KNDO	Karen (Kayin) National Defense Organization
KNDP	Karenni National Democratic Party
KNG	Kayan National Guard
KNLA	Karen (Kayin) National Liberation Army
KNLP	Kayan New Land Party
KNPDP	Karenni National Peace and Development Party
KNPLF	Karenni National People's Liberation Front
KNPP	Karenni National Progressive Party
KNSO	Karenni National Solidarity Organization
KNU	Karen/Kayin National Union
KNU/KNLAPC	Karen (Kayin) National Union/ Karen (Kayin) National Liberation Army Peace Council
MaBaTha	Organization for the Protection of Race and Religion
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NMSP	New Mon State Party
SSA	Shan State Army
SSA-S	Shan State Army South
USDP	Union Solidarity and Development Party

Glossary

969 Movement: A nationalist movement opposed to the perceived expansion of Islam in predominantly-Buddhist Myanmar. The three digits of 969 ‘symbolize the virtues of the Buddha, Buddhist practices and the Buddhist community.’

Bamar: The majority ethnic group in Myanmar that speaks the Burmese language.

Focus Group Discussion (FGD): Discussions convened with groups during field research gathering together people from similar backgrounds or experiences to discuss a specific topic of interest. The group of participants is guided by a moderator (or group facilitator) who introduces topics for discussion and helps the group to participate in a lively and natural discussion.

Forces for peace: Forces that can be utilized to promote movement away from conflict and towards peace. They include actors and influences that connect people across divisions and conflict lines. They initiate cooperation and exercise leadership in support of peace.

Forces against peace: Negative forces, such as spoilers, working against peace or in favor of conflict. They include factors, issues, elements, individuals, and groups causing conflict and/or dividing people.

Key actors: Individuals or groups who are in a position to strongly influence the conflict—either positively or negatively. They are not necessarily people who a program targets directly and their influence does not always have a direct impact on the conflict.

Key Informant Interview (KII): Interviews conducted with individuals, usually with above average knowledge, selected to represent diverse ethnic, gender, generational, social and religious groups, including cultural actors, media, religious leaders, the private sector and marginalized groups.

‘Key people; more people’: An approach that seeks to involve particular people, or groups, critical to the continuation or resolution of conflict, due to their power and/or influence (key people), while also increasing numbers of people in actions to promote peace (more people).

Knowledge, Attitude, Behavior (KAB) framework: A function of attitudes toward a behavior and perceived norms and personal agency toward that behavior.

Ma Ba Tha: Also known as the Patriotic Association of Myanmar or Association for the Protection of Race and Religion, is a Buddhist organization based in Myanmar. Some members

are connected to the nationalist and 969 Movement, although others, such as the Sitagu Sayadaw, have actively championed inter-faith dialogue and tolerance.

Nat: One of several spirits worshipped in Myanmar in conjunction with Buddhism.

National races: The 135 groups recognized by former General Ne Win that were indigenous to Myanmar and thus deemed worthy of citizen status.

Panglong Conference: An historic meeting that took place at Panglong in the Shan States in Myanmar (at the time Burma) between the Shan, Kachin and Chin ethnic minority leaders and Aung San, head of the interim Burmese government in February 1947.

Structural violence: The term used by Johan Galtung to describe violence characterized by systematic ways in which social structures harm or otherwise disadvantage individuals.

Sangha: A monastic community of Buddhist monks or nuns.

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Executive Summary

Introduction

In October 2015, Myanmar will conduct national elections; this critical event will shape the country's political landscape as it seeks to consolidate the reform efforts which have been led by the current government. The national-level politics are unfolding in a highly divided society which is rife with, both violent and non-violent conflicts. The ethnic, political class and other divisions are intensified by the country's complex history, and rich diversity. Multiple and deep rifts entrench enmities across the country's various states and divisions. However, the opening of the country to new cultural ideas and influences is currently challenging these discords.

This conflict analysis aims to provide insight into the dividing lines that cut across the society as a whole; it is a ground-focused look at the backdrop of conflicts in which the upcoming elections will take place. Many of the factors identified here are fluid, and some are sure to change after the October polls. But the root causes and the long-standing divisions will still be present, even as new political realities unfold.

Therefore, this report aims to aid in the creation of peacebuilding initiatives that strengthen constructive narratives, counter stereotypes, and catalyze attitude, knowledge and behavior changes that contribute to the peacebuilding and democratization process. . The study aims to specifically inform cultural and media actors which are working to promote reconciliation across dividing lines in Myanmar. Based on the full review of existing literature, this research identifies gaps and best practices in promoting reconciliation in Myanmar and builds on them.

The analysis focuses on actors both for and against peace, and the major dividing lines in these states and divisions, in order to identify opportunities to bridge divides at the inter-personal level through dialogue (key people) and media (more people).

For the study, SFCG conducted a scoping mission in four ethnic states (Mon, Kayin, Kayah and Kachin) and two major cities (Yangon and Mandalay) and conducted a range of interviews. These locations were selected based on their strategic significance to the national peace process and the presence of existing connections with active civil society in each location. This analysis has been informed by 80 key informant interviews (KIIs) and 80 focus group discussions (FDGs) conducted with diverse ethnic, gender, generational, social and religious representatives, including cultural actors, media, religious leaders, the private sector, and the marginalized groups.

Summary of Key Findings

The analysis reveals three major findings:

1. **Minorities and non-recognized¹ groups face continued exclusion:** Structural violence, characterized by systematic ways in which social structures harm otherwise disadvantaged individuals, is deeply rooted within society. Minority and non-recognized groups – persons from ethnic groups not officially recognized by the government as citizens of Myanmar predominately of South Asian or Chinese descent – face legal, social, and cultural exclusion across all target states and divisions. Persons from non-recognized groups are especially vulnerable. They face numerous structural and social forms of discrimination such as prevention from accessing education, documentation, work, and travel. These persons are additionally subject to acts of violence and threats within their communities with often little or no means to achieve legal recourse or access to justice.

Majority groups remain largely unaware of the challenges minorities face. Thus, minority groups are only able to combat structural or physical violence within their own communities. Due to the ethnically stratified policies of former military governments, which were further compounded by decades of armed conflict, Bamar² Buddhists have been promoted to be the powerful ethnic group. This perception has created a shared sense of exclusion among minority ethnic groups that unites them against the Bamar. Consequently, persons of mixed heritage in ethnic areas who did not easily fit within the ethnic categorization did not feel a sense of belonging in their own communities.

2. **Multitudes of Societal Divisions:** The key dividing lines in society (ethnic, religious, gender, and generational) remain rooted in unresolved political issues, decades of militarization, and patterns of authoritarian behavior. Ethnocentric development ideologies, embedded in the formal policies and informal practices of the central government, are reflected in structures and patterns of common behavior of ethnic groups. These patterns are reinforced and intensified by unjust economic projects, a lack of transparency, and an increasingly inequitable distribution of wealth and social services. Refer to Table 1 below.

Table 1: Key Dividing Lines

¹ The term 'national races' refers to those 135 ethnic groups chosen by former general Ne Win as ethnic groups of Myanmar receiving guaranteed citizen status. Ethnic groups included as 'national races' are referred to as 'recognized groups' while ethnic groups not included in this list are referred to as 'non-recognized groups'.

² Bamar refers to the majority ethnic group in Myanmar that lives primarily in the Irrawaddy River Basin and speaks the Burmese language.

- **Inter-ethnic dividing lines:** Some respondents in ethnic states expressed negative sentiment towards the ethnic Bamar and, in some cases, other ethnic persons for their association with military presence and/or large-scale economic projects and their relative advantage in existing societal structures. Additional resentment was felt towards the ethnic Bamar as a result of the government’s longstanding forced assimilation practices.
- **Intra-ethnic dividing lines:** Divisions exist amongst those ethnic groups that consist of multiple sub-groups or tribes speaking different languages and dialects, sometimes complicated by religious differences. These divisions have often contributed to the separation of ethnic, political, and armed groups from the larger group. There is a widespread perception that the government maintains a long established practice of encouraging these divisions within and amongst ethnic populations.
- **Religious divides:** While respondents from religious minority groups shared an array of struggles with both structural and social discrimination, Buddhist respondents were often unaware of local inter-religious issues based on their relative privilege. Muslims, who have long been subject to systemic discrimination, have been increasingly targeted since 2012. The rise of Buddhist nationalist hate speech has exacerbated conflict by increasing the stigmatization of Muslims, isolating Muslim communities, and inciting violence against them.
- **Gender divides:** Men and women are affected by conflict in different ways. Gender-based vulnerabilities and inequalities persist, underscoring the relationship between exclusion and fragility. Women’s structural exclusion from political participation prevents attempts to address problems that disproportionately affect them, such as violence against women, women’s citizenship rights, and maternal health.
- **Generational Divides:** Perceptions of leadership and approaches to community development often differ between younger and older generations based on differing life experiences such as living under colonialism and military rule.
- **Government-civil society divides:** Few mechanisms exist to resolve conflict between government and civil society. Civil Society respondents expressed numerous frustrations with the inability to resolve conflicts with government actors.

3. Common Grounders as forces for peace: Despite these deep dividing lines, common grounders exist in all communities as forces for peace. They are commonly seen to be engaged in interfaith activities, civil society initiatives, social work, and other activities aimed at building bridges across dividing lines. The intention and work of these actors should be highlighted for use by the wider society and shared widely in the media. Refer to Table 2.

Table 2: Forces for/Against Peace

<u>Forces for Peace</u>	<u>Forces Against Peace</u>	<u>Key Actors</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inter-faith activities and initiatives • In-group peacebuilding activities • Civil-society collaboration, networking and coalition building • Shared cultural activities • Social work across ethnic and religious divides • Government-civil society collaboration • Government – civil society collaboration • Human rights advocacy • Cooperation amongst local political leaders, armed group leaders and civil society groups • Positive relationships between local communities and local government officials, police and military • Parliamentary debate • Media coverage of interfaith and inter-ethnic cooperation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Military control over political processes • Centralized decision-making structures • Ethnically stratified government, military and civil service • Discriminatory legislation and policy • Lack of rule of law • Control over civil society • Enduring practices of forced assimilation • Land grabs • Sexual and gender based violence • Drug abuse in communities • Hate speech media • Trainings and activities of nationalist groups • Aggressive social discrimination; disruption of positive relationships • Mysterious occurrences • Disunity amongst local political leaders, armed group leaders and civil society groups • Weak or no relationships between local communities and local government officials, police and military 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The president and central government • Military leadership • Parliament members • Local NGOs and civil society groups • Youth groups • Women’s groups • Formal and informal networks • 969 and MaBaTha • Companies involved in economic projects • Local religious leaders • Local political and armed group leaders • Local government officials, police and military • Individual peace builders

Key Recommendations

The recommendations in this report draw on a ‘more people; key people’³ approach. Recommendations for international partners focus on ‘key people’ while recommendations for cultural and media actors in Myanmar support the development of messages to influence ‘more people’ at the societal level. This approach addresses the causes of conflict and is geared towards developing the capacity of local actors to build peace. Refer to Table 3 below.

More people: aim to engage increasing numbers of people in actions to promote peace. This may involve expanding the numbers of people committed to peace.

Key people: focus on involving particular people, or groups, critical to the continuation or resolution of conflict, due to their power and/or influence.

Table 3: A key people, more people approach

For International Support (Key People)

Unresolved Political Issues

- Support inclusion of civil society and women’s voices in the peace process.
- Integrate strategies to ensure civil society and women’s participation in decision-making.
- Encourage decentralization in all sectors.
- Support (and build capacity where necessary) stakeholders to establish democratic structures for cooperative decision-making.
- Support local initiatives bridging divides between civil society and government.
- Advocate to the government to hold instigators and perpetrators of anti-Muslim violence to account.

Conflict Related Economic Projects

- Advocate for transparency, protection of environment and local populations, inclusion of civil society voices and equitable distribution of wealth in economic projects.
- Support local groups working to address issues related to economic projects.

Ethnocentric development ideologies:

- Advocate for the deconstruction of ethnically stratified systems and policies.
- Support local groups working on issues across ethnic and religious divides.
- Support local groups working against forces driving disunity and initiatives using culture to bridge ethnic and religious divides.
- Promote knowledge of universal economic, social, and cultural rights.

³ *Reflecting on Peace Practice*, 2009, Collaborative Learning Projects

- Research structural forms of discrimination.

For Media (More People)

Provide alternatives to militarized cultures and authoritarian ways of solving problems.

- Transcend cultures of obedience at all levels.
- Integrate heroes and role models for peace.
- Integrate narratives where people critically analyze media and use participatory approaches to formal learning.
- Show scenarios where diverse stakeholders solve complex problems through collaboration.
- Integrate narratives portraying female leadership.
- Show stories where women and communities transform stigma associated with intimate partner and sexual violence committed within the community (not by military).
- Add realistic narratives where local communities and local government officials/departments solve conflict successfully.
- Include stories of local communities uniting to get youth away from involvement in drugs.

Demonstrate development alternatives.

- Include stories that portray development alternatives that benefit local populations and are profitable.
- Integrate narratives of persons changing destructive patterns of behavior in business or economic development.
- Include narratives of development alternatives that protect the environment and local culture.
- Stories of people creating new and innovative business ventures learned from examples outside of Myanmar.
- Portray a story showing cooperation between a large company and local community to develop a creative business venture (*be clear that this is a new and innovative experience to avoid misrepresenting reality).
- Show narratives of locally promoted small businesses that are profitable, generate local employment and are culturally and environmentally friendly.

Broaden the scope of understanding of universal rights. Provide a vision for an inclusive national identity.

- Integrate narratives that educate universal economic, social, and cultural rights.
- Include stories that portray the beauty of Myanmar's diverse cultures and the positive contributions that diverse people have made to the development of the country.
- Highlight examples of peaceful coexistence both past and present. Integrate narratives of inter-cultural cooperation and sharing of culture through events and activities.
- Portray diverse peoples united together around non-politically sensitive causes. Include stories showing strength in diversity.
- Show stories of youth rejecting ethnically/religiously divisive messages and forces, then

working for peace.

- Show Burmans learning about issues of ethnic minorities, Buddhists learning about issues of religious minorities, and recognized ethnic groups learning about issues of non-recognized groups.

I. Introduction

Research Overview

Purpose

This conflict analysis was conducted to support a European Union funded project implemented in partnership with Search for Common Ground (SFCG), Shalom Foundation, and Yangon Film School (YFS). The analysis will be used to inform the development of media and cultural outputs that seek to aid in the creation of associational narratives and realistic storylines from those who have experienced conflict first-hand. By creating associational narratives of experiences with conflict, this project seeks to promote reconciliation across multiple divides in Myanmar.

The research identified ethnic, political, inter-generational and gender divides within society, and exploration in these areas further informed the analysis.

Methodology

Following a comprehensive review of existent literature, SFCG conducted a field assessment in four ethnic states (Mon, Kayin, Kayah and Kachin) and two major cities (Yangon and Mandalay). These locations were selected based on their strategic significance to the national peace process and the presence of existing connections with active civil society in each location. Individuals were initially identified for interviews based on ethnic, gender, generational, social and religious criteria. Interview and focus group participants included political leaders, religious leaders⁴, armed group leaders, civil society leaders, women's group representatives, youth group representatives, business people, farmers, shop owners, teachers, cultural association representatives, civil servants, interfaith group representatives, media professionals and cultural actors.⁵

Researchers conducted a total of 80 key informant interviews (KIIs) and 80 focus group discussions (FGDs) in Mon State, Kayin State, Kayah State and Kachin State, as well as in Mandalay and Yangon during the months of September, October and November of 2014. SFCG staff and partners have reinforced this data with subsequent and recent visits to all areas. In ethnic states, research was carried out in both urban and rural settings. Most interviews were conducted in Burmese and translated into English while some were conducted directly in English. A few included translation from Kayin languages and Jinghpaw. Notes were typed and interviews were recorded on audio (except for interviews in which participants requested not to be recorded). Stories and quotes were later transcribed for this report. Some audio recordings contained errors and quotes herein relied upon detailed notes taken during interviews. Responses were coded and analyzed to determine parallels between responses across states and divisions.

⁴ All major faith groups included: Buddhist, Christian, Hindu and Muslims. Sikh participants were interviewed in some areas. Also, a few spiritual leaders and representative leaders from animist and other indigenous philosophical traditions were interviewed.

⁵ See Appendix 1 for detailed breakdown of interviewees.

Limitations

Although a wide array of civil society actors and local political leaders were consulted for this study, diverse perspectives from actors operating in the government were not included in the interview process. Civil society partners who were tasked with arranging interviews did not have relationships with actors in government, and in many cases were unable to arrange interviews. This inability of civil society partners to access government actors illustrates the divide that exists between both entities. Therefore, additional research should be conducted to involve diverse perspectives of the government actors.

With three days allotted for research in each state/division, it was not possible to draw out extensive details regarding state- or township-specific variations on dividing lines. A number of complex factors are involved at this level that cannot be analyzed fully with only three days of research data from each location. Therefore, additional research should be conducted to gather more state- or township specific-details on dividing lines.

Terminology

The term 'national races' refers to the 135 ethnic groups identified by former General Ne Win as indigenous ethnic groups of Myanmar that are guaranteed citizen status. Ethnic groups included as 'national races' are thus referred to as 'recognized groups' while ethnic groups not included in this list are referred to as 'non-recognized groups'. These include predominantly Muslims and Hindus, most of whom have at least some South Asian ancestry, as well as Chinese and other populations.

The term 'ethnic Bamar' is used to identify the majority ethnic group in Myanmar. During interviews, some of the respondents quoted chose to use the term 'Burmese', which can be applied more generally to the national language, culture, food, nationality, and majority ethnic group. Semantic choices respondents used to refer to the majority ethnic group and its relevance were not changed.

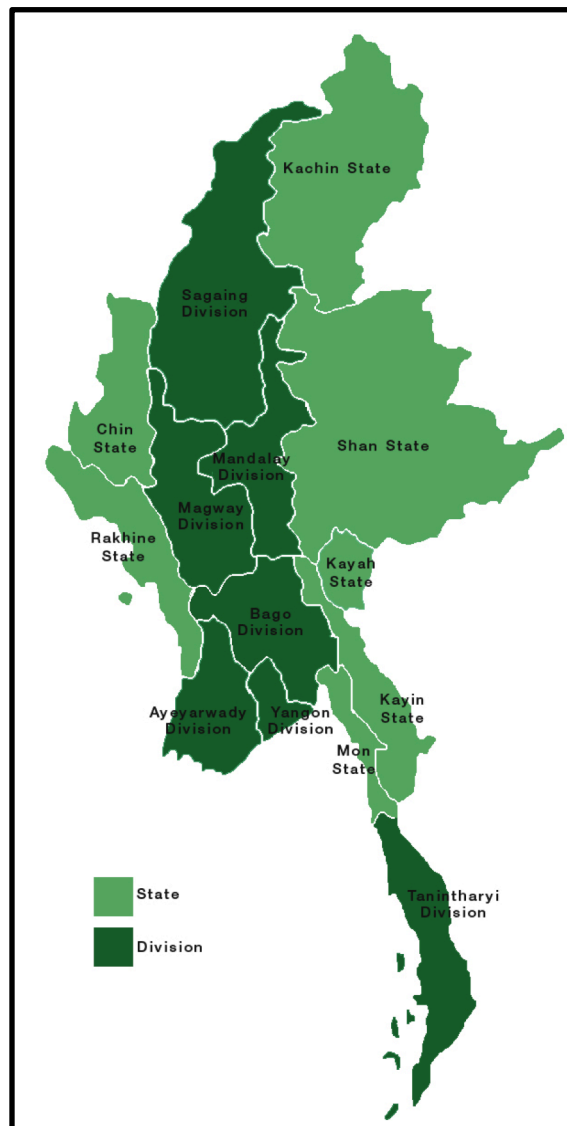
Diversity in Myanmar

Any basic map of Myanmar highlights seven divisions, largely populated by the ethnic Burman majority, as well as seven ethnic states including Mon, Kayin, Kayah, Kachin, Chin, Rakhine and Shan. However, viewing the Myanmar society through the lens of administrative divisions runs the risk of oversimplifying the country's ethno-linguistic diversity.⁶ It also ignores the presence of several self-administered zones that were never brought under the centralized control of the Union government.

⁶ As described in Robert Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, The University Press, Dhaka, 1999, p. 29-30.

Despite their names, none of the ethnic states are homogenous. In most, the major ethnic group of the state is composed of a number of subgroups (sometimes referred to as tribes), each speaking a unique language or dialect. In addition to the predominant ethnic group, states generally include a number of Burman and other ethnic inhabitants. Sometimes, significant portions of other ethnic groups indigenous to the area also live within the state. The complex diversity of local populations is unique to each state.

Field research for this analysis focused on Mon, Kayin, Kayah and Kachin States. Of these, Mon is the only state in which the majority ethnic group, the Mon, speak one language and contain no ethnic sub-groups or tribes. The Kayin are composed of three major sub-groups, each with its own language: East Po, West Po and Sqaw.⁷ The ethnic group of Kayah State is the Karenni. The Karenni are composed of nine government designated official sub-groups, each with their own language or dialect: the Kayah, Kayan, Kayaw, Yintale, GeBa, MoNu, Yinbaw, GeKho and Lalta. The Kachin people are made up of six groups, commonly referred to as tribes: the Jinghpaw, Rawang, Lisu, Lou Vow, Lachik and Zai Wah.



Although animist communities thrived in many ethnic areas during pre-colonial era, inhabitants of the Burmese kingdom are largely Buddhist. Over the years, some animist and other indigenous beliefs were adopted into Buddhist practice as Buddhism spread through the kingdom. For example, nat worship occurs across the country in conjunction with Buddhist practices among Bamar and minority ethnic communities alike.

Prior to colonial rule, Muslim communities of considerable size were also present in all of the principal cities of the kingdom.⁸ In addition to Muslims, the British classified all Hindus and small numbers of Sikhs, Jains, and other religious minorities that arrived during the colonial era, collectively as 'Indians'. By the end of the colonial era, most ethnic populations living in what

⁷ Respondents to interview were not all in accordance as to how many additional minor ethnic groups, distinct languages or dialects exist amongst the Kayin.

⁸ Moshe Yegar, *The Muslims of Burma: A Study of a Minority Group*, 1972, p. 12.

are now Chin and Kachin States, as well as some communities in Shan State and other states, had converted to Christianity.

Many areas, particularly in the North, have a long history of relations with China. Chinese populations predominantly practice Buddhism, although they also include followers of Islam and Christianity. Ethnic Chinese communities can be found throughout the country.

Ethnic, linguistic, and religious influences on the identities of populations living around the country are complex. Contrasting perceptions are common and dividing lines associated with ethnic classification are unique, often differing from one state to the next. With additional political underpinnings to ethnic classification, it is common that local populations do not accept the ethnic classifications determined for them by the government. It is further not uncommon that groups have variant perceptions amongst themselves.

Historical Background to Conflict

Armed Conflict

When negotiating the political landscape of Burma's independence, representatives from Chin, Kachin, and Shan territories were invited to take part in the historic Panglong Conference⁹. Representatives were promised the "right to exercise political authority over administrative, judiciary, and legislative powers in their own autonomous national states. They were also promised the ability to preserve and protect their language, culture, and religion in exchange for voluntarily joining the Bamar to form a political union and pledge their loyalty to the new state."¹⁰ Despite this representation from select ethnic minorities, the aspirations of the Rakhine, Mon, Kayin, Karenni and others were not reflected in the outcome of the conference.

Dissatisfied with many unfulfilled promises of the Panglong Agreement which formed the basis of an independent Burma, as well as their political status following independence in 1948, opposition political groups and a number of ethnic nationalist movements took up arms against the government. Of the ethnic nationalists, the Kayin revolted first, followed by the Mon, Karenni, Pa-O, Chin, Kachin and Shan, while Rakhine State had splintered into a multitude of armed groups following WWII.¹¹ With the military scaling up offensives in the years after

⁹ The Panglong Conference of 1947 was a historic conference held between ethnic leaders and independence hero Aung San (representing ministerial Burma) convened to decide the political status of ethnic minority territories in post-independence Burma. While leaders of the Shan, Kachin and Chin were invited to attend, the Kayin were only permitted to send observers while the Mon, Rakhine, Karenni and other minority groups were not included in the conference. An English language version of their agreement is available online at http://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/MM_470212_Panglong%20Agreement.pdf

¹⁰ Joseph Silverstein. "Minority Problems in Burma Since 1962," in Lehman(ed.), *Military Rule in Burma since 1962*. Singapore 1981, p. 51.

¹¹ Martin Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, op. cit. p. 28.

General Ne Win's¹² 1962 coup, armed conflict became a way of life for many ethnic communities around the country.

Throughout the 1990s effort were made to bring the numerous armed conflicts to a close and a host of bilateral ceasefire agreements were signed, freezing hostilities.¹³ By 2011, 10 of the 11 major ethnic armed groups had agreed to ceasefires and were poised to enter negotiations for a long-term settlement. The Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) was the major group which was outstanding and called for a genuine federal state; in 2011 the military launched a major offensive which continues to this day.¹⁴ Many advocacy groups across multiple ethnic states insist that the government is using ceasefire periods to bolster their military presence in ethnic areas where there are significant commercial interests. With the national political dialogue still underway, the tenuous peace remains precarious.

Communal Violence

Communal violence targeting Indians and Muslims first erupted during the anti-colonial, nationalist movements of the 1920s and 30s. Although the riots of 1930 targeted those perceived to be 'Indians' based on the British definition (including all those with South Asian descent), the riots of 1938 included specifically anti-Muslim sentiment. The British, imported many Indians, including many Muslims, from Bengal for labor. Perceptions of Muslims as instruments of the colonial oppressor quickly became embedded in the mindsets across Myanmar. As Muslims entered the middle economy as gold sellers and gained increased access to wealth and resources, resentment grew.

During the buildup to the 1938 riots, newspapers spun stories targeting Muslims by claiming that Muslims "have taken possession of the wealth of the Burmese people and also their daughters and sisters." They demanded laws to ban inter-marriage in order to prohibit the spread of Islam and called upon people to boycott Muslim shops.¹⁵ Riots and other communal violence directed towards Muslims, which was seen by some analysts as a tool to distract public anger away from the military regime, erupted again in sites throughout Myanmar in 1983, 1988, 1997 and 2001.¹⁶

Although the seeds of inter-religious conflict had been sowed during the British colonial period, and stoked over subsequent decades, the scale and intensity of the inter-communal violence

¹² Burma's first military dictator: 1962 – 1988.

¹³ During the 1990s more than 20 individual ceasefire agreements were signed with ethnic armed and political groups, including major armed groups: Shan State Army (SSA) in 1989, the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) in 1991, Karenni National People's Liberation Front (KNPLF) in 1994, New Mon State Party (NMSP) in 1995 and the Democratic Karen/Kayin Buddhist Army (DKBA) in 1995. Major ethnic armed groups who did not sign ceasefires during this period were the Karen/Kayin National Union (KNU), Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) and Shan State Army South (SSA-S).

¹⁴ "A Chronology of the Kachin Conflict", *The Irrawaddy*, 20 November 2014.

¹⁵ Moshe, Yegar, *op. cit.* p. 35 - 39.

¹⁶ "Easy Targets: the persecution of Muslims in Burma", Karen Human Rights Group, May 2002, p. 29-30.

targeting Muslims that erupted in 2012 is a new phenomenon. A string of events sparked by divisive media coverage of a rape case in the township of Ramree resulted in the eruption of communal violence in four townships of Rakhine State in June 2012. Organized attacks targeting Muslim communities occurred simultaneously in nine townships throughout Rakhine State during the following October, then spread to an additional 18 townships throughout the country in 2013.¹⁷ Since that time, attacks have occurred sporadically in various locations though not on the same scale as earlier violence.

In Rakhine State, the focal point of anti-Muslim violence, government sources indicate that 167 people were killed and 10,100 public, private, and religious buildings (mosques) were burned or destroyed.¹⁸ Over 140,000 people¹⁹ (predominantly Muslim) were displaced and confined to internally displaced person (IDP) camps. As violence spread throughout the country, a massacre of at least 20 students and several teachers at an Islamic school brought the official death toll in Meiktila, a city just outside of Mandalay, to 44, though some believe it to have been much higher.²⁰ Accurate casualty figures are difficult to obtain and low-level violence persists. Although Muslims remain confined to IDP camps due to government imposed restrictions on movement, Buddhists affected by violence are free to travel and have been largely resettled. Instigators of violence remain active while Muslims are arrested and tortured in prison.²¹

It is important to emphasize that all Buddhists are not propagating hatred and violence against Muslims. Many of these attacks have taken place following appearances by members of the militant Buddhist 969 Movement and MaBaTha, which are accused of using malicious messages transmitted via word of mouth and social media to spur violence. Forces for peace are actively countering hate speech (see Forces for Peace section).

II. Dividing Lines

A number of dividing lines were identified via KIIs and FGDs around the country. While dividing lines within major ethnic groups are unique in each state, common patterns were identified for other dividing lines based on commonalities in conflict situations witnessed around the country. The number of divisions at local and national levels is significant, making traditional dialogue efforts very complex to bring together.

¹⁷ For a map of townships where violence spread from March to August of 2013 see “Burma Update: Serious Crimes Continue”, Alternative ASEAN Network of Burma, BN 2013/1097: September 28, 2013.

¹⁸ Cited in UNOCHA, “Rakhine Response Plan: July 2012 – June 2013”, revision 16 November 2012.

¹⁹ UNOCHA, “2014 Strategic Response Plan: Myanmar”, December 2013.

²⁰ “Massacre in central Burma: Muslim students terrorized and killed in Meiktila”, Physicians for Human Rights, May 2013.

²¹ Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar thoroughly documented widespread and systematic human rights violations against Muslims in Rakhine State and around the country during the first two years of the conflict in Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Tomás Ojea Quintana, A/HRC/25/64, 12 March 2014.

Reflection on Privilege

During field research, it was observed that respondents from minority ethnic and religious groups more commonly valued the experience of sharing their culture and perspectives on conflict issues. The disadvantages that minority groups face were seen to contribute to the greater interest and involvement of these groups.

Given the relatively privileged experiences of ethnic Burman respondents (most of whom are Buddhists), and to an extent other ethnic groups which are Buddhists, they expressed less interest in sharing their cultures and perspectives. It was observed that most Burmans interviewed had little or no awareness of issues faced by ethnic minorities; most Buddhists had little or no knowledge of issues faced by religious minorities; and most recognized ethnic group members had little or no knowledge of issues faced by non-recognized groups.

Inter-ethnic Dividing Lines

Negative Sentiment Towards Ethnic Burmans

There is a preponderance of negative perception of ethnic Burmans among members of minority groups; disparaging comments were commonly made during interviews in these areas. The negative sentiment was usually expressed in relation to the association of Burmans with the military and/or forced assimilation²² practices by military regimes of the past. During interviews, it was common to hear respondents from recognized ethnic minority groups express a sense of camaraderie or solidarity with their counterparts based on the struggles they shared against a 'common enemy' (the Burmese military or ethnic Burmans).

Stronger resentment towards ethnic Burmans was seen in areas with high military presence or large-scale economic projects, often with high military presence in areas hosting economic development projects. In these cases, Burmans were associated with high levels of military presence and military owned companies. Local community members often resented the presence of higher numbers of ethnic Burmans for their association with abuses connected to

²² Denied by the military regime, ethnic forced assimilation to Burman/Buddhist culture (sometimes referred to as Burmanization) is commonly understood amongst ethnic and religious minorities throughout the country. Though historic tactics of successive regimes for assimilation vary in each area, they commonly include a mix of strategies for ethnic, religious and linguistic assimilation. For further documentation of forced assimilation practices see Martin Smith, *Ethnic Groups in Burma: Development, Democracy and Human Rights*, Anti-Slavery International, 1994. And Lian H. Sakhong, "The Dynamics of Sixty Years of Ethnic Armed Conflict in Burma", Burma Center for Ethnic Studies, January 2012. And "Threats to Our Existence: Persecution of Chin Christians in Burma", Chin Human Rights Organization, September 2012.

military activity and economic projects. Many ethnic minority respondents also displayed an aversion to ethnic Burman persons, military or otherwise, marrying local ethnic women. One respondent explained his frustration:

“We have been fighting the Burmese for decades. They (ethnic Burmans) marry our daughters. Our grandchildren are Burmese (ethnic Burman). In the military barracks they have to build a church because all the Kachin girls are there (ethnic Burmans are predominantly Buddhist; ethnic Kachins, predominantly Christian). They try to kill us now. How bad are they? Because of greediness and power.”

--Kachin community leader

Ethnic minority respondents commonly expressed a perception that longstanding practices of forced assimilation continue. Some respondents expressed concern related to increased military presence in ethnic areas resulting from peace process negotiations. Respondents described concern that the government and military have used the peace process to gain further access to ethnic territories and strengthen fortifications of military installments around economic project sites. The subsequent increased presence of ethnic Burman military and business personnel associated with these activities further fuels resentment.

Persons of Mixed Heritage

A significant issue expressed by mixed-ethnic persons from recognized groups (particularly those whose parents also came from different religious groups) was that of racism towards mixed ethnic persons. One young respondent explained:

“My father is Burmese (ethnic Burman) and my mother is Kachin. I live here in Kachin State. When I go to meet Kachin people they say to me that I am not Kachin. When I meet Burmese (ethnic Burman) people they say I am not Burmese. It is hard to find people who accept me. It is worse now that there is armed fighting in our state.”

--Mixed-ethnic youth group representative.

Although respondents noted a perceived decrease in the intensity of discrimination, rejection based on ethnicity is an issue that persons of mixed ethnicity face on a regular basis. This was seen to be less prevalent in Yangon and Mandalay, where persons of mixed ethnicity commonly identify as Burmese or ethnic Burman and are indistinguishable from other residents. Tensions are heightened for persons of mixed ethnicity with recognized minority ethnic and ethnic Burman heritage who live in ethnic states, particularly in areas with recent experiences of armed conflict.

Inter-ethnic Division of Recognized Groups

Although not prevalent during interviews, it was noted that some respondents held negative attitudes towards other recognized ethnic groups. A few interviewees made negative comments about other ethnic groups. In one focus group, a respondent, knowing that the

translator was Kachin, explained firmly (in a way that the translator interpreted as purposefully derogatory) that:

“Our people aren’t so aggressive or militaristic like the Kachins (who are currently engaged in armed conflict with the government). We are a peaceful people as you can see, and we are striving for peace. We don’t make conflict for no reason.”

--Respondent from an ethnic state.

In other cases, negative sentiment towards other ethnic groups is related to economic projects. One respondent explained:

“Now there are many Burmese, Chin, Rakhine and others in our land. They come for business. Our land is so rich (in natural resources). Those who come. . . they become so greedy. They occupy the land and that is only the start of their greed. They have so many cunning schemes. We (our ethnic group) are a peaceful people. We have a good attitude towards others. But how should we respond as we watch our land be taken by those who become so greedy?”

--Community leader from an ethnic state.

Intra-ethnic Dividing Lines

The intricate nature of dividing lines within major ethnic groups varies from state to state. Divisions, sometimes complicated by religious differences or other factors, are most prevalent amongst those ethnic groups with multiple languages. These divisions have often been encouraged by previous military regimes, contributing to splits amongst political and armed groups during past decades.

Ethnic populations hosting multiple sub-groups²³ struggle for unity. Respondents from smaller sub-groups often expressed worry about the loss of language and culture to more dominant sub-ethnic groups in a similar way that the entire group express concerns of submission to dominant Burman culture.

Mon Intra-group Dividing Lines

Although most major ethnic minority groups within the country host a multitude of sub groups speaking various dialects and languages, the Mon are one of the few ethnic minority groups that share one language and culture. In addition, by having one major ethnic political party and

²³ This ethnic groups noted as consisting of sub-groups are those who are officially classified as the government as containing multiple tribes or ethnic groups. Linguistic differences generally constitute for these distinctions. Kayin sub-ethnic groups are predominantly East Po, West Po and Sqaw, amongst others. Sub-ethnic groups of the Karenni are The Kachin sub-ethnic groups/tribes are Kayah, Kayan, Kayaw, Yintale, GeBa, MoNu, Yinbaw, GeKho and Lalta. Sub-ethnic groups of the Kachin are Jinghpaw, Rawang, Lisu, Lou Vow, Lachik and Zai Wah. The Mon contain no sub-groups/tribes.

armed group representing the whole, no major divisions were found within the Mon ethnic group.

Respondents from other areas often cited the Mon people as an example of a united ethnic group because of their shared language and literature. The strength of Mon identity has increased as a result of attempts to safeguard Mon language and culture against forced assimilation of the group into mainstream society.

Kayin Intra-group Dividing Lines

Major ethno-linguistic sub-groups within the Kayin are Sqaw, East Po and West Po. Respondents explained a multitude of complexities within these groups. In brief, East Po speakers are mostly Buddhist; West Po and Sqaw are both Buddhist and Christian. Major Christian denominations within Kayin State include Anglican, Po Baptist, Sqaw Baptist, Roman Catholic and Seventh Day Adventist. The Sqaw language has two main scripts, one with a Bible translation used by Christians and the other used by Buddhists. There is also a Bible written in West Po script. There are also some forms of ancient script only used by Buddhist monks, as well as an indigenous writing form known and used by few persons.

The complexity of languages and literatures within the ethnic Kayin has resulted in a number of intricate divisions within the group. None of the respondents from the two interviews and one focus group discussion with representatives of various Kayin Literature and Culture associations were able to provide a clear response as to how many languages, dialects and scripts the Kayin people have. At times, this complexity and lack of clarity can cause division amongst Kayin populations. One representative explained:

“Though our literature and culture association was established 35 years ago, we only began teaching Kayin language three years ago. The reason for this is that for the first 32 years, group members could not agree as to which Kayin literature we should teach. So during that time we focused mainly on cultural activities.”

--Kayin Literature & Culture Association representative

Further competition amongst scripts is a delicate subject prompting increased division between some Kayin populations while simultaneously unifying others. One respondent from a Kayin Literature and Culture Association explained:

“We have one script created in 1994 called Law Chauk Wai that is based on ancient Kayin literary forms. Some Kayin groups promote this script wishing that it will be used by all Kayin people as a uniting force, as the Mon are united by their script. However, Christian Kayins who have Bible translations in their own literary forms are not interested to convert to use of literary forms based on Buddhist traditions. Efforts to spread this script have been a subject of debate.”

--Kayin Literature & Culture Association representative

During the colonial era, a portion of the Kayin population converted to Christianity. Traditional festivals and activities are associated with indigenous faith, and many Christian Kayins have felt uncomfortable participating in these Kayin cultural activities. Efforts have been made to include further participation of Christian communities in traditional cultural events, though participation varies depending on the religious leaders of each community.

With the longest recorded history of the ethnic groups surveyed, the major political group representing Kayin people is the Kayin National Union (KNU). The Kayin National Liberation Army (KNLA), Kayin Youth Organization (KYO), Kayin Women's Organization (KWO) and Kayin National Defense Organization (KNDO) are all affiliated with the KNU. For many years, youth served in the KYO and KWO in local communities throughout the state before assuming positions within the KNU, KNLA or KNDO. Since the 1994 KNU/DKBA split, however, the pre-existing operational structure governed by the KNU has adapted its mode of operation to fit the political circumstances of the time.

KNU/KNLA – DKBA Split. 1994

Encouraging the widening of religious divides amongst the Kayin subgroups, the military regime supported efforts to divide members within the Kayin National Union/Kayin National Liberation Army in 1994. Due to the fact that KNU leadership was predominantly Christian, reports that government agents as well as internal discrimination encouraged disaffection amongst some lower ranking Buddhist KNLA soldiers. Receiving military and logistical support from the regime following the split, the newly formed Democratic Kayin Buddhist Army (DKBA) soon became a proxy militia of the government. Within months, the severely weakened KNU headquarters of Mannerplaw was overrun by government troops.²⁴

Since the KNU/DKBA split, Kayin civil society has strived to unify the Kayin people across this religious/political divide. Respondents explained that since the formation of the KNU/KNLA Peace Council (KNU/KNLAPC) in 2006/7, these three main organizations (KNU, DKBA and KNU/KNLAPC) have operated independently, though efforts were made to work cooperatively by drawing membership from the KYO and KWO. One respondent explained:

“Although we have a number of different languages and scripts amongst the Kayins for which there is minor conflict, and some Kayins are Christians while others are Buddhist, our identity is more closely tied to our major ethnic group: the Kayin. In a church you may have Kayins, Burmans, Pa-O, Mon and Indian if it is diverse. Kayin Christians would worship and celebrate religious festivals with the others, but they would always be loyal to the Kayin. It is important to be united as Kayin.”

--Kayin Civil Society Representative.

Following the period of field research, violent clashes between KNU/KNLA and government troops prompted a renewed discussion amongst Kayin armed and political groups. With wide

²⁴ Information based on Ashley South, *Ethnic Politics in Burma: States of conflict*, Rutledge, 2009, p. 57 – 61.

support across Kayin civil society, the KNLA, KNDO, DKBA and KNU/KNLAPC announced their reunification to be represented as Kawthoolei Armed Forces (KAF).²⁵

Karenni Intra-group Dividing Lines

As with the Kayin ethnic group, a multitude of ethno-linguistic variations exist within the major ethnic group of Kayah State. The name of Kayah State used to be Karenni, and the accepted classification of the ethnic group of the state is Karenni. Within the Karenni people, the government classifies eight major sub-groups, each with its own language or dialect. These include the Kayah, Kayan, Kayaw, Yintale, GeBa, Kayah MoNu, Yinbaw, Ge Kho and Lalta. Some respondents in the state consider there to be 10 or 11 major groups, although there is no consensus regarding which groups are distinct and which might be the same.

Major political/armed groups²⁶ operating in Kayah State include the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), Karenni National People's Liberation Front (KNPLF), Karenni National Democratic Party (KNDP), Karenni National Peace and Development Party (KNPDP), Karenni National Solidarity Organization (KNSO), Kayan New Land Party (KNLP) and Kayan National Guard (KNG). The largest group is the KNPP, which was founded in 1957. Other major groups split successively from the KNPP in 1978, 1995, 1999 and 2002. One respondent explained his view of the development of these divisions:

“Under the regime of General Ne Win it was the strategy of the government to cause conflict and division within major Karenni sub groups. You can see that we have seven ethnic armed groups, each splitting from the KNPP in successive years during the past decades, splits always occurring along ethno-linguistic lines. Each major ethnic sub-group has its own political/armed group.

In past years the military regime would give priority treatment to some armed groups over others, granting business deals to some while neglecting others; inviting some to decision making meetings while overlooking others. These tactics caused continued internal fighting (not violent) amongst ethnic political and armed groups consistently during past decades. We have no unity as a result.”

--Karenni NGO worker

Amongst the Karenni people, the majority practice Buddhism and a minority practice Christianity. No clear data exists to determine the religious proportions within the Karenni or any other group. There is also a strong influence of traditional Khe Htoe Boe²⁷ culture and faith. Khe Htoe Boe cultural groups are highly organized, and its traditional culture is integrated into the culture and lifestyle of many Buddhists.

²⁵ Karen Army Forces Statement of Reunification, 13 October 2014. Downloaded from the Myanmar Peace Monitor website on 14 January 2014. <http://www.mmpeacemonitor.org/>

²⁶ Other armed/political groups also operate in Kayah State; however, these have less influence or are not aligned specifically with one ethnic sub-group of the Karenni.

²⁷ Khe Htoe Boe is the major indigenous philosophical tradition of the Karenni people.

In the past, some Christians rejected Khe Htoe Boe culture, associating it with a faith they do not accept. Although many Christian Karenni have begun to accept traditional culture in recent years, ill feelings still exist amongst some Buddhist and Khe Htoe Boe communities based on this earlier split. One Khe Htoe Boe respondent expressed his feelings thus:

“When Buddhism came to our land many people began to practice both Buddhism and Khe Htoe Boe. Buddhists accepted our traditional faith and culture. But when Christianity came here and some people converted, the missionaries forced them to stop practicing old traditions. They saw our indigenous people as ignorant and made those who converted to Christianity reject our tradition and culture.”

--Khe Htoe Boe community elder

Kachin Intra-group Dividing Lines

There are six primary tribes²⁸ within the Kachin ethnic group, each with its own distinct language. Amongst these, the Jinghpaw are represented in the highest numbers. Other tribes include Rawang, Lisu, Lou Vow, Lachik and Zai Wa. A unifying force amongst the Kachin is that the vast majority of Kachins converted to Christianity during the colonial era; however, a number of different Christian denominations exist. Respondents explained that no major division exists amongst various Christian denominations in their state. Furthermore, the Kachin have one primary political group, the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), and one primary army, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA).

Although no major division is apparent amongst the Kachin tribes, some minority sub-ethnic groups expressed disbelief regarding a universal feeling of social and cultural equality amongst the tribes. Underscoring this division, the term Jinghpaw is in some cases used to represent the whole of the Kachin people, much to the chagrin of smaller tribes. Representatives of smaller tribes within the Kachin expressed a feeling of exclusion when the term Jinghpaw is applied to them.²⁹ One respondent explained:

“Amongst our Kachin people, the mentality that one group is superior to the rest disrupts peace amongst us. All groups should be viewed as equal. It is the same with ethnic Burmans. The mentality that the Burman should be dominant to all others disrupts peace around the country. Amongst major ethnic minorities we struggle against this in our interaction with Burmans, but somehow people in our own community have internalized this mentality of superiority.”

If a mentality develops within the dominant Burmans that all ethnic groups should be considered equal, it would resolve all conflicts around the country. Likewise, if this

²⁸ The term tribes is commonly used to describe major sub-ethnic groups of the Kachin. It is not widely used for other ethnic groups included in this report.

²⁹ Interviews during September 2014.

mentality of equality develops within the dominant group of our Kachin people it would resolve internal conflicts amongst us in Kachin State.”

--Non-Jingphaw culture association leader in Kachin State

Some respondents explained that these divisions did not exist before the military takeover in 1962, and that intra-group divisions resulted from the government’s preferential treatment of some groups over others. In some cases, current interaction with the government continues to deepen these divisions. One representative of an ethnic sub-group explains:

“We felt offended by recent government media describing the Kachin people collectively as Jinghpaw. These media releases and the acceptance of them by many Jinghpaws have evoked strong reactions among our people. The government knows that this is a big issue for us, but somehow these issues keep coming up.”

--Representative of Kachin ethnic sub-group

An interviewee from the Jinghpaw tribe explained:

“The recent government decision to provide special status and consideration for the Rawang and Lisu under the Ethnic Affairs Ministry we think is unfair treatment. We are all Kachin people. The Ethnic Affairs Ministry is to give support to ethnic communities with significant populations (of 50,000 or more) living in other states, like the Shans who live in Kachin State. But the Rawang and Lisu are our Kachin people and giving them a special status creates unnecessary conflict. All of our Kachin tribes should be given equal treatment by the government.”

--Political group representative

Religious Divides and Non-recognized Ethnic Groups

The government uses religion to determine ethnic classification in Myanmar. Specifically, Hindus and Muslims are generally forced to classify themselves based on a ‘foreign’ part of their identity (Indian, Pakistani or Bengali), and are therefore ‘not-recognized’ as one of the 135 races.³⁰

During the field research, it was found that a major issue for individuals from non-recognized groups³¹ was that of obtaining citizen documentation. It was found that those of higher financial standing and influence were generally more likely to obtain documents while those without substantial financial means to pay necessary bribes were unable to get paperwork. Respondents frequently explained that local officials would commonly lose or misplace paperwork, necessitating further bribes or resulting in lost interest in obtaining citizen documentation.

³⁰ Sai Latt, “Burma’s Ominous Political Debate over Ethnicity”, *The Irrawaddy*, 25 June 2013.

³¹ See terminology section.

A multitude of structural barriers remain for individuals from non-recognized groups, whether they are able to obtain citizen documentation or not. Interviews with religious minorities and non-recognized groups showed a correlation between the organizational strength of groups in each area and their ability to obtain necessary approval to maintain or construct worship facilities or, in some cases, to celebrate festivals. Well-established groups in urban centers had a higher potential to bribe or otherwise persuade local officials to grant permission for the needs of their group, while small populations living in rural areas often lacked organizational and financial backing to get what they needed, regardless of a change in pre-existing barriers. As one Hindu resident in a rural town explained:

“In 1969 there was a fire in the town that destroyed many buildings. We were lucky because our (Hindu) temple was not burned. But, after the fire the government cleared the whole area to make space for the construction of new houses. As part of this process, they demolished our temple. At that time, they promised us that they would give us land to build a new temple.

Well, we did not receive any land and officials later told us they had no record of the agreement. So some of our Hindu community members offered to build the temple on their land, but our petitions to the government for approval have not been accepted. Our community has tried repeatedly since 1969 to get a new temple, but have failed each time. Current political transitions have not changed our situation. We feel hopeless and we worry about our future generations, as we have no place where we can pass on the values of our faith.”

--Hindu community member from a rural town

The most apparent religious divide observed during field research was the lack of awareness amongst most respondents from recognized ethnic groups regarding both structural and social issues faced by non-recognized ethnic groups. Recognized group members often explained that, although there is anti-Muslim violence and religious tension in other parts of the country, discrimination against Muslims and other non-recognized groups did not exist in their local community. Meanwhile, individuals from non-recognized groups shared a wide range of concerns, both structural and social. Usually, discrimination was directed towards these communities regardless of citizenship status.

A typical focus group with persons from non-recognized groups would include stories of struggles to procure citizenship and related documentation, structural barriers to education and work, requirements to obtain permission to travel, violence and other crimes committed against them with no protection or access to justice, economic hardship due to social discrimination and complicated relationships with police amongst other struggles. Sometimes examples of structural and social discrimination occur separately from one another; at other times, they occur simultaneously. One Hindu respondent explained:

“In our community local officials won’t allow us (Hindus) to buy land without a recommendation letter from a local influential monk. As we Hindus also worship the

Buddha, we do not see much difference between local Buddhists and us. It is no problem for us to go pay respect to local monks and request what we need from them. The monks are always nice to us when we meet them, but somehow we continue to be unable to buy land due to complications with local officials. We think that the local monks are speaking bad about us behind our backs and telling the local officials not to allow us to buy land.”

--Hindu community representatives in a rural state

Another respondent explained:

“Last year one of the respected persons from our community passed away. The funeral services took place in a rural village where he was born and many community members from the surrounding areas came out to pay their respect. Prior to commencement of the funeral service the police arrived, responding to a call from local residents about the mobilization of many Muslims. The service was delayed until family members of the deceased and funeral organizers finished explaining purpose of their gathering and plans for the day to police. I’m certain Buddhists would never have to deal with such things.”

--Muslim community member

Whereas many communities throughout the country often have no mechanism to resolve conflicts with police, military or government officials, individuals from non-recognized groups often have no protection or means to access justice, regardless of whether they are able to obtain citizenship documentation or not. The experience of many non-recognized groups has suggested that taking issues to the police has only resulted in more problems for their community. One respondent described an incident in which a rape survivor’s family attempted to seek justice for their daughter:

“In my community a young Muslim girl was raped by her Buddhist neighbor who was a local government staff. Feeling that going to the police would bring trouble our community went to the Buddhist monastery. The head monk called both parties and their families together to discuss the issue. After hearing what both parties had to say, the monk decided that since there was no evidence of rape, and since the girl was so young and could not be trusted, each side should make peace with each other, casting no blame. The girl’s family was then asked to sign a paper saying that they would not sue the man or cause any trouble about the case.”

--Local community member

Due to the impact of structural discrimination on the vulnerability of non-recognized groups, stories of violence were common. For example, vulnerability is highest in areas where non-recognized communities are also at significant economic disadvantage. It was also commonly stated that, after becoming victims of violent crime, non-recognized group members were expected to sign documents affirming that they would not cause trouble. Victims were thus left without any recourse to seek justice.

As a result of the spread of hate speech and anti-Muslim violence, many Muslim religious leaders further encouraged their communities to keep quiet when issues arose for fear that speaking out could trigger a riot or attack on the local mosque. In all locations, Muslim and Hindu respondents could share many examples where minor incidents and/or rumors almost triggered violence. Heightened tensions in one community resulted in young boys sleeping on rotation in the nearby mosque, ready to alert police based on a general feeling that any small incident or rumor could trigger riots and attacks on the building.

Religious Division in Urban Centers

Religious division in urban centers of Yangon and Mandalay is similar to other areas of the country. Forces driving religious conflict are active and freely incite conflict while local forces for peace simultaneously work diligently to transform conflict. Although both Yangon and Mandalay host a multitude of local NGOs, informal groups and networks actively working to transform inter-religious division, some coordinating efforts nationwide, structural and social discrimination and the potential for actors for conflict to act aggressively, exist in each city.

Gender and Generational Divides

Although Myanmar hosts numerous distinct ethno-linguistic, religious and cultural groups, traditional norms and roles considered 'Burmese' manifest themselves in a variety of ways across diverse cultures.

Both gender and generational issues were observed as more pronounced in areas with weaker activity of youth and women's groups. Conversely, knowledge of gender and generational issues was higher in areas with higher levels of women's and youth group activity.

TRADITIONAL ROLES AND NORMS

In her 1984 book, *World of Burmese Women*, prominent Burmese anthropologist Mi Mi Khaing describes traditional culture as one that supports a strong belief in 'suitable' feminine behavior. As a result, traditional culture often requires handling daughters more strictly than sons. It is also a mother's duty to arrange her daughter's marriage.

Traditional parent-child relationships are marked by love, fear, and respect for the parent, and relationships between youth and elders follow a similar pattern. Children and youth must refrain from voicing opinions, and deviating from such expected behavior is considered troublesome.³²

Gender Divides

The heavy militarization around Myanmar during the past decades has contributed to increased numbers of men joining military or armed groups while women are simultaneously excluded

³² Information from Mi Mi Khaing, *The World of Burmese Women*, The Pitman Press, 1984, p. 16 – 22.

from many positions of power and decision-making. Patterns of militarization are prevalent from the central government to armed groups operating around the country.

In areas of current or past conflict, respondents explained that young men often have few opportunities for personal advancement beyond involvement in local armed groups or emigration for work. Many respondents also believed that the past military regime weakened armed resistance by introducing drugs into the population as a strategy to affect young men at increasingly high rates. In some communities, while men were involved in armed conflict, women were left with the burden of providing financial support for the family and caring for children. Based on cultures of militarized masculinity, many communities have struggled— and in many cases continue to struggle— with high incidence of rape by military personnel. As a result, women remain highly vulnerable in conflict zones.

Although describing external threats and structural influences on young women and men was relatively easy for respondents, many had difficulty conceptualizing cultural influences and internal community pressures on men and women. During decades of armed struggle against the military, problems were often externalized and communities were often less willing to look inward at their own cultural and social influences. As a result, many communities are only now coming to terms with gender issues long prevalent in their communities. One woman with a local youth network explained:

“Before when we had armed conflict there were lots of rape cases by the military and this is what our community focused on. Now that there is no armed conflict, we see that there is a lot of domestic and sexual violence within our community. But the community doesn’t know how to handle this. The women think it is shameful and they don’t disclose the abuse they suffer. Women and the community in general have low knowledge of rights and as a result women keep quiet about these issues.”

--Female youth network representative

Social stigma associated with sexual violence, particularly when committed by a partner or community member, was a major issue raised by interview subjects in all areas of field research. Deeply ingrained cultural norms contribute to the suppression of this issue and the inability of many communities to make the cultural shift needed to address the issue. With traditional practices of arranged marriage still common in many areas, young women continue to be pressured into marriage, and a general perception persists that women should accept whatever fate awaits them. Some respondents connected these issues with deeper cultural norms. One respondent explained:

“Our traditional culture says that women’s position is lower than men. We have old songs and stories that tell of this. This discrimination has developed over a long time through our culture. Now they just try to put women in leadership roles, but the culture has not changed, so people throughout the community talk badly about them and try to discourage them from being leaders.”

--Youth group representative

At an even deeper level, pressures to uphold long engrained gender roles are embedded into the cultural practices of religious groups. One male respondent explained:

“In my community, religions keep women down. It is not one religion, but each of them, and in different ways. Women are not permitted to enter some places close to the (Buddhist) Pagoda. Likewise, in my church, women are prohibited to stand on the pupil. Women can give sermons and religious lectures when men aren’t present, but when men are involved, they don’t allow the women to fill any leadership roles.”

--Young male respondent

During research, respondents often explained that women’s voices were seldom heard in leadership and decision-making. With the exception of meetings arranged with women’s and youth groups, women rarely attended interviews or focus groups. In many cases, women served coffee, and then disappeared when discussions commenced. It was common that men spoke on behalf of women or about women’s issues. One female leader explained:

“My leadership is only possible because I work in the education field. If I wish to extend my leadership beyond education, it would not be accepted by power-holders in the community. Local culture discourages the leadership of women.”

--Female leader in ethnic state

Decades of armed conflict have fostered the development of cultures of militarized masculinities, extending from the political center to the ethnic areas around the country. Privileges allotted to personnel in the military— an exclusively male institution— have long been unattainable for women, and policies are developed without gender-balanced participation. As evidenced by meetings with political actors, armed groups and civil society representatives, cultural norms around the country follow similar patterns of male-dominated decision making. Women’s participation remains minimal in local decision-making, participation in political groups and involvement in the ongoing peace processes.

Intergenerational Divides

While some respondents gave examples of positive intergenerational cooperation, many described a significant gap between elders and youth, defined by poor communication and common misunderstanding. Similar stories were heard in all locations and involved all ethnic and religious groups. The elder generation, long accustomed to coping with life under the military dictatorship, often fears that the aspirations of the younger generation will bring trouble for the community. One youth leader explains:

“I am an activist. I want to unify people and get people to work together to help the community. Nevertheless, the older generation does not accept it. They misunderstand my intentions and think that I want to be involved in politics. They see politics as something that is dangerous and think it is better to avoid it. The young generation has

different ideas. The older generation worries. They do not want us to be involved in politics. And they can't give us any reason for this."

--Youth activist from an ethnic state

In some communities, youth struggle with expectations to show obedience towards parents and older generations. Those with their own ideas, who are interested in doing things in new and different ways, expressed frustration that their communities do not make enough space for them to become leaders. Many youth described a feeling that the elder generation does not support them. Another young respondent describes:

"Our youth groups are always organizing seminars, events and trainings for youth. We want to build our capacity to make a better community. However, the older generation does not understand what purpose we have for trying to build our capacity. They see it as a waste of time and energy. We want them to support us, but they are not interested. We have to organize and plan everything ourselves."

--Youth leader from ethnic state

In some communities, the older generations felt that they did provide opportunities for youth and that the youth were not interested in utilizing them. One elder community leader, dissatisfied with the errors made by youth in arranging our meeting, explained:

"I have been a community leader for many years now and I want to retire. I want to pass on my responsibilities to the younger generation, but they are not interested. I asked some of the younger ones to arrange this meeting, but look, they messed up the communication, and other community representatives will arrive late as a result. Young people these days are busy doing other things. Here I have requested them to do something very simple and they cannot even do that well. I worry about the future. How can I pass on further leadership responsibility if they can't even arrange a simple meeting?"

--Elder community leader from rural village

It seemed that, after hearing from both youth and older generations, perceptions of what it is to be a leader are quite different. Whereas the older generation came to be leaders from working under the older generation when they were younger, many of the younger generation today are not interested in following the ways of their elders. They have new ideas and do not have patience to do things in the traditional way. At the same time, the younger generation at times lacks creative engagement with the older generations, preferring simply to complain about them and continue doing things as they see fit.

Government-Civil Society Divides

In all areas where field research was carried out, the distrust of the government was evident and the division between citizens and the state seen as causing local conflict. While

respondents often described political issues with ease, many expressed uncertainty regarding how to solve the problems encountered with the government. As previously noted, fault was often ascribed to the government with little consideration of the community's contribution to increasing tensions and perpetuating conflict. Often, whatever mechanisms were in place for solving conflicts with local government were ineffective. One student explained:

“Exam time is a very important time for us. For students in Myanmar, it determines our future. In ethnic areas like ours, we often have problems with electricity shortages. Knowing this, the students arrange for representatives to meet with the electricity department and request that they do not cut electricity during the exam period so students can focus on their study.

We have done this for years and they never listen to our complaints. After extended electricity cuts during exam time, this year a group of students gathered to throw rocks at the electricity department office to show them our disapproval. We still don't think they will listen to us.”

--University student from an ethnic state

Mutual mistrust between civil society and the government was also common in most areas. This is particularly true with local groups involved in politics. One respondent explained:

“In our state there is much division amongst various ethno-linguistic subgroups. During decades past, the military government has encouraged splits within our political and armed group leadership, splits consistently occurring along sub-ethnic, linguistic lines. Our youth network seeks to build unity amongst our many armed and political groups, while at the same time advocating that in all actions our various political and armed groups conduct themselves for the benefit of the people.

While many local NGOs have increased freedom during this political transition period, our group has difficulty with registration and is still under suspicion from the ‘special police’. They are suspicious of our activities to build ethnic and political unity and we are suspicious of their intentions in monitoring us.”

--Youth network representatives from an ethnic state

III. Forces

Using the Reflecting on Peace Practice model developed by CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, a ‘three box analysis’ of conflict in Myanmar is presented below.³³ The ‘three box analysis’ was designed to maintain simplicity in the process of conflict analysis without ignoring the inherent

³³ Information on CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, the ‘three box analysis’ and other tools can be found on the CDA website: www.cdacollaborative.org

complexity of the situation. This model is designed to identify key forces for peace, key forces against peace and key actors involved.

Drawn from findings on dividing lines, a number of structural and social forces for peace and forces against peace are identified in this section. Narratives are used to highlight the influence of these forces on local communities. Using information from field research relevant data on actors involved is provided.

Forces for Peace		Forces Against Peace	Key Actors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interfaith activities and initiatives • In-group peacebuilding initiatives • Civil society collaboration, networking and coalition building • Shared cultural activities • Social work across ethnic and religious divides • Government – civil society collaboration • Human rights advocacy • Cooperation amongst local political leaders, armed group leaders and civil society groups • Positive relationships between local communities and local government officials, police and military • Parliamentary debate • Media coverage of interfaith and inter-ethnic cooperation 	<p>P</p> <p>E</p> <p>A</p> <p>C</p> <p>E</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Military control over political processes • Centralized decision-making structures • Ethnically stratified government, military and civil service • Discriminatory legislation and policy • Lack of rule of law • Control over civil society • Enduring practices of forced assimilation • Land grabs • Sexual and gender based violence • Drug abuse in communities • Hate speech media • Trainings and activities of nationalist groups • Aggressive social discrimination; disruption of positive relationships • Mysterious occurrences • Disunity amongst local political leaders, armed group leaders and civil society groups • Weak or no relationships between local communities and local government officials, police and military 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The president and central government • Military leadership • Parliament members • Local NGOs and civil society groups • Youth groups • Women’s groups • Formal and informal networks • MaBaTha • Companies involved in economic projects • Local religious leaders • Local political and armed group leaders • Local government officials, police and military • Individual peacebuilders • Government sponsored interfaith associations

Forces for Peace

Forces for peace can be utilized to promote movement away from conflict and towards peace. They include actors and influences that connect people across divisions and conflict lines. They initiate cooperation and exercise leadership in support of peace. In all parts of the country, there are citizens and key institutions which are working to improve the conflict dynamics, build bridges and prevent violence. It is critical that any peacebuilding work builds on these local initiatives as described here.

Interfaith Activities and Initiatives

A wide range of NGOs, youth groups, women's groups, and civil society groups operating both locally and nationally facilitate interfaith activities. Some of these groups have facilitated activities for many years while others have emerged in response to recent religious conflict. The following is an example of the impact of one interfaith initiative:

“My daughter is a university student. I encourage her to make friends with students from many ethnic and religious backgrounds. Therefore, after her first semester of university I told her that she could invite all of her new university friends over to our house to celebrate our Muslim festival of Eid. I made snacks and arranged our house to accommodate all her new friends. She was very excited.

On the day of Eid we waited at our home, but nobody came. Only two of my daughter's close friends from childhood were there. I could not bear to see my baby girl's disappointment. I told her not to be sad, but what more can I do?

That year she became involved in the interfaith activities of a local NGO. She made friends from all different religions. Again, I told her that we would celebrate Eid at our house and told her to invite all of her friends. It was unbelievable. We have a three-story house and were unable to accommodate for all of my daughter's new friends who came to celebrate Eid in our family home. It was one of the happiest days of our lives. I am so thankful to the local interfaith youth group.”

--Muslim father

In-group Peacebuilding Initiatives

A wide range of local NGOs, youth groups, women's groups, and civil society groups also facilitate in-group peacebuilding initiatives. Respondents explained that although it is important to build cooperation amongst ethnic and religious groups, it is essential that ethnic and religious groups work to create positive transformations within their own groups. One representative from a local Buddhist NGO described engagement with the Buddhist Sangha³⁴ and responses to recent conflict:

“As we are a Buddhist organization well respected within the Buddhist community many monks have requested to us to also provide capacity building and training to monks and nuns. In 2013 we began organizing trainings for monks and nuns. Like our other projects,

³⁴ Sangha refers to the community of Buddhist monks and nuns.

trainings for monks also cover topics of environmental awareness, peacebuilding, interfaith understanding, gender issues, and socially engaged Buddhism. Our earlier trainings were so successful that more and more monks and nuns requested training from us. We planned and initiated a more intensive leadership training for monks in 2014 for graduates of our first trainings.

To address interfaith conflict directly we worked through our networks to bring monks from Rakhine State and Meikthila to attend our trainings. We organized an interfaith symposium and through our networks of engaged Buddhist organizations in other parts of Southeast Asia arranged interfaith exposure trips for monks to Thailand and Cambodia. We hope our efforts can help to transform interfaith conflict from within the Buddhist Sangha.”

--Buddhist NGO representative

Civil Society Collaboration, Networking and Coalition Building

As many civil society groups carry out activities that explicitly serve the needs of one ethnic or religious group, initiatives that encourage collaboration amongst civil society groups can help build bridges across ethnic and religious divides. In local communities, individuals and small groups form local networks and coalitions, while at the national level NGOs and civil society groups are dedicated to forming strong networks and coalitions. One respondent in Kachin State provided an example:

“Drugs are a big problem in our community. Drug use is an issue that affects every community regardless of ethnicity or religious affiliation. Within the many denominations of our Christian community, we host fellowship programs to raise awareness about the dangers of drugs. To address the issue of drugs in the community, all Christian denominations join. We organize an annual anti-drug day and invite other religious communities to join. Last year we invited a locally respected Buddhist monk to give motivational speeches and to show that all religions can work together to address this problem.”

--Christian youth leader in Kachin State

Shared Cultural Activities

Examples of sharing cultural events and activities were seen throughout all areas where research was conducted. In some cases, cultural activities were shared between neighbors and individuals; in other cases, cultural festivals were organized to incorporate participation of diverse groups. The following is an example of one owner of a private tuition school who organizes activities for festivals for his students of different religions to share together:

“As most people in our community are either Christian or Buddhist, most of the students at my tuition school are either Christian or Buddhist; though, we do have some students who are Hindu and Muslim.

Every Christmas I organize a Christmas party at the school and invite Christian leaders to join. During Thadingyut (Buddhist light festival) we arrange tuk tuk taxis to drive us around town to visit pagodas and see the candle displays. All students enjoy participating in these activities together. There is no religious purpose behind our organizing these activities. It is just a fun way of bringing all students together.”

--Private tuition school owner

Social Work Across Ethnic and Religious Divides

Throughout all areas where field research was conducted, examples were found of people engaging in social work across ethnic and religious divides. Both groups and individuals initiated activities. In all cases, engaging in social work across ethnic and religious dividing lines is an opportunity to build tolerance and understanding. One Muslim doctor explained:

“After finishing my secondary education in British schools, in the 1960s I attended medical university in Yangon. I have worked as a doctor of medical surgery in upper Myanmar since that time. Later in my career, after my children were married and left home I had more free time. Therefore, in addition to my regular work I also began to volunteer at the local Buddhist hospitals. These are hospitals exclusively for Buddhist monks and nuns. I have been doing this since the early 1990s and have treated thousands of patients there.

As a Muslim doctor, I’ve never experienced any issues of discrimination working in the Buddhist hospitals. Monks and nuns have always been pleased with my service and expertise. They respect me as a medical professional and for giving my time.”

--Muslim medical doctor

Government – Civil Society Collaboration

Although many local communities are quick to air their grievances with the central government, numerous examples can be found of government-civil society cooperation. As local communities are often small and tight knit, community members commonly have closer relationships with local officials. Initiatives were also noted to be bridging the gap between higher-level officials and local communities. The following is an account of a local group that took the initiative to build cooperation amongst parliament members and local villages:

“Our local NGO conducts a wide range of trainings in villages around our state. We use participatory methods to involve diverse community members in the process of ‘bottom-up’ development. We have found that there is a gap in understanding between high-level political leaders and local communities. In one training villagers requested to meet parliament members.

Honoring their request we arranged for parliament members to join in our training with a few local villages. At first, some of the local members were afraid or hesitant to speak up to higher-level political leaders, but once they found the parliament members were interested to learn from them they began to open up. In the end, parliament members

gained awareness of local needs and local villagers both learned about higher-level political processes and provided input to the higher-level. Both groups were more friendly to each other than they would have been in the past.”

--Local NGO workers

Human Rights Advocacy

Human rights advocacy by local, national and international actors is critical in ensuring that the military and political leadership of Myanmar act in accordance with human rights standards. For decades, local and national advocacy efforts have documented abuses of the military government and economic projects while advocating observance of human rights standards. Many international donors have overlooked these efforts during the current period of transition, and human rights abuses are once again going unnoticed. In the absence of sufficient support for local human rights advocacy, it is easier for military, political, and business elites to commit human rights abuses with impunity.

Cooperation among Local Political Leaders, Armed Group Leaders and Civil Society Groups

Local political and armed group leaders have long represented communities in ethnic areas. Although division within the leadership of political and armed groups weakens their ability to achieve their political aspirations, cooperation amongst them trickles down through the ranks to benefit local communities. Unity amongst local political and armed group members ensures consistent pressure on the government to relinquish military control of political decision-making and open space for real democracy. Strong connections

Background to Human Rights Advocacy in Myanmar

Civil society groups associated with ethnic political and armed groups have long established human rights units and media agencies advocating for the rights of their respective ethnic communities. In addition, ethnic women’s organizations have documented systematic sexual violence by the military regime while lead activists from the 1988 student uprising³⁵ setup organizations in exile, some of which implemented human rights trainings and conducted in depth research on human rights abuses.

During the 1990s and into the 2000s, a multitude of groups operating predominantly in Thailand, as well as other nearby countries, made available regular publications documenting a wide array of abuses. Strategies of international donors have changed since the recent political and economic changes, resulting in an inward shift in cash flows and inward focus on projects coordinated in cooperation with the government. With less funding available for human rights advocacy efforts, the capacity of many of these groups to conduct research to document abuses has diminished.

³⁵ After the military’s brutal crackdown on pro-Democracy protests of 1988 large numbers of student leaders and protesters fled the country. Many setup organizations in exile largely supported by international donors.

between civil society and political/armed group leadership ensure that political and armed group leaders represent the needs of local communities and are less susceptible by opportunities to profit from economic projects in their areas.

Positive Relationships Between Local Communities and Local Government Officials, Police and Military

The existence and quality of relationships between community members, township administrators, and other local officials profoundly influences conflict dynamics. These relationships are often weak; however, cases have been recorded where positive relationships have had strong positive influences on local community members and groups.

Minority communities, principally those from non-recognized groups, are particularly vulnerable if they are unable to build positive relationships with the Township Administrator or other key officials. The existence or absence of a relationship between local officials and minority religious communities had a direct correlation on the level of safety experienced by members of minority religious groups living in local communities. Field research shows that, in some cases, township administrators take personal responsibility for the protection of minority communities, coordinating with the local police force to ensure their safety. One respondent explained:

“Our community faces many problems, both from discrimination within the government system (structural) and from some persons within our town (social). But we feel safe in our town because we have a good relationship with the Township Administrator. After violence targeting Muslims began to spread throughout the country we went to talk with him. He told the chief of police that he must ensure our protection if some violence does occur. He understands our concerns and doesn’t want violence to come to his town. We feel safe as a result.”

--Muslim resident from ethnic state

Parliamentary Debate

The Union and state-level parliaments are among the only constructive forums for free debate. Many parliament members, both civilian and military, express interest in learning from local communities. Knowledge of local issues enables those within parliament working for peace to be more effective in targeting their work to meet the needs of the recipient communities. Some respondents explained that the president’s decision to pause the construction of the Mitzone Dam Project, a central issue in the conflict in Kachin State, was the result of intense debate in Parliament.

Civil society efforts to build positive communication between local communities and parliamentary representatives contribute to peace as some members of parliament debate the protection of local communities.

Media Coverage of Interfaith and Inter-ethnic Cooperation

Citing concerns of hate speech media, respondents working for peace described efforts to include further media coverage of interfaith cooperation in their work. Although their efforts

are limited, the influence of media coverage of interfaith and inter-ethnic cooperation has deep impact, particularly when local communities see the involvement of local leaders.

Forces Against Peace

Forces against peace are working against peace or trying to incite conflict. They are factors, issues, elements, individuals, and groups causing conflict and/or dividing people.

Military Control Over Political Processes

In interviews throughout the country, respondents commonly cited disapproval of military controls over political processes. Respondents frequently expressed an initial hope that the military would relinquish some level of control over key political processes; however, as time passes they have become further displeased with statements by key political leaders that indicate otherwise. Respondents commonly cited that, for peace to be possible, it is most important that Myanmar has a “real democracy.”

Review of Constitutional Amendments of Note

Amongst other issues, respondents commonly expressed their disapproval of a number of constitutional amendments ensuring military control over political processes. Common issues noted were as follows:

- Provisions reserving seats at all levels of parliament for military personnel (Article 14 and 141).
- The provision granting the military the right to assume control of the government (Article 40).
- Provisions ensuring the military will not come under civilian control and extending further control of key ministries (Articles 17, 20 and 232).
- Provisions providing undemocratic advantages for military leadership to attain the position of president (Article 59 and 60).

Centralized Decision-making Structures

The military-controlled political processes ensured centralized decision-making and central appointment of key positions of power at top at national, state/division and township levels of governance. Although not all respondents expressed knowledge of complex, constitutionally reinforced, centralized appointment systems, they quickly noticed the prevalence of military officials holding positions of power within state/district and township governments.

Local respondents were often displeased that state/district leadership were not democratically elected and did not represent the local communities. Central appointment and decision-making aggravates unresolved political grievances of ethnic communities seeking the development of measures for local autonomy.

Review of Central Appointment and Decision-Making

Article 161 of the Constitution guarantees the appointment of Chief Ministers of each state and division by the President. Chief Ministers are accountable only to the President, and all have been chosen from the military Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP). Chief Ministers appoint other key ministers of the state/division with the exception of reserved military appointments. Ministers are accountable to the Chief Minister of their state/division and, indirectly, to the President. Appointments reach further to townships and sometimes into villages.

In addition, appointment procedures and structures limit judicial independence throughout the country. State and division budgets are very small, and funds are predominantly controlled by central structures.³⁶

Ethnically Stratified Government, Military and Civil Service

Ethnic stratification in the government, military and civil service creates and reinforces division. Ongoing exclusion of non-Burmans from positions of power, as well as general exclusion of religious minorities, sets the stage for religiously and ethnically motivated discrimination by government, military, and civil service. This exclusion also creates resentment from disadvantaged groups. Respondents commonly described problems caused by government, military and civil service officials, which they claimed would not exist if these institutions were equitably integrated.

Ethnically Stratified Systems and Policies

The divide-and-rule strategies of the British ensured that ethnicity and, by default, religion would be used as key criteria for recruitment into the military, police, and civil service. Whereas the Chin, Kachin and Kayin ethnic groups (all areas of strong conversion to Christianity) were allotted their own military regiments under the British, Indians (predominantly Muslim and Hindu) were represented in high numbers in civil service and armed forces.

Policies of the Ne Win era reversed the dynamic of the colonial era and created an ethnically stratified government, military, and civil service. Positions of power within the regime were reserved for ethnic Burmans while other ethnic groups filled lower ranks. Indians, Chinese, and others perceived as immigrants were scarcely represented in this system. Ne Win's infamous 1982 Citizenship Law stripped citizenship from large sections of the population not included in his selected list of 135 'national races,' thereby restricting them from accessing a multitude of educational and employment opportunities. This also provided a basis for the removal of other rights and privileges.

³⁶ Information on centralized structures provided in "State and Region Governments in Myanmar", The Asia Foundation, September 2013.

Discriminatory Legislation and Policy

In addition to the continued use of a wide array of discriminatory laws from the military era, leading nationalist members working through the Organization for the Protection of Race and Religion, known by its Burmese acronym of MaBaTha, have developed laws imposing restrictions on Burmese citizens. These include restrictions on changing religion and the ability of women to marry outside of their Buddhist religion.

The Myanmar government's endorsement of these legislative prohibitions provides formal, political recognition of the growing demographic fears harbored by the majority Buddhist population, which cites threats posed by a Muslim takeover of the country. Political recognition of such fears further validates discriminatory laws and implicitly sanctions discrimination and violence against Muslims on social and political grounds. One respondent explained:

"969 monks preach at our Buddhist festivals and distribute hate speech media. We can't stop them. The divisive language they use when they preach we hear repeated in the community. It even causes conflict between Buddhist and Christians, particularly because the interfaith marriage law will also affect Christians."

--Buddhist community representative

Lack of Rule of Law

Respondents around the country described the continued problem of rape and other violent crimes committed by military and security forces in local communities. Impunity for rape and other violent crimes remains a major problem in Myanmar, and respondents were dissatisfied with how such cases were handled. The former UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar has persistently called upon the Myanmar government to address the lack of accountability for its security forces.³⁷ Accountability is difficult to achieve for perpetrators within the military based on the military's independence under constitutional provisions 17 and 20.

Control Over Civil Society

Respondents commonly expressed fear that repressive laws, such as those used to arrest and imprison civil society groups and persons working for peace, would be used by the government to stifle the peacebuilding efforts. The development and implementation of new laws restricting media, civil society, and peaceful assembly cause fear amongst local actors working for peace. Further development and use of these laws would place major restrictions on the ability of actors working for peaceful change.

³⁷ Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Tomás Ojea Quintana, A/HRC/25/64, 12 March 2014.

A Glimpse of Legislation that Restricts Freedom of Civil Society Actors

Repressive laws still on the books long used to justify arbitrary arrest and imprisonment include the Unlawful Associations Act, the Electronics Transactions Act, and the State Protection Act.

In addition, newly developed laws used to stifle civil society include The Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Law, The Draft Associations Law and The Draft Printing and Publishing Enterprise Law, amongst others.³⁸

Enduring Practices of Forced Assimilation

Annual reports from the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, supported by further evidence gathered during field research, show little change in structurally enforced restriction on non-Buddhist religious groups.³⁹ Many local ethnic and religious minority communities long struggling to preserve their cultures continue to face the same barriers of the past.

Land Grabs

As an element of political transitions, new laws offering incentives to foreign businesses enable companies to seize land with greater ease, thereby exacerbating land grabs throughout the country.⁴⁰ Excluding discussion of land tenure and land rights from peace process discussions ensures that persons living in areas designated for displacement have no protection. Field research showed growing divisions within local communities resulting from planned economic projects throughout ethnic communities. Due to secrecy and an overall lack of transparency in developing projects, the existence of some planned economic projects and the extent of displacement resulting from others is unknown.

Sexual and Gender Based Violence

Social stigma associated with sexual and gender-based violence remains a barrier to gender equality and empowerment of both women and men within their communities. The local perception that sexual and gender-based violence are not local issues is a barrier to peace. Decades of blaming the government and focusing only on gender violence perpetrated by the military regime has contributed to the development of local cultures that condone and even justify sexual and gender-based violence.

³⁸ A review of key laws provided in “Rule By Law: An Analysis of the Use of Legislation to Stifle Civil Society Space in Burma”, Burma Partnership, 30 September 2013.

³⁹ “Annual Report of U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom”, U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, 2012. Also, successive reports from 2013 and 2014.

⁴⁰ An overview of relevant legislation provided in “Land Confiscation in Burma: A Threat to Local Communities & Responsible Investment,” Alternative ASEAN Network on Burma, BN 2014/2001: 25 March 2013; updated 5 May 2015, p. 2.

Drug Abuse in Communities

Drug abuse is also a barrier to peace, corroding community cohesion and preventing community members from focusing their energies towards other important issues. Communities affected by high rates of drug use are more vulnerable to manipulation by other forces against peace.

Hate Speech Media

The increasing prevalence of hate speech has led to violent attacks against Muslim communities. Ashin Wirathu, the self-proclaimed “Burmese Bin Laden”⁴¹ and leader of the militant Buddhist 969 Movement, is accused of using malicious messages to spur violence. Through dehumanizing metaphors and veiled threats, Wirathu has been accused of stoking ethnic tensions and inciting fear and anger among his followers. Wirathu has said:

*Muslims are like the African carp. They breed quickly and they are very violent and they eat their own kind. Even though they are minorities here, we are suffering under the burden they bring us.*⁴²

Wirathu and his followers present Islam as an existential threat to Buddhism, and the nation, and he exhorts Buddhists to “take action” against the threat.⁴³ A false rumor spread on Wirathu’s page was a direct cause of violent anti-Muslim riots in Mandalay in July of 2014.⁴⁴ Other outbreaks of violence have often followed public appearances in which Wirathu invoked the stereotype of rapidly multiplying Muslim ‘enemies’ seeking to rape and force conversion of Buddhist women.⁴⁵ For example, Wirathu claimed

*[Muslims] have a lot of money... That money will be used to get a Buddhist-Burmese woman, and she will very soon be coerced or even forced to convert to Islam... And the children born of her will become Bengali Muslims and the ultimate danger to our Buddhist nation, as they will eventually destroy our race and our religion. Once they become overly populous, they will overwhelm us and take over our country and make it an evil Islamic nation.*⁴⁶

Other extremist monks, primarily from the local Sangha, also spread Wirathu’s messages by giving speeches on his behalf. DVDs are distributed by nationalist groups while sermons

⁴¹ Max Fisher, “I am proud to be called a radical Buddhist’: More Burmese embracing anti-Muslim violence” Washington Post, 21 June 2013, Web, available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2013/06/21/i-am-proud-to-be-called-a-radical-buddhist-more-burmese-buddhists-embracing-anti-muslim-violence/> (accessed 12 April 2015).

⁴² Tin Aung Kyaw, “Buddhist monk Wirathu leads violent national campaign against Myanmar’s Muslims” *Global Post*, 21 June 2013, Web, available at <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatches/globalpost-blogs/groundtruth-burma/buddhist-monk-wirathu-969-muslims-myanmar> (accessed 11 April 2015).

⁴³ Matthew J. Walton, “Myanmar Needs a New Nationalism”, *Asia Times Online*, 20 May 2013.

⁴⁴ “‘False rape’ caused Myanmar riots”, AFP, 21 July 2014.

⁴⁵ Thomas Fuller, “Extremism Rises Among Myanmar Buddhists” *New York Times*, 20 June 2013, Web, available at http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/21/world/asia/extremism-rises-among-myanmar-buddhists-wary-of-muslim-minority.html?pagewanted=all&_r=1 (accessed 8 April 2015).

⁴⁶ Matthew and Hayward, p. 18.

spreading anti-Muslim messages are played from wheel carts with loudspeakers mounted on them traveling through rural communities. One respondent explained:

“After receiving reports of a man going around local villages with a loudspeaker cart playing recordings of hate speech media, our interfaith group informed the local authorities. Pleased that our efforts were successful, the police arrested the man. The following week, the man reappeared to continue traveling through all the clusters of villages surrounding our town. During the subsequent meeting of our group, we discussed the issue and agreed that it was no use to inform authorities.”

--Muslim community members

Trainings and Activities of Nationalist Groups

During field research in each ethnic state, respondents described situations where nationalist groups have come to their communities and facilitated trainings encouraging young participants to become involved in spreading hate speech or incite conflict. One respondent explained:

“When they (MaBaTha) first came to our community they initiated a project to protect a (Buddhist) religious holy site. Buddhist persons from a range of political and civil society groups joined. Then they started sharing their propaganda and organizing trainings with youth that encourage them to make conflict. That is when I stopped attending their activities. I don’t accept them. They push youth to make conflict. This is not Buddhism.”

--Buddhist civil society leader

Aggressive Social Discrimination; Disruption of Positive Relationships

Respondents described examples of aggressive actions by local 969 groups that were disruptive to positive relationships between diverse community members. One example is provided below:

“Within our Muslim community we have a lot of social service. For many years now we have organized free health care services to communities in need. We often provide free health care services for monks and nuns at local Buddhist monasteries. We have never had any problem with this until recently.

One day, we (some Muslim community members) went to meet some ill monks with a doctor who is a Buddhist. While the doctor was working on the monk a woman arrived who quickly became furious to see Muslims standing over a monk in the Buddhist compound. She told us in a rude manner to leave at once. Then the head monk arrived and tried to calm her down. So she left and made a phone call. Within five minutes, ten men arrived on motorbikes and threatened us. So we went away. Later, we found out that they were from the 969 group.”

--Civil society representative

Mysterious Occurrences

Several respondents from Muslim and Buddhist communities around the country described mysterious occurrences, where persons disguised as Muslims were discovered spreading rumors or otherwise trying to cause conflict. One Buddhist respondent explained:

“One man dressed as a Muslim went to a monastery, killed a man and run out. The community members caught him. They thought he looked suspicious then took off his beard. He was wearing a fake beard and dressed like a Muslim. Then he escaped and ran away. Everyone knows who is behind it (the government/969).”

--Local Buddhist respondent

What sometimes appear to be mysterious occurrences, such as coincidences, is actually the result of surveillance. The military’s long history of surveillance and repression extended to religious communities. Monks from 2007’s peaceful protest attribute the effectiveness of the crackdown to the surveillance efforts of the Special Branch⁴⁷ on the Buddhist Sangha.⁴⁸ One Muslim respondent described what he felt was a similar practice within the Muslim community:

“The government sends agents wearing disguises of Muslims to participate in our worship and cultural activities. We know who these people are as it is obvious that they are not real Muslims. Some of them wear very conservative looking Muslim attire, which our community does not wear. We assume that they are there just to conduct surveillance and it is ok because we are doing nothing wrong. There is nothing we could do to stop it anyhow. We also worry that these agents might also be used to spread false rumors or influence more conservative Muslim communities to be involved in conflict.”

--Local Muslim respondent

Disunity Amongst Local Political Leaders, Armed Group Leaders and Civil Society Groups

As cooperation and unity amongst leaders of local political and armed groups intensify efforts to push for the opening of democracy, disunity and infighting amongst them is counterproductive, stalling progress. Conservative elements within the central government are able to exploit these divisions in order to maintain military dominance and exert further control over civil society. Weak involvement or exclusion of civil society representatives from the peace process and other decision-making processes increases the suspicion harbored by civil society

⁴⁷ Myanmar’s past military regimes developed extensive networks for the collection of intelligence and surveillance of local communities. The once highly feared Special Branch continues to carry out the task of investigation and collection of intelligence information. They are the section of the police force responsible for arbitrary arrest against perceived political opponents. While little is known of the structure and operation of the Special Branch their involvement in repressive crackdowns and disappearances was once highly feared.

⁴⁸ “Crackdown: Repression of the 2007 Popular Protests in Burma”, Human Rights Watch, Volume 19, No. 18(C), December 2007. And “The Resistance of Monks: Buddhism and Activism in Burma”, Human Rights Watch, September 2009. And “Spies, Suspicion and Empty Monasteries- Burma Today”, The Guardian, 15 December 2007.

towards leaders of political and armed groups based on their potential involvement and profiteering from economic projects.

Weak or No Relationships Between Local Communities and Local Government Officials, Police and Military

Just as the existence and quality of relationship between community members, Township Administrators and other local officials can mitigate conflict at the local level, the poor quality or complete absence of such relationships can escalate conflict. In areas where minorities have weak relationships or no relationships at all with local officials, they often feel that the risk of communal violence is high. The potential for violent clashes between armed groups and military is likewise high in areas with poor communication between government officials, police and military personnel and local ethnic armed and political groups.

Key Actors

Key actors are individuals or groups who are in a position to strongly influence the conflict—either positively or negatively. They are not necessarily people who are directly targeted by a program, and their influence does not always have a direct impact on the conflict.

The President and Central Government

With centralized decision-making, the office of the president is a key position. Aside from ministries controlled by the military through constitutional provisions⁴⁹, the president has a high degree of influence on local dynamics throughout the country.

Military Leadership

The continued influence of the military leadership on politics is often overlooked. Despite hopes for a true transition to democracy as a result of the military leadership's decision to cede some power to a civilian-led government, no substantive changes have been made to the structure or operation of the military. Due to the fact that the constitution provides the military with control over its own operations, over key political processes and over selected departments of government, the institution maintains a high degree of influence on the lives of people living around the country.

Parliament Members

Although decision-making within parliament remains largely controlled by the military, the parliament remains one of the only forums for free and fair debate. Interestingly, the military holds 25% of the appointed seats and there are representatives of the military's USDP in parliament. Regardless of the continued presence of the unelected military members in parliament, elected parliament members tend to work hard to represent their constituencies bringing key issues to the parliament floor for debate.

⁴⁹ Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Home affairs and Ministry of Border Affairs. Articles 17 and 232.

Local NGOs and Civil Society Groups

Myanmar has developed a strong and vibrant civil society and NGO culture to fill the multitude of gaps left by decades of military rule. Local NGOs and civil society groups were found in all locations where field research was conducted. They are working to address conflict-related issues and bridge divides. Often, strategies for engagement were creative and well planned.

Youth Groups

In all locations where field research was conducted, a multitude of locally-based youth groups were evident. Although they were often organized by religious or ethnic affiliation, youth were often involved in interfaith, community development, service, and peacebuilding activities.

Women's Groups

All major recognized ethnic groups include women's organizations. These organizations tend to focus on particular issues affecting women in their ethnic group and are sometimes affiliated with local ethnic political groups. Of non-recognized ethnic groups, often women's group activities are operated within religious institutions.

Formal and Informal Networks

Through involvement in formal networks and partnerships, local NGO members and others have an opportunity to build relationships with people from diverse ethnic and religious groups. Formal youth networks, women's networks, interfaith networks, and others have diverse representation and support cooperation around issues that affect everyone. Some groups are directly involved in building inter-faith and inter-ethnic cooperation while others do so indirectly.

In many communities, informal networks of friends have hosted interfaith and social work activities for decades. Under the military regime, this was the only way to organize networking activities due to the high levels of repression experienced by civil society. In light of emerging controls on civil society, many critics are still suspicious of higher-ranking officials within the government and prefer to continue their decades-long practice of operating with no formal structure.

969 and MaBaTha

The 969 and MaBaTha exert substantial influence over conflict dynamics both at the national level, through their media distribution capabilities and at the local level through their grassroots community activities. Drawing upon historic nationalist sentiments, 969 has become a symbol of modern Buddhist extremism. The movement calls for Buddhist solidarity by framing social and economic exclusion of Muslims as defensible actions within Buddhism.

Buddhist respondents from all locations surveyed described a common pattern of interaction with 969 and MaBaTha. Numerous stories were heard where 969 (and/or MaBaTha) came to their communities first to initiate service activities, such as blood donations, funeral services, protection of religious sites and other noble efforts that drew wide participation from Buddhist civil society. Then, after building networks, they began to facilitate trainings for youth by spreading their message of hate and encouraging youth to start conflicts.

Reflections on Interaction with 969 and MaBaTha

During field research, a few monks affiliated with 969 were encountered. It was noted that none of these monks openly confirmed their affiliation with 969. Often, they first expressed their desire for peace and religious harmony amongst all peoples. Some displayed pictures in their monasteries of cooperative activities with Christian leaders. It was later, during interviews, that stories were told in which Muslims were portrayed as instigators of violence, specifically encouraging peaceful Buddhists to engage in violence. In all cases where 969 affiliated monks were encountered, every moment of our interaction with them was recorded on video and in photographs. During one encounter, more than 10 people arrived to take pictures and video during our interview.

Companies Involved in Economic Projects

Respondents who described the hardships suffered by their community as a result of economic projects had a difficult time conceptualizing the individuals and groups behind economic projects. Knowing that during decades of dictatorship the economy was tightly controlled by the military, respondents assumed that those making business deals and approving them in Naypyidaw⁵⁰ were military personnel and cronies.

Local Religious Leaders

Throughout Myanmar, religious leaders play a key role in society. Particularly in rural areas, these individuals exert vast influence in their communities. In many cases, religious leaders display strong influence over local populations as both forces for peace or forces against peace. Some Buddhist religious leaders in ethnic states were seen to wield considerable political influence while leaders from other minority religious groups take strides in divisive matters to build coalitions with other religious, governmental and political leaders to ensure the protection of their communities. As Buddhists are expected to follow the example and teaching of their leaders, the influence of prominent Buddhist monks over local conflict dynamics is extensive. Monks are treated with utmost reverence, and their sermons are received as directives for proper moral conduct. Thus, even incendiary messages are interpreted as reflections of the Buddha's teachings and are followed as such.⁵¹

Local Political and Armed Group Leaders

The operation of political and armed groups is unique in each state, both in terms of the number of political and armed groups and the linkages or levels of cooperation amongst them. Further details are provided in the section on in-group divides.

⁵⁰ Naypyidaw is the capital city of Myanmar.

⁵¹ Matthew J. Walton and Susan Hayward, "Contesting Buddhist Narratives: Democratization, "Nationalism, and Communal Violence in Myanmar" *Policy Studies* 71 (2014), pp. 29-30, Web, available at <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.tufts.edu/docview/1620816865/fulltextPDF> (accessed 12 April 2015).

Local Government Officials, Police and Military

Township Administrators are responsible for approving and overseeing any major activity or occurrence within their townships. While they often must seek approval from higher up the centralized system, through their working relationships with local communities, other local officials and security forces, these individuals possess a considerable degree of influence over the lives of people living within their respective townships. Therefore, the relationships between community members, Township Administrators, and other local officials profoundly influence conflict dynamics.

Individual Peacebuilders

Individuals were seen as great contributors to peacebuilding at the local level. During field research, a large number of people were encountered who, of their own initiative, actively engaged in building positive relationships, initiating cooperative activities and providing community service with diverse groups. These include religious leaders, civil society leaders, restaurant and business owners, students, parents, teachers, media professionals, political leaders, ex-political prisoners, doctors, pharmacists, and many others.

Government Sponsored Interfaith Associations

In response to religious-based conflict, the Myanmar government established a network of interfaith associations in many locations throughout the country. Interfaith associations operate from a centralized structure organized at the national, state/division, and township levels. In each township, three representatives of each major religion (Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim and Christian) are invited to be members of these groups. Interfaith associations were encountered in all locations visited during field research, and the chairperson of the group was Buddhist.

The formation of these associations in some locations has drawn the involvement of religious group representatives long active in building interfaith cooperation. In others areas, such individuals are suspicious of the government's intention to establish interfaith associations, and for this reason have avoided involvement. Some members of interfaith associations explained that they are limited in their operations by their involvement with the government and the need to get approval for any actions taken.

On multiple occasions, interfaith association members expressed that the formation of the group by the government was "only for show" and had no real purpose. After making contact with the interfaith association to setup an interview in one township, the association organized a media event for our meeting with them. When they found out we were only interested in interviews without media, our meeting was cancelled. This development seemed to affirm the earlier statement that the association is "only for show."

Some interfaith association representatives explained their purpose was to mitigate violent conflict when it arises. Some even shared compelling examples of successful interventions for these purposes. Focusing on mitigation, where possible, no interfaith associations were seen to otherwise build positive relationships amongst faith communities or transform the roots of

either social or structural intolerance. Upon reflection, it seems that the interfaith associations serve the interests of the central government to promote a view that the government is actively dealing with religious conflict while simultaneously permitting longstanding discriminatory policies at the root of conflict to remain firmly in place.

IV. Root Causes of Conflict

Numerous political, economic, and social problems lie at the root of numerous national and local conflicts. These problems influence systems and structures of the central government and opposition groups, and influence the perceptions of people living around the country.

Political Issues, Militarization and Authoritarian Patterns

Unresolved political issues first raised at the Panglong Conference have been further exacerbated by decades of armed conflict. These unresolved issues have contributed to the development of firmly established militarized cultures throughout the country. As power was centralized by the military regime, ethnic armed groups united in opposition of the government. As a result, the regime encouraged countered this perceived threat by encouraging divisive policies.

With political grievances unmet, many ethnic communities perceive measures to codify military control into the 2008 Constitution as an extension of military governance. Perpetuating a cycle of conflict, military appointees to parliament cite ongoing-armed conflict and communal violence as justification for maintaining military dominance in political affairs.⁵²

Throughout all areas where field research was conducted, respondents cited examples of what they perceive as a continued strategy of the central government to encourage division within and amongst ethnic groups. Some explained what they believe to be additional strategies to encourage division. One respondent explained:

“There were many Muslims involved in the 1988 protests. We were stronger because Buddhists and Muslims joined. There were five Buddhist student groups and one Muslim student group; six all together marching in the streets. After the protests, someone told us that the government would try to make conflict between the Buddhists and Muslims to weaken any potential for opposition.

I feel that this is what we have seen recently. Divisions throughout political and civil society have weakened any potential opposition during this military controlled political transition period. It has been very effective.”

--Muslim '88 generation leader

⁵² Francis Wade, “How the Burmese Military Perpetuates its Own Myth”, Asian Correspondent, 19 November 2014.

Militarization has contributed to the development of male-dominated cultures where obedience is demanded, and fear and mistrust pervade every level of society. The ability of the populace to engage in critical thinking is severely underdeveloped due to an education system that emphasizes blind obedience and media that offer few opportunities to receive information without strictly controlled messaging. One respondent explained candidly:

“We have the worst education system. Our education system shuts your brain. You only have to memorize and obey. They say, ‘this is what you need to know; that’s it, shut up!’ Because of this, people are very stupid. They get manipulated easily.”

--Local community leader

Interview respondents explained that young people are taught to obey their political and religious leaders, parents, teachers, and elders, without room to make their own decisions. One respondent explained:

“Dictatorial patterns are seen all the way down to the relationship between parents and children, elders and youth. People are always blaming problems on political/military leaders without thinking about how they need to change the way they operate in their own family and community.”

--Civil society leader

Economic Projects, Transparency and Distribution of Wealth

To perpetuate military control, successive military regimes have relied on resource extraction and other large-scale economic projects. With the vast majority of the country’s natural wealth lying in ethnic states, the military had to maintain its dominance over ethnic groups to maintain control of resources in these areas.

Profits flowed from the peripheries through the center, enabling the regime to develop infrastructure and social services in central areas. This enabled the regime to maintain a military advantage while providing little benefit to ethnic areas. Many projects devastated local populations and environments, further fuelling ethnic resistance movements. Just as ceasefire deals brokered in the 1990s led to extensive land grabs in ethnic areas, initial ceasefire deals in the current peace process have contributed to a new wave of land grabs occurring at an unprecedented scale.⁵³ Uncertainty over who is profiting from current economic projects has fuelled local suspicion. One local NGO worker explained:

“Plans were made to construct a big factory just outside of our town. Contracts were signed and approval granted in Naypyidaw back in 2008, but the local communities did not hear about the project until people began to be forced off their land in 2011. The immediate factory area will displace between three and four thousand people in 8

⁵³ “Access Denied: Land Rights and Ethnic Conflict in Burma”, Transnational Institute, Burma Policy Briefing Nr 11, May 2013.

villages. In addition, more people will be displaced in forest and mountain areas needed to collect raw materials.

As local villagers were accustomed to aggressive land grabs during the past decades of the military era, many fled right away. Residents who remained emboldened by political changes and ideals of Democracy staged protest. So representatives from the conglomerate of companies supporting the project arranged a meeting with the villagers. They brought in paid persons from the outside intending to rig a vote so it would look as if villagers approved the project. Surprised with how many real villagers showed up, they cancelled the vote, later to hold another vote in a meeting in which real villagers were not invited.

They told local residents that they should accept the compensation while they were still able, as their land would be taken anyhow. Some people took these offers and those that were left became less and less. Few remain. It is rumored that the government has paid some local armed groups to gather raw materials from their territory as they have done in the past, but no one seems sure about this. As in the past, we expect that we won't find out the truth about who is really profiting from the project until it is too late."

--Local NGO worker

Other projects throughout the country follow a similar pattern. The incidences of land grabs have increased sharply since the democratic transition began, and local community members commonly described a feeling of disempowerment due to what they perceive as a fake transition to democracy. This perception is based on their experiences with numerous ongoing projects. Tomas Quintana, former UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, further warns that, "the process of economic development will have a corrosive effect on Myanmar society and its environment, leading to exploitation and the reinforcement of the position of privileged elites."⁵⁴

Ethnocentric Development Ideologies

The policies of the central government have long been ethnically stratified in the military, government and civil service, but this stratification has also extended into the business sector and other areas of society as well. One respondent provided an example of ethnically exclusive policies formerly employed by the Myanmar National Football Team:

"Before (during the military era) there were Hindus, Christians and others on our National football team. The team was good. We succeeded because we had the best players from all diverse communities.

⁵⁴ Tomas Quintana, "Statement of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar", 19 February 2014.

During the military era, only Buddhist and mostly ethnic Burmese were on the team. The team was lower quality because they did not permit the good players from all diverse groups to join.

Now they have started to allow some Muslims, Christians and others on the team. We can see a clear improvement from decades past. As with football, ethnically exclusive policies of past decades weakened the quality of all sectors. The country suffered as a result.”

--Civil society leader

Successive military regimes developed policies to eliminate ethnic languages, phase out minority religions, and erase ethnic histories. These attempts to eradicate crucial elements of ethnic cultures and assimilate ethnic minorities have driven conflict throughout the country for decades.⁵⁵ One respondent explained using a parable:

“If Myanmar were a flower garden it would be so beautiful. Anyone would look at it and comment on its beauty. If the country were only Burmese (ethnic Burman) the outside world would see a beautiful garden, but if the garden were filled with so many colors and types of flowers, it could be the most beautiful garden in the world. The problem is that outside observers do not see the difference; they just see a beautiful garden. But somebody is trying to make it a garden with only one type of flower. This philosophy to build a nation is wrong.”

--Local community leader

As a result of the ethnically stratified policies of the central government and struggles against assimilation, ethnic groups around the country have used the salience of ethnic identity to mobilize a response to human rights abuses. Local groups have initiated projects researching and documenting human rights abuses committed against their ethnic group. They have also established programs to support education, health, and other services for their ethnic group, often without considering the needs of other ethnic groups living in their communities. One respondent described:

“There is too much focus on work with only our ethnic people. Nation building is more important than ethnic unity. We need more focus on nation building and not on ethnic unity. But this is hard for people to understand.”

--Ethnic youth leader

Although some restrictions on the use of local language and cultural celebrations have been lifted, many people still view the intentions of the military and central government with suspicion and distrust. Due to perceptions of assimilation as a long-term strategy, they view the easing of restrictions as the result of tenuous political circumstances, which are more akin to the fleeting openings of the past than to any lasting change.

⁵⁵ Lian H. Sakhong, “The Dynamics of Sixty Years of Ethnic Armed Conflict in Burma”, op. cit.

V. Recommendations

Recommendations for International Support

To build the capacity of the local actors in order to address the root causes of conflict, the following recommendations are given for international actors in Myanmar:

To address political issues, militarization and authoritarian patterns

1. Support the inclusion of civil society and women's voices in the peace process.

Inclusion of civil society and women voices in the peace process will ensure accountability of leadership and protection of local populations. International actors should support the activities of local groups working for inclusion of civil society and women's voices in the peace process while simultaneously advocating to higher-level actors within the government and ethnic political and armed groups involved in the process.

2. Integrate strategies to ensure civil society and women's participation in decision-making.

Representatives from civil society and women's groups have in-depth knowledge of the impacts economic and development projects have on local populations. Their voices are critical to ensure that international involvement in Myanmar avoids aggravating existing conflict and contributes to building peace. International actors should integrate strategies to ensure civil society and women's participation in decision-making on the development and implementation of their own projects and activities.

3. Encourage decentralization in all sectors. Support (and build capacity where necessary) stakeholders to establish democratic structures for cooperative decision-making.

The pervasive nature of centralized decision-making and its accompanying culture of obedience must be dismantled. International partners should highlight concrete actions that can feasibly be undertaken to achieve effective decentralization in the public, private, and non-profit sectors. They should use participatory approaches for engagement with local partners, model democratic systems and encourage collaboration in decision-making. Those working in education and media sectors can integrate programs to cultivate a culture of critical thinking and collaboration.

4. Support local initiatives bridging divides between civil society and government.

Supporting local initiatives to bridge divides between civil society and government has great potential. In planning and implementing projects, international agencies should include joint dialogue with civil society representatives and local officials. Furthermore, international agencies should support local initiatives aimed at organizing cooperative activities between local communities and officials (including local police, military and government as well as initiatives that incorporate parliament members).

To address economic projects, transparency and distribution of wealth

1. Work with international development and investment projects to ensure that they are contributing to improving the lives of local populations. This includes engaging in collaborative efforts with all relevant stakeholders and ensuring that international human rights and environmental standards are upheld.

2. Support local groups working to address issues related to economic projects.

In every state around the country, there are grassroots initiatives operating locally to provide legal assistance to persons displaced by economic projects. In addition, a number of groups operating nationally research and document human rights abuses associated with projects and advocate for transparency in the public and private sectors, as well as protection of human rights and the environment. Collaboration with and support for this work will enable these initiatives to transform destructive patterns of development and establish new, pragmatic forms of development.

To address ethnocentric development ideologies

1. Advocate for the deconstruction of ethnically stratified systems and policies.

International actors should urge the government to dismantle formal and informal ethnically stratified systems of operation within the government, military and civil service. Associated laws and policies must be removed and evidence must be shown that minority ethnic and religious groups are being equitably integrated into levels of the government, military, and civil service previously inaccessible to them. No one should be barred from accessing employment, education or other services based on ethnic classification. Removal of laws⁵⁶ and constitutional provisions⁵⁷ supporting only the select 135 'national races' must be amended.

2. Support local groups working on issues across ethnic and religious divides.

In ethnic states, much of civil society has developed based on supporting the needs of specific ethnic and/or religious groups. In order to deconstruct this mentality at the local level, international partners can support local organizations that offer services to all people, regardless of religion or ethnic classification, as well as networks building coalitions involving diverse ethnic and religious groups. Collaboration on crosscutting issues can be a uniting force.

3. Support local groups working against forces driving disunity. Support initiatives using culture to bridge ethnic and religious divides.

The mobilization of ethnic groups in opposition to the government and simultaneous efforts by the central government to encourage division for the protection of 'national unity' will continue perpetuate conflict. Likewise, the mobilization of extremist elements against Muslims and other

⁵⁶ At the forefront of laws granting rights and privileges to selected ethnic groups is the 1982 Citizen Law. In addition to this a large multitude of supporting laws and policies have been developed since that time.

⁵⁷ Sections 15, 17, 22, 354 and 391 of the 2008 Constitution outline selected rights and protections granted specifically to the 135 national races, excluding rights and protections for persons from non-recognized ethnic groups.

non-recognized groups further divides the populace and provides a distraction from more important issues. International actors should support local groups working against drivers of conflict, as well as local groups working to build understanding and tolerance. Education and media initiatives that promote unity amongst all Myanmar people should be encouraged and supported.

4. Promote knowledge of universal economic, social, and cultural rights.

International actors should advocate for the protection of economic, social, and cultural rights of all people, regardless of ethnicity and religious affiliation. International partners can support local education and media initiatives that promote the universality of rights. They can also build capacity of local groups and work with them to devise creative intervention strategies that uphold the rights of all while bridging divides.

5. Research structural forms of discrimination.

Although minority respondents around the country were able to describe numerous experiences with structural discrimination, they were often unable to clearly describe discriminatory laws and policies beyond the 1982 Citizen Law. Further research should be conducted to clearly identify legislation and formal policies that should be transformed while simultaneously clarifying unwritten discriminatory norms.

Recommendations for Media Messaging

Provide alternatives to militarized cultures and authoritarian ways of solving problems. Transcend cultures of obedience at all levels.

Identify heroes and role models for peace and use them as positive examples in media messaging. Employ narratives where people critically analyze media and use participatory approaches to formal learning. Illustrate scenarios where diverse stakeholders solve complex problems through collaboration. Integrate narratives portraying women's leadership. Highlight stories where women and communities transform stigma associated with sexual and gender-based violence committed within the community (not by military). Employ realistic narratives where local communities and local government officials/departments solve conflict successfully. Highlight stories of local communities uniting to help youth stay away from drugs.

Militarized cultures throughout the country lack heroes and role models not associated with war and violence from whom inspiration can be drawn. Within each local community, a multitude of individuals past and present can be identified based on their ability to inspire peace. Integrating gender balance into storylines of peace heroes will further help to deconstruct pervasive beliefs that leadership should be a male dominated endeavor.

Inclusion of narratives portraying diverse stakeholders solving complex problems collaboratively will uphold democratic values. Such narratives can further portray characters breaking long established authoritarian patterns of behavior and embracing new behaviors that are more constructive.

Narratives showing women’s leadership and transforming stigma of sexual and gender-based violence contribute to breaking down negative gender stereotypes in communities. Stories of positive resolution of conflict between local and government actors, as well as stories where communities unite against drugs, help to empower actors in local communities.

Desired outcomes:

<p>Knowledge</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historical figures not associated with the military or armed groups in Myanmar as potential role models for peace • Different styles of engagement with conflict—such as avoidance, accommodation, control, compromise and collaboration—should be highlighted • Knowledge of practical strategies for conflict transformation for everyday problems faced by people around Myanmar • Participatory methods of operation for government and business structures, civil society organizations, local communities and families • Positive examples of collaboration and critical thinking for solving problems
<p>Attitude</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieve net positive outcomes for all parties by solving social, political, and structural problems collaboratively • Involve diverse stakeholders in collaborative processes with balanced representation of genders and age groups • Empowering children, youth, employees, subordinates and others is not a threat to one’s family, community, business, government department or otherwise • Women and men can both make good leaders • Stigma is harmful to victims of rape and sexual violence and should be combated.
<p>Behavior</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empathy shown towards persons with opposite political perspectives • Collaborative engagement to solve problems. Listening and positive communication Improved cooperation between parents and children, elders and youth, in business, civil society structures and governance • Achieve gender parity in community leadership positions • Communities acknowledge and address issues of rape and sexual violence within their own communities

Demonstrate development alternatives.

Include stories that portray beneficial and profitable for local populations. Integrate narratives of people changing destructive patterns of behavior in business or economic development. Include narratives of development alternatives that protect the environment and local culture. Share stories of people creating new and innovative business ventures learned from examples outside of Myanmar. Portray a story showing cooperation between a large company and local community to develop a creative business venture (*be clear that this is a new and innovative

experience to avoid misrepresenting reality). Show narratives of locally promoted small businesses that generate profit, spur local employment, and preserve local cultures and the environment.

In the past, development was seen as a zero-sum venture with clear winners and losers. Failing to adopt realistic alternatives to this outdated model runs the risk of entrenching old patterns of development that are destructive to the environment and local populations. Providing development alternatives will enable people to think outside the box and devise innovative approaches that are beneficial to all.

Although local populations and business elites in Myanmar often have little exposure to alternative forms of development, numerous examples can be drawn from the surrounding region. Some local organizations have conducted exposure trips bringing local participants to visit ecotourism sites, organic farming networks, independent businesses, and other alternative development initiatives in other countries in the region. Additionally, some people from local communities have generated new ideas from their experiences as migrant workers. Although creative, community-led business initiatives exist, no examples were found of collaboration from high-level corporations and local communities.

Although in-country examples are not presently available, the potential exists for businesses and local communities to create alternative forms of development. Integrating regional examples and narratives of local individuals and groups experimenting with new ideas could inspire both local populations and business elites alike.

Desired outcomes:

<p>Knowledge</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of the instability created by destructive patterns of economic development • Knowledge of economic rights and international standards in business practice • Knowledge of sustainable development practices that are profitable for business owners and benefit local populations • Knowledge of profitable alternative business projects that are successful in other countries in the region • Knowledge of business practices that protect the environment and preserve culture.
<p>Attitude</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High-level businesspeople and local communities can work together • Business and economic projects can be developed cooperatively and can benefit everyone • It is not necessary to destroy the environment to make profit • It is important to uphold human rights standards in economic projects
<p>Behavior</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic projects are transparent, protect the environment, involve local communities and uphold human rights standards • Businesspersons and local communities working together to develop

creative economic projects that are profitable and benefit local communities.

Broaden the Scope of Understanding of Universal Rights. Provide a vision for an inclusive national identity.

Integrate narratives that educate people about universal economic, social, and cultural rights. Include stories that portray the richness of Myanmar’s diverse cultures and the positive contributions that such diversity has made to the development of the country. Highlight examples of peaceful coexistence, both past and present. Integrate narratives of inter-cultural cooperation and sharing of culture through events and activities. Portray diverse peoples united together around non-political causes. Include stories showing strength in diversity. Show stories of youth rejecting ethnically/religiously divisive messages and forces, then working for peace. Show Burmans learning about issues of ethnic minorities, Buddhists learning about issues of religious minorities and recognized ethnic groups learning about issues of non-recognized groups.

Media messages should provide an alternative to ethnocentric development ideologies. Narratives should inform people about universal human rights and portray the richness of Myanmar’s diversity with contributions from both recognized and non-recognized groups. Stories should humanize characters from all ethnic and religious groups and avoid stereotypical depictions of characters to build tolerance of others.

Messages should encourage viewers to reflect and internalize an understanding that rights of all people should be protected, moving beyond an ethnocentric focus. Realistic narratives should show diverse people working cooperatively to resolve non-politically sensitive conflicts to help build unity across ethnic and religious divides. Narratives should portray unity amongst diverse characters that are supporting the people of Myanmar to develop an inclusive national identity.

Showing narratives of youth rejecting divisive forces, such as Burmans learning about issues of ethnic minorities, Buddhists learning about issues of religious minorities and recognized ethnic groups learning about issues of non-recognized groups will breakdown misconceptions associated with privilege, encourage viewers to reflect on their own experiences and inspire them to learn more.

Desired outcomes:

Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge and appreciation of the history and culture of diverse ethnic and religious groups in Myanmar. (Particular focus on small ethnic-sub-groups and non-recognized groups whose history is not valued) • Knowledge of historical events (and persons involved) in Myanmar that demonstrate inter-faith and inter-ethnic cooperation and unity • Examples of peaceful coexistence of diverse communities in Myanmar, past and present. Realistic examples of communities sharing cultural
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	<p>events and activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of the economic, social and cultural rights of all people
Attitude	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embracing diversity will bring strength to my sports team, business, community, nation or group • Ethnically exclusive policies and mentalities weaken and divide us • All people should have the right to practice and promote their culture • The promotion of other cultures is not a threat to my own • I have the responsibility to uphold and protect the right of all people to practice and promote their culture, not only my own culture.
Behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher incidence of involvement of diverse ethnic and religious groups in festivals, cultural events and social service activities • Persons working to uphold the rights of all, not only their own ethnic, religious group • Transformation of discriminatory laws, policies and systems repressing minority ethnic and religious groups

Appendix 1: KII/FGD Interviewee List

Key Informant Interview (KII)

Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

Mon State

#	Location	KII/FGD (# of participants)	Name/group
1	Ye Township	KII	Christian religious leader
2	Ye Township	KII	Buddhist religious leader
3	Ye Township	KII	Local government representative
4	Ye Township	FGD (7)	Mon Literature & Culture Association, Kayin Literature & Culture Association and Mon Youth Network members
5	Ye Township	KII	Hindu community leader
6	Ye Township	KII	Muslim businessman
7	Ye Township	KII	Interfaith Association representative
8	Mawlamyine	FGD (3)	Businesspersons
9	Mawlamyine	KII	CBO/Women's group representative
10	Mawlamyine	FGD (9)	Muslim community representatives
11	Mawlamyine	FGD (6)	Christian youth group and Buddhist youth group members
12	Mawlamyine	KII	Christian religious leader
13	Mawlamyine	KII	Muslim community leader
14	Mawlamyine	FGD (7)	Mon Literature & Culture Association
15	Mawlamyine	FGD (4)	Hindu youth group
16	Mawlamyine	KII	Buddhist religious leader
17	Mawlamyine	KII	Hindu community leader
18	Mawlamyine	FGD (2)	Chinese temple representatives

Kayin State

#	Location	KII/FGD (# of participants)	Name/group
19	Hpa'an	KII	Local political group representative
20	Hpa'an	KII	Representative from local boarding school
21	Hpa'an	KII	Youth network leader
22	Hpa'an	KII	Kayin Literature and Culture Association
23	Hpa'an	FGD (11)	Kayin youth network
24	Hpa'an	FGD (18)	Muslim community members
25	Hpa'an	KII	Local political group representative
26	Hpa'an	KII	Buddhist religious leader
27	Hpa'an	FGD (20)	Buddhist community members

28	Hpa'an	KII	Animist spiritual leader
29	Hpa'an	FGD (5)	Hindu community leaders
30	Hpa'an	KII	Kayin businessman and cultural leader
31	Kawkareik Township	KII	Local NGO representative
32	Kawkareik Township	FGD (3)	Armed group representatives
33	Kawkareik Township	FGD (15)	Kayin Literature & Culture Association
34	Kawkareik Township	KII	Muslim businessperson

Kayah State

#	Location	KII/FGD (# of participants)	Name/group
35	Demoso Township	FGD (6)	Local NGO and political party
36	Demoso Township	FGD (5)	Religious leaders
37	Demoso Township	FGD (12)	Farmer collective
38	Loikaw	FGD (4)	Local NGO staff
39	Loikaw	FGD (2)	Local political/armed group
40	Loikaw	FGD (2)	Local NGO staff
41	Loikaw	FGD (12)	Traditional faith/culture group
42	Loikaw	KII	Sayadaw U Zi Noe Batha
43	Loikaw	FGD (3)	Local NGO
44	Loikaw	FGD (8)	Youth network
45	Loikaw	KII	Local NGO
46	Loikaw	FGD (2)	Muslim community leader
47	Loikaw	FGD (9)	Kayah Literature and Culture Association

Kachin State

#	Location	KII/FGD (# of participants)	Name/group
48	Myitkyina	KII	Buddhist religious leader
49	Myitkyina	KII	Civil society leader
50	Myitkyina	KII	Christian youth leader
51	Myitkyina	KII	Christian religious leader
52	Myitkyina	FGD (6)	Christian youth group
53	Myitkyina	FGD (6)	Hindu youth group members
54	Myitkyina	FGD (6)	Political group and Shan Culture Association
55	Myitkyina	FGD (5)	Muslim youth group members
56	Myitkyina	FGD (5)	Shan youth group members
57	Myitkyina	KII	Popular singer
58	Myitkyina	FGD (2)	Sikh and Muslim youth leaders
59	Wai Maw Township	FGD (4)	Literature & Culture Association of one Kachin tribe
60	Wai Maw Township	FGD (3)	Literature and Culture Association of one

			Kachin tribe
61	Wai Maw Township	KII	Buddhist religious leader
62	Wai Maw Township	FGD (5)	Shan Literature and Culture Association

Mandalay and Yangon

Number	Location	KII/FGD (# of participants)	Name/group
63	Mandalay	KII	Christian community leader
64	Mandalay	KII	Muslim civil society leader
65	Mandalay	KII	Muslim businessperson
66	Mandalay	KII	Hindu community leader
67	Mandalay	FGD (10)	Local NGO representatives
68	Mandalay	FGD (6)	Local NGO representatives
69	Mandalay	KII	Buddhist religious leader
70	Mandalay	KII	Chinese Buddhist temple representatives
71	Mandalay	FGD (2)	Muslim community leaders
72	Yangon	KII	Independent photographer
73	Yangon	FGD (8)	Television station representatives
74	Yangon	KII	Fashion designer
75	Yangon	FGD (2)	Independent videographers
76	Yangon	FGD (6)	Independent media group
77	Yangon	KII	Television station representative
78	Yangon	KII	Independent videographer
79	Yangon	KII	Local NGO worker
80	Yangon	KII	Interfaith network representative