

Perspectives on the Myanmar Peace Process 2011 – 2015



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About the Book

“Perspectives on the Myanmar Peace Process from 2011-2015” is a collection of narrative insights of national peace process actors. The aim is for national actors to step back and reflect on the extraordinary developments in the peace process that took place between 2011 and 2015. This book follows the 2014 publication series entitled “Catalyzing Reflection on Dialogue Processes among Parties in Myanmar,” which allowed national actors to take time and reflect on different dimensions of the peace process. This book continues to address the urgent need to document these narratives and experiences in order to better understand the country’s complex and rapidly shifting peace process.

The authors are Myanmar national actors, whose reflections and personal insights are based on their deep involvement in the peace process. Their words speak directly to other actors in the process, the larger Myanmar community and international actors in supporting roles. We hope that this series inspires more discussions and reflections to support current national and international peace efforts.

Introduction

After more than 60 years of conflict, the Myanmar government and ethnic armed organizations started to engage in peace talks in 2011. Over the past several years, Myanmar has witnessed a series of landmark events, including the signing of a ceasefire agreement with 8 out of a 16-member coalition of ethnic armed organizations; a historic general election in November 2015, resulting in a landslide victory for the National League for Democracy; and the formation of a new government, which, for the first time in half a century, will comprise a majority of people without a military background. Continuing to take stock of and analyse the current peace efforts will be crucial to moving forward in this new phase.

The following chapters look back at the last five years of the peace process to draw lessons and recommendations for the new phase of national dialogue. It features a series of conversations with key actors from 2011 to 2015 to draw perspectives from the government, ethnic armed organizations and members of Myanmar’s civil society engaged in the formal peace process.

We chose this approach to illuminate the complementarity of individual efforts that drove the process forward. Myanmar’s peace process was characterized by complexity: the sheer number of actors and groups involved in different constellations of representation; the change in government at a pivotal point in the process; no formal third-party intervention; and the peace process being embedded in a broader political and economic transition. Despite these factors, the majority of Myanmar national actors pushed for one track and one process. We would like to highlight the views, roles and goals of different actors to show how diversity and the question of national identity lie at the heart of this peace process. What does it mean to be a national of Myanmar in the peace process, and how has the term “national” been understood and used by different sides? What are the common goals of these

actors? We hope that having these perspectives in one book values diversity and complementarity as being at the root of being a national of Myanmar.

Our aims for this publication are threefold:

- To allow space for reflection to key Myanmar peace process actors on their work and to bring forward the diverse voices shaping this process. This intends to contribute to the efforts for peace undertaken by the government, the ethnic armed organizations and civil society in the past five years.
- To document the transition in Myanmar, which has been taking place at a rapid pace and with great complexity. This publication should contribute to institutional memory around the peace process, and to documenting internal processes and dynamics among actors in a context where personal relationships and individual contributions played a large role in moving the process forward.
- To inform both new national and supporting international actors with the knowledge they need to build on previous efforts for peace and the trust that has been established. Especially in the case of international actors, we think substantial knowledge of the particularity of Myanmar's peace process is essential to best support local efforts.

In short, our objective is to value the work of these Myanmar peacebuilders.

Context

When President U Thein Sein's quasi-civilian government invited ethnic armed organizations to formal peace talks in the administration's August 2011 Call for Peace, Myanmar witnessed an unprecedented opportunity to resolve the country's six-decade long internal armed

conflict. Union Government Announcement No.1/2011 "extended the olive branch" to ethnic armed organizations engaged in a political and armed struggle for self-determination. Since the country's independence from the British in 1948, ethnic groups in resource-rich border regions have campaigned politically and militarily against iterations of Myanmar's government, and vice versa. Attempts to broker ceasefires went through several phases of success and failure over the decades, even as the country's natural resources and economy were ravaged, resulting in a large number of casualties and high level of internal displacement.

In 2011, U Thein Sein's government attempted to address the dizzying array of military situations by reaching out to different ethnic armed organizations. The first phase of the process gained momentum steadily as the government formalized ceasefires that had previously been verbal agreements, brokered new ceasefires and negotiated ceasefires where earlier agreements had broken down. By 2013, with bilateral ceasefires in place with some of the main groups, the government felt that the process was ripe for a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement that would be signed by all groups and end all hostilities, paving the way for a future political dialogue to address deep-seated political issues.

The momentum continued and the window for peace grew. In November 2013, 17 ethnic armed groups met in an unprecedented summit in the Kachin Independence Organization headquarters in Laiza. They formed the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team, an umbrella entity that would represent the ethnic armed organizations at formal talks with the government, as well as play a facilitation and technical role in the peace process. The team put forward an 11-point draft agreement to serve as the outline for the ceasefire agreement.

Buoyed by these developments, the peace process launched into an ambitious phase of whittling down over 100 outstanding issues over 18 months of negotiations and nine rounds of formal talks. The goal was to have the ceasefire signed by August 2014 in a high-profile ceremony with international observers. This and future deadlines were missed, however, and new clashes with the Kachin Independence Army in April 2014 tempered the initial optimism. The process faced a real threat of breakdown when several months later, in November 2014, a Kachin Independence Organization training centre was hit by the Tatmadaw. Desperate to keep the fraught process afloat, President U Thein Sein invited the ethnic armed organizations to a “coordination meeting” in early 2015 to recover. At the same time, a new front of armed clashes in the Kokang region and northern Shan State broke out with three armed groups: the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, the Ta’ang National Liberation Army and the Arakan Army. Somewhat surprisingly, despite these developments, an ad referendum agreement was signed to much fanfare on 31 March 2015, signalling that the ongoing clashes would not derail the path to signing the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement.

While the ad referendum agreement was endorsed by all main stakeholders on the government side, the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team had to gain the buy-in of their respective constituencies at the summit for ethnic armed organizations held in June 2015 in Lawkheelar. Based on a previous meeting hosted at the headquarters of the United Wa State Army with 12 organizations, the groups put forth several conditions, including that no credible signing of the ceasefire could take place while ongoing clashes were occurring in Kokang and Northern Shan State. Furthermore, the three groups involved in the clashes, the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, the Ta’ang National

Liberation Army and the Arakan Army, must be included in the signing of the ceasefire. The notion of “inclusivity” was a principle supported by both government and ethnic armed organization negotiators throughout the process. The 16 groups in the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team affirmed that none would sign the agreement unless all of them could sign. The team was then dissolved and a new entity, the Senior Delegation, was created to negotiate the final outstanding issues in the agreement.

The deadline for signing the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement became a race against time, or specifically, a race to sign before the general elections. The government wanted the agreement concluded before its term was up, but would not include the three groups engaged in ongoing clashes. The ethnic armed organizations were split between those who did not feel ready to sign because of the “all-inclusive” position, and those that did for diverse political and strategic considerations. Against a backdrop of complex political dynamics that included national and international pressure, the signing ceremony took place on 15 October 2015. Eight out of 16 ethnic armed groups signed the agreement.

The signing jumpstarted a series of post-agreement mechanisms related to ceasefire monitoring and preparing for a larger political dialogue. Amid this restructuring and recalibrating, the historical general election that took place on 8 November 2015 ushered in the country’s first democratically elected civilian government in over 60 years. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi’s National League for Democracy won a landslide victory, and in March 2016, the new administration formally took power.

Methodology

The perspectives highlighted in this book are based on an exploratory methodology that concerns social processes and is interpretative. It does not aim to provide conclusive evidence or systematic analysis of the outcomes of the first phase of the peace process in Myanmar, but to gain insight into the process through in-depth interviews with individuals identified as key actors in Myanmar. The report uses interviews as a method for qualitative research designed to explore expert knowledge.

Expert interviews are used to generate explicit, tacit, professional or occupational knowledge of individuals based on their interpretative knowledge (“know why”) and procedural knowledge (“know how”) of the subject of inquiry.¹ In this sense, we are interested in knowing, in broad strokes, how expert Myanmar nationals view the first phase of the peace process.

While the differences between experts and elites are beyond the scope of this introduction, it is useful to position elites as a distinct group of experts who have special knowledge, experiences, responsibilities and obligations within a specific function. Thus, in selecting the interviewees, we are not interested in their individual biographies, but in them as “representative of an institution or organisation insofar as he/she (re-) presents the (re-)solutions or decision-making structures.”²

Interview questions

Due to the specific identity of the interviewees as Myanmar actors negotiating in a mediation process in which there are no external third-party mediators, the interview questions were based on an adapted “methodological debriefing” of mediators³ aimed also at

1 A. Bogner, B. Littig and W. Menz (eds.). 2009. *Interviewing Experts*. Basingstoke, United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan.
2 B. Littig. 2013. “Expert Interviews: Methodology and Practice.” Presentation prepared for the IASR Lecture Series, 17.09.13. Available from: www.uta.fi/iasr/lectures/index/17.9.2013_Beate%20Littig_Tampere%20Expert-Interviews.pdf.

knowledge generation on mediation experience and at providing information for a range of uses (lessons learned for mediators, institutional memory, cross-case comparison). In concrete terms, this meant that the interviewers prepared a set of questions pertaining to different topics of the Myanmar peace process. The interviews took place in Yangon and Vevey (Switzerland) between April and May 2016. The interviews were then transcribed and manually coded.

The following questions were asked of all interviewees:

- What was your role in the 2011-2015 peace process in Myanmar?
- How do you assess the peace process between 2011 and 2015?
- What were pivotal moments in the peace process?
- What did you learn along the way?
- What is your hope or vision for the future?

Interviewee selection

The interviewees were selected in close consultation with peace process actors (national and international) on the ground. We recognize the risk of bias in interview selection and are aware of our position in this undertaking as international actors supporting national actors. A key element of the interviewee selection process was based on access and trust. We also sought out actors who were in positions of leadership in the process to gain knowledge about internal and personal dynamics. U Aung Min was interviewed as the head negotiator for the government side. Dr. Lian Sakhong and Khu Oo Reh were interviewed to highlight the diversity of views and goals of the ethnic armed organizations. Ja Nan Lahtaw and Nang Raw Zahkung are civil society leaders who played formal technical and facilitation roles.

3 S. Mason and M. Siegfried. 2010. “Debriefing Mediators to Learn from Their Experiences.” *Peacemaker’s Toolkit Series*. Washington, DC/Zurich/Bern: United States Institute of Peace/ Center for Security Studies ETH/ swisspeace.

We are aware that this represents only a selection of views, and that perspectives on the peace process are much larger and more diverse. This book is part of a project entitled “Catalyzing Reflection on Dialogue Processes among Parties in Myanmar” that aims at bringing forward and valuing national voices on the peace process.⁴ We hope to continue this project and get additional voices from past, present and future efforts for peace, especially from the Tatmadaw (Myanmar Armed Forces) and the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (parliamentary Assembly of the Union).

While the selection of interviewees was a key issue, the editors of this book faced a few other important and difficult questions. How should one tackle the diversity of ethnic armed organizations and their various voices? How can one choose 2 out of more than 20? How can all these different experiences and perspectives be put into only one book? Do the interviewees feel comfortable being gathered in one book? Is this the right format? What about the risk of projecting or overstating complementarity? In order to tackle these questions, and many others, the advice of national and international colleagues and friends based in Myanmar or working in that context for years was taken into account. We would like to thank them once more for their valuable insights and ideas.

This publication does not pretend to be neutral, but does strive to be impartial, to value the diversity of views, and to reinforce the notion that the Myanmar peace process needs all these extraordinary hands and heads to move forward. The difficulty of these actors working together for a common future when history is so loaded is undebatable. Only a few years ago, it would not have been possible to have these views in a common book; that in itself speaks volumes.

⁴ For more info, please see: www.swisspeace.ch/regions/myanmar.html?tx_ttnews%5Bpointer%5D=5&cHash=7180172d88.

Present Challenges

Aung Sang Suu Kyi and the new government have prioritized the peace process moving forward, but it remains rife with complex challenges. These encompass the question of inclusivity, given the partial signing of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement and the groups excluded from the process; balancing the brokering of ceasefires and advancing a political dialogue in parallel; agenda topics to prioritize; and building on the trust and momentum developed in the last your years. This list is by no means exhaustive, and represents merely a glimpse into the myriad challenges the peace process faces. Building on and valuing the previous phases may help illuminate possibilities for creating and sustaining peace in Myanmar in the years to come.

Timeline

18 August 2011	Union Government Announcement no.1/2011, U Thein Sein's Call for Peace
30 October–2 November 2013	First ethnic armed organization leader's summit at Kachin Independence Organization headquarters and creation of the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team (Laiza)
November 2013	First round of formal negotiations (Myitkyina)
January 2014	Second ethnic armed organization leaders' summit at Karen National Union headquarters (Lawkheelar)
March 2014	Second round of formal negotiations (Yangon)
April 2014	Third round of formal negotiations (Yangon)
May 2014	Fourth round of formal negotiations (Yangon)
August 2014	Fifth round of formal negotiations (Yangon)
September 2014	Sixth round of formal negotiations (Yangon)
January–12 February 2015	U Thein Sein invites ethnic armed organizations to peace process "coordination meeting" (Nay Pyi Taw)
31 March 2015	Ad referendum agreement reached on Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement text and "negotiation completion agreement" signed by the government and the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team (Yangon)
1-6 May 2015	United Wa State Army meeting with 12 ethnic armed organizations (Panghsang)
2-9 June 2015	Third ethnic armed organization leader's summit at Karen National Union headquarters and establishment of the Senior Delegation (Lawkheelar)
3 July 2015	First official meeting of the Senior Delegation (Chiang Mai)

22-24 July 2015	Eighth round of formal negotiations (Yangon)
6-7 August 2015	Ninth round of formal negotiations (Yangon)
21-24 August 2015	Fourth ethnic armed organization leader's summit (Chiang Mai)
9 September 2015	Ethnic armed organization meeting with U Thein Sein (Nay Pyi Taw)
24-26 September 2015	Fifth ethnic armed organization leader's summit (Chiang Mai)
15 October 2015	Signing of Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (Nay Pyi Taw)
8 November 2015	National League for Democracy wins general election
18 November 2015	Union Level Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee formed
21 November 2015	Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee formed (Yangon)
12-16 January 2016	Union Peace Conference (Nay Pyi Taw)
26-30 July 2016	Ethnic Armed Organization Conference (Mai Ja Yang)
29 July 2016	Talks between United Wa State Army and the National Democratic Alliance Army with State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi (Nay Pyi Taw)
31 August–3 September 2016	21st Century Panglong Peace Conference

Interview with U Aung Min

[U Aung Min](#) served as the Minister of the President's Office of Myanmar, Chairperson of the Myanmar Peace Centre, the chief peace negotiator between the ethnic armed organizations and the former government, and the Vice-Chairman of the Union Peace-making Work Committee. He served as the Rail Transportation Minister from 2003 to 2011 under the State Peace and Development Council. While serving his post as Commander of the Tatmadaw's Southern Regional Military Command in 2010, he was elected as a member of parliament for Taungoo Township. Described as the "minister without borders", he has played a key role in negotiating peace deals with ethnic armed groups and exiled pro-democracy organizations. Currently, he is the Chairman of the Peace and Development Foundation in Myanmar.

→ What was your role in the 2011-2015 phase of the peace process in Myanmar?

I was the Minister of the President's Office and Chief Negotiator representing the government of Myanmar. I was asked by President U Thein Sein to negotiate with 16 ethnic armed groups for about four and a half years. I have served with President U Thein Sein since I was a junior officer many years ago, and I have worked on many projects with him since then. Throughout our experience together, I was able to successfully complete all my duties and built up trust with President U Thein Sein.

With regards to the peace process, because of the trust the President had in me, he has given me the legal power to make decisions that were needed. Because of this trust and because of the level of decision-making priority, we were able to make very quick decisions in some of the negotiations that we held with the ethnic

armed groups. Once these decisions were made, President U Thein Sein always provided me with backup and support for them, which is fundamental. In 2011, when President U Thein Sein's administration came into power, the President emphasized the peace process as a priority. Because without peace in our country, which hasn't existed since independence, it would be hard to really develop the country and move it forward. For example, if you want to build a bridge and that bridge is destroyed monthly to yearly, then you are always back to where you started. It's endless.

I've been wanting to work on peace since I was young, mainly because I served in the army nearly 40 years. When you have had to fight, you see things differently, as you see the damage caused by war. If you look at it, war destroys both sides—the government as well as the ethnic armed groups and of course the people who are caught in the middle. Because of that, I have thought about peace since I was serving and fighting in these wars. During those times, I tried to do whatever I could to make sure that the situation never escalated. With regards to when President U Thein Sein asked me to lead the process, I saw it as the highest duty and the highest honor that has been given to me. Once I was asked, I made the decision that I will try to do the best I can to make it a success and to make sure that the peace process is fruitful.

An army cannot be formed with just one person; it has to be founded with many people and groups. I only knew about fighting. Of course I wanted peace but I had never trained to make peace. So accepting the challenge to negotiate peace was one of the most difficult tasks in my life. Since I was a soldier I could not refuse the order coming from above. But by this time, I was tired of war; I had seen enough miseries of war. I wanted peace. So I recruited civilians, peace and conflict experts, former political prisoners, exiles and former rebels to help me out. I told them: "I want to make peace but I do

not know how. I need your help. We have the authority, and you have the education and know-how. So if we work together we will have both.”

When you have had to fight, you see things differently, as you see the damage caused by war.

In terms of how I built trust with the ethnic armed groups: Since the very beginning, I put no limits on what I needed to do when we met them. I had to go through a body search, and I agreed to that willingly. I took food for them to these meetings. This was at a stage where the distrust was so high that they would not touch the food because they thought that it was poisoned. Sometimes you would take presents for group representatives. They would not accept them at the very beginning, because they thought that we might be bringing some listening devices or such. But regardless, I put forth all efforts to make them feel comfortable. For instance, I would go to wherever they wanted me to go, and I would eat whatever food they gave us, and I would talk to whomever was willing to talk to me. More importantly, I listened to whatever they wanted to say. And in listening, I began to understand their demands, and I tried to accommodate these demands.

After some time, I began to identify to some extent with the ethnic armed groups, their demands and their feelings, so because of that, the members of my own government suggested that I may even have gone over to the side of the groups! I was getting too close.... It is always difficult to bridge sides without one part thinking you are taking the other side's view.

Whenever we went to meet with the groups in their areas, I never took security personnel with me, I never took police protection or military protection along. I went there with the white flag raised. And that is how we went to many of the areas controlled by the ethnic armed groups. As an example, some of my staff suggested that perhaps when we go on these trips we should wear bullet proof vests. But I quickly shut that down and said: “If they want to kill us, they are not going to bother shooting at us, they are simply going to blow us up. And you are going to be dead with or without a bullet proof vest. So let's not start doing things like this, and let's go without protection.”

In addition to this, I have also worked with Aung San Su Kyi during past years. I was actually the one who tried to make the meeting between her and President U Thein Sein possible. All need to work together for peace.

→ How do you assess the peace process between 2011 and 2015?

Because we had to negotiate with so many different groups coming from all directions and places, for over four and half years, we never had time to go over what worked and what did not in the Myanmar peace process. Except occasional explanations of our peace process to visiting experts, visitors and diplomats, we never had time to gather our thoughts about the peace process or share them far and wide.

I think that the approach we adopted was the best under the circumstances. When you contextualize the way things were in Myanmar during the last decades, we really needed a new approach. And we did so. We learned lessons from what was done before: We must be patient, we must be tolerant, we must be understanding. Only then will we be able to have proper negotiations for a peace deal. This is the approach that I think is best for the country, for the peace process. I don't think that I would have done anything differently.

The Myanmar Peace Center was a governmental organization that was made up of 10 ministers. I was in charge of the overall management but individual ministers were assigned to different ethnic areas. So while I was dealing with the overall issues, these individual ministers were dealing with the issues and events in the specific areas they were assigned to. It was a real team effort.

[At the Center,] we all made the decisions together. We had different programs: the ceasefire program, the political dialogue program and the public outreach program. The responsibilities were divided among these different programs, and we recruited many people with different backgrounds: scholars, experts, consultants, activists as well as former rebels and political prisoners. These people had been working on ethnic issues for many years and they knew the ethnic issues better than many people. So with support from people like that, we could come up with the right diagnosis and prognosis for the disease that the country has.

There are many facts and situations that make the armed conflict in Myanmar different from others. The standpoints, beliefs and objectives of the ethnic armed groups are different from each other. There are big groups, but smaller groups are often harder to negotiate with; they tend to take tougher positions than the big groups. The groups are based along Myanmar's borders with Bangladesh, India, China, Laos and Thailand. At the same time, many of their leaders are living abroad, in countries such as the United States, Australia and many European countries. So, when negotiations started, we often needed more than a 12-hour day because of the time difference with those countries.

The notion of a homegrown process means you rely on yourself, you have to double your efforts, you have to try to be patient and tolerant, you have to listen to the ethnic grievances for hours on end. "Homegrown" means you do all that you can to build relationships across the

divide. You learn what you can and move on. It means you are also telling the other side that there is no one else but just you and me, and we need to make things happen together.

So when President U Thein Sein asked me to negotiate peace on his behalf, I had to build an army of peace. I had to gather all kinds of people from all walks of life.

There are other challenges that we overcame during the peace process, which can be considered as successes. For instance, the ethnic armed groups have made many demands. One that stands out is the call for federalism, the call for a federal structure. Back in the day, back in previous governments, we really did not understand what federalism means or what federalism calls for because federalism was equated with something unknown. There were many worries from the government decision-making side. Government officials thought of federalism not as a way of power-sharing but as a form of secession, which they were against and worried about. So what we had to do in the peace process was to get over that hurdle. We had to get the answers, and we had to tone down the worries on the side of the government. At the end of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, President U Thein Sein's administration accepted federalism and the need for a federal structure to be developed as part of the puzzle of the peace process.

Another challenge that I'm proud of having tackled is the reduction in hostility since the peace process began—that can be considered a success. Since the peace process started four years ago, we were able to reduce 90 percent of the hostility that existed in the country. This is a huge success!

Another challenge that we had to overcome, which many of the hardliners in the government were hesitant about, [involved] illegal associations and illegal organizations. Only by having flexibility on this topic were individuals able to travel around freely and act as normal citizens. Without this, it would have been hard to have

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constructive discussions. It is not just the ethnic armed groups that are having trouble with this issue. I myself had to overcome many challenges concerning it because when we had talks with the groups, myself and members of the Myanmar Peace Center would have to go to their bases, into their areas to hold these talks. So when that happened we were in violation of Section 17.1 (the Illegal Organization Association Act), and we could have gone to prison for that. I do not say this lightly because this threat was mentioned to me by members of the military,

by members of my own government and even by the members of the National League for Democracy, who are leading the legislature now, as well as ethnic political parties. Because of that, I requested President U Thein Sein to give me a presidential order saying that even though I was meeting members of the Myanmar Peace Center or ethnic armed groups, this was done so at his request. To this day I carry the order that I received from the President so that in case we are prosecuted under Section 17.1, I can show it to them and say that we were allowed to interact with the ethnic armed groups.

Different actors will have to come together for a peace process to take place and to move forward. The government, the army, parliament, political parties, the ethnic armed groups, civil society organizations and international partners. The role of international partners is also very important. In the past, the international community was quite hostile towards the military government, but when the new government came to power, they provided a large amount of humanitarian assistance to the ethnic armed groups. Some might say that providing assistance to the groups prolonged the conflict in the country. Many international partners, after they built up trust and confidence in the reform process undertaken by President U Thein Sein's administration, have come to provide the biggest forms of assistance to us. At the beginning of the peace process, I had meetings with the representatives of international organizations like UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) as well as international NGOs (non-governmental organizations). I told them that if they are willing to do the same things they did along the border inside the country—in terms of providing assistance to IDPs (internally displaced people) and refugees, for instance—I would help them. And I did so.

We closely followed the peace process in Indonesia and the Philippines. The peace negotiations were going on in Indonesia at that time. They still had some fighting

going on at the same time as their negotiations. But in the Philippines, they tried to stop the fighting first, and then they negotiated the peace. We tried to learn lessons from both of the countries especially in areas where the lessons from each country were applicable to our situation.

→ What were pivotal moments in the peace process?

When I have to assess the peace process, one of the things that stands out the most is that trust-building is very important. In order to build trust, we had to have many meetings with many different ethnic armed groups—informal as well as formal meetings. If I look at the main successes in the peace process, the first thing that comes to mind was our ability to achieve a ceasefire and then peace with the Karen National Union. I would consider this as one of the main successes. Because if you look at an organization like the Karen National Union, this is an organization that was formed to revolt against the government since independence. So when we were able to achieve a ceasefire deal and continuing dialogue with this organization, it was a huge success. Now if you look at Karen State, for instance, you can go anywhere in Karen State without having the need of any security protocols. And that speaks volumes about where the peace process has come to compared to where it was four years ago.

The second critical moment I had to deal with was with the Kachin. In 2012, there was a lot of conflict and an increase in hostilities in Kachin State, to a point where the military had to use air power. At that point, I realized that we have to negotiate this situation. But it was a different proposition because the battle was still going on, and there was continued fighting in these areas. So the first thing we did was to have an initial meeting in Chiang Rai. I met with Kachin leaders there, and after that we were able to hold two meetings in Ruili, in China. After that we wanted to move the meetings to

Myanmar. The Kachin counterparts wanted to have that initial meeting in Mai Ja Yang where the battle was still going on. So when you went to Mai Ja Yang to meet with Kachin leaders you could see that the tension of the battle was high. You had to pass through villages that had been destroyed, and sometimes you could even feel that there was death all around. But the meeting in Mai Ja Yang was successful, and afterwards we moved the meeting to Myitkyina, which is the capital of Kachin State. At the beginning of the meeting the leaders asked for my permission to hold what later became the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team, a meeting of ethnic armed group leaders, the very first one, in Laiza. I gave permission right away for them to hold that ethnic leaders' summit. And because of that, I think the tension between the government and the Kachin Independence Army subsided. The battle started decreasing, and in the subsequent meeting in Myitkyina, we were able to achieve a bilateral deal with the Kachin Independence Organization.

In terms of decisive moments, it's hard to choose. When we first started the process in the very initial meeting in Chiang Rai, we met with five different ethnic armed groups. In these meetings I met with them from morning until night. One group after another. Out of the five groups that were there for the initial meeting, the Karen National Union, the Restoration Council of Shan State and the Chin National Front have signed on to the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement. With the other two, the Kachin Independence Organization and the Karenni National Progressive Party, we have bilateral agreements. One of the key issues that we discussed during that meeting was the fact that the ethnic armed group representatives did not accept the 2008 Constitution. I remember saying that constitutions are written by human beings and that constitutions can be amended by human beings. I challenged them: Instead of staying on the outside, why not amend the Constitution from the

inside? I think that was pivotal for having the Restoration Council of Shan State and the Chin National Front decide right there that they wanted to be part of the peace process. This gave a lot of confidence to our side to continue this dialogue.

But in Myanmar our dream for peace is unfinished. We will have to keep going until we find the light at the end of the tunnel, until this beautiful dream becomes reality.

→ What did you learn along the way?

In terms of advice for whoever comes in to work on the peace process, what is really important is to try to understand where the ethnic armed groups are coming from. They have to really listen to, appreciate and understand the root of their grievances. In addition to listening, you have to do things on the ground that [they] can see. Not many things can be done at the same time, but you have to do what is possible in each given moment. You have to continue to do things in the future that only the future can allow us to do. In terms of individual capacity, the person working on the peace process needs to have a lot of patience, and they have to work extremely hard. I myself put no limitations on what I had to do to achieve peace. Namely, in the very beginning, we had to spend our own money to arrange meetings and to go to different areas and to actually have these talks. Furthermore, I was not able to give as much time as I would have wanted to my family and to other things. So whoever will continue this work, they

need to be able to do that, and they need be able to decide what limitations they can live [with].

A little bit of personal trust between leaders is needed to build the whole process. I believe some ethnic leaders trusted me personally because I went to them and honestly said that if there are problems that arise during the ceasefire or later on, and if they really think that they are right, then I will fight for their side. Because of that we were able to build personal trust. And I might go as far as to say that somebody like Mutu Sae Poe brought along the Karen National Union because he trusts me personally. Perhaps even more than he trusts the position of the government. So it is this type of personal trust that is needed. It is at the heart of peace processes.

I did try to learn lessons from political leaders from other countries. I particularly like Nelson Mandela and the way he tried to prepare himself and others for the peace process. His understanding, his patience. I found this really enlightening and illuminating. We cannot talk about the peace process in South Africa without acknowledging the contribution from F. W. de Klerk. He also sacrificed a lot to bring peace to his country. There is no Mandela without de Klerk and no de Klerk without Mandela. So I would say I tried to learn a lot of lessons from how these two people had to work with each other. I tried to do similar things in dealing with many ethnic leaders. Because I was representing the government, I paid more attention to what de Klerk had done. He was very patient. He was also very determined, and at times he had to bring along his own people into the peace process. The way he tried to bring peace to South Africa I find quite inspiring. I read about the classified meetings de Klerk had with Mandela and I tried to learn from the way they interacted with each other. I also paid attention to what Tony Blair and his colleagues did in Northern Ireland. I must admit that I did learn some lessons from the way they dealt with their own processes.

There are many things that are sensitive and hard to say publicly. Nevertheless, I would like to share a few thoughts. For instance, I don't particularly think that I have much trouble talking to the ethnic armed group representatives and trying to convince them what needs to be done. Where I have most difficulty is trying to convince my own constituency. Be it the government, the legislature or the military.

As a negotiator in a peace process you need patience and tolerance. And you need to treat your counterparts with a lot of respect. In a peace meeting or peace talk or negotiation, heated words are exchanged quite often, and there are many instances where my counterparts across the table would yell and be angry. But in those times it is extremely important that you remain patient and tolerant of their views because they have to get out these words of anger before they can sit down and continue to work on peace. So you have to be able to sit there and not lose your smile. And after these heated words are exchanged, then you can actually sit down and continue to work on the peace process. Then you can actually turn to the things that matter.

Three things are necessary to work on the peace process: technical capacity, being experienced and being trusted. Technical capacities are things that can be learned and transferred to whoever is coming next to work on the peace process. One needs to study other cases from around the world, and get assistance and advice from experts. However, experience and trust are different. It will be hard to transfer the experience that I have gained from the peace process as well as before the peace process from my military career. At the same time, it will be difficult to transfer the trust that I have gained from the ethnic armed groups and others involved in the peace process. Whoever comes in next to work on the peace process will have to build their own experience and trust like I had to build them.

I understand that not every peace process is homegrown like our Myanmar process. There may be situations in which mediators are required. But you as the stakeholders keep your decision-making power within you. You do not give up your principles or objectives. I know not all mediators are really neutral. But if you are going to mediate a conflict, I have some advice. Especially in a situation like ours where there are so many groups, so many stakeholders, there are few secrets. Besides, in our situation, even among the ethnic groups who do not get along there are ways of sharing information. So be careful what you say. If you gossip about one group as a mediator, it will get to the other side sooner or later. Then you will no longer be trusted as a mediator. The most important thing a mediator can do when things get stuck is to encourage all sides to continue to engage in informal dialogue. Ask them to spend hours or days together just talking. Encourage them to explore innovative ways to step out of the stalemate. If you are mediating, ask them to turn their recorders off, speak off the record, then perhaps you can lead them to explore the way out. Most importantly, you as the mediator encourage them to explore possibilities not as two teams but as one team "in a true spirit of dialogue."

→ What is your hope or vision for the future?

With regards to peace: I value peace, and I desire peace in Myanmar. I do not want to see the peace process fall apart. I do not want to see what we have constructed fall apart. And because of that I will continue to work on peace in one capacity or another. I had mentioned to you earlier that President U Thein Sein has always backed me up and supported me to make the decisions that I have made. So if the next President supports me in that way and gives me the ability to make decisions, then I will be able to continue in that capacity. If that is not possible I will still work on the peace process independently.

I really want to see Myanmar becoming a modern and developed country.... But for such development to take place we really need to end all the fighting. Without peace, we will not have a stable democracy, we will not be able to develop the country. That is why I want to give the most priority to keep peace in our country. The scope for conflicts in this country is big. The scope for democracy is very narrow. So we will have to try to do everything we can to narrow the scope for conflicts and then expand the scope for democracy and peace as much as possible.

Even though there are non-signatories to the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, all ethnic armed groups noted that they could work with the ceasefire agreement. The only disagreement we have so far is the issue related to all-inclusiveness. But this particular issue is not mentioned in the agreement. Rather it needs to be discussed separately. As long as we all stick to the agreement and use it as a foundation for the peace process, I think sooner or later all ethnic armed groups will join in.

Our job is to provide assistance to the peace process if and when asked. Peace is bipartisan and beyond individuals. So we are ready to help anyone regardless of who is in power. In conclusion, I want to tell you that peace is a beautiful dream from which you do not want to wake up. But in Myanmar our dream for peace is unfinished. We will have to keep going until we find the light at the end of the tunnel, until this beautiful dream becomes reality.

Interview with Dr. Lian Sakhong

[Dr. Lian Sakhong](#) is the Vice Chairperson of the Chin National Front and the Secretariat Member of the Union Peace and Dialogue Joint Committee, which is formed jointly by the government of Myanmar, the ethnic armed organization signatories to the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement and parties that won the 2015 election. The committee is chaired by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. Dr. Lian Sakhong is also the Executive Director of the Centre for Development and Ethnic Studies, an independent think tank and study centre founded in 2012 to generate ideas on democracy, human rights and federalism. He has written numerous articles and papers on the political and social situation in modern Burma in English and Burmese.

→ What was your role in the 2011-2015 phase of the peace process in Myanmar?

When the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement process officially started in 2013, I represented the Chin National Front. I was also a member of the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team. When we formed the team in Laiza,⁵ I was asked to draft the Laiza agreement, which was then transformed into the Law Khee Lar agreement. In Laiza, I was asked to do this almost overnight, so I quickly wrote down 11 points. Those 11 points were written into a full text version that grew to 30 pages, or slightly more. We submitted the text on behalf of the team to the Law Khee Lar conference in January 2014. Those papers then became the [basis] of the Law Khee Lar agreement. The Law Khee Lar agreement is what [the ethnic armed organizations] submitted to the government as the draft of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement. That was my main responsibility. The government also submitted a draft, so the two drafts were combined to a single text.

⁵ In October and November 2013, a historical conference was convened by the Kachin Independence Organization at their headquarters in Laiza, Kachin State. The Laiza conference brought together ethnic armed organizations. For the first time, they formed a coalition called the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team to discuss a proposed nationwide ceasefire with the government of Myanmar.

People ask me how these 11 points were drafted “overnight.” The answer is simple: These have been my feelings for my whole life. In Rangoon in 1990, when we had all ethnic political parties, we created the alliance called the United Nationalities League for Democracy. I was the secretary, and at that time, I submitted a paper calling for a peace conference. Then, when I was in exile from 2001 to 2008, I was the General Secretary of the Ethnic Nationalities Council. The council held a big conference in 2004, where we formulated the design of the peace process. At the time, I had submitted a paper with seven or so points. So all these years, we have been working and focusing on peace. That is why we have all these discussion points. We put all these ideas, points and discussions together into a single form.

→ How do you assess the peace process between 2011 and 2015?

Before I talk about the final stage of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement signing, I would like to also speak of some regret that we have. President U Thein Sein’s government was so open, so we [ethnic armed organizations] needed to compromise on various points. So after the Law Khee Lar conference⁶ took place, we submitted a single text draft. Some of the points that we could have negotiated were agreed upon in May 2014 already. But sometimes we did not trust each other. Some of our ethnic leaders even thought that the points that we could have negotiated should not be trusted. So we went back, organized another conference, and came back with another proposal. If we had looked at the main points and the political substance that we agreed upon rather than the process, maybe we would have been able to sign the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement in May 2014. It was all so positive—we thought that everything would be done in August 2014.

But things were not working out, even if we tried. So that’s why when people ask whether to trust them or not, trust should be based on two factors. Number one:

the personality. Number two: their policy. On both accounts, we didn’t trust the military regime in the 1990s and 2000s. We did not trust them on a personal level. In terms of policy, we did not trust them either. But on the other hand, if you are not making peace with your enemy to find a solution for this country, what else can you do? We cannot fight and defeat them. They cannot fight and defeat us. So obviously military confrontation is not the solution. We have to find ways and options to engage with the regime. But they responded in the 1990s that they cannot engage with us in political dialogue as they were only the interim government, a de facto government without a written constitution. So Secretary General Khin Nyunt of the then military regime, known as the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), said you cannot engage in political dialogue with a de facto government, meaning we could not engage in political dialogue with a military regime, but had to wait for a new government through constitutional means.

So we felt like things really started moving when President U Thein Sein announced on the 18th of August 2011⁷ that we could engage in talks. Since then, we still think that now is the best time to make peace in this country, after all these years of armed conflict.

If we could have signed the agreement in May 2014, then we would have had a lot of time to negotiate on the real political issues. If you look at this Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement process, it is not only about designing the process; we also included the principles for political substance. What is important is substance. Unfortunately, we could not even agree on the process until we signed the agreement in October 2015 [and then] President U Thein Sein’s term ended. It is regrettable that we were not able to come up with more substance and deep political agreement before President U Thein Sein ended his term. The positive side of this agreement is that before we signed officially in October 2015, we came up with a kind of formal

6 A follow-up conference, the Ethnic Armed Organizations Conference, was held in Law Khee Lar, Karen State, the headquarters of the Karen National Union in January 2014.

7 18 August 2011 refers to President U Thein Sein’s official call for dialogue with ethnic armed organizations and the dropping of pre-conditions for talks (Announcement No 1/2011).

agreement that in Burmese translates to “adopted final draft.” We just signed in front of President U Thein Sein on 31 March 2015. So that was very good, because at that time all Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team members were together.

Sometimes peace divides us. This has been true until today.

We were not split into signing groups and non-signing groups yet. So what we can still say is that this text, the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement text, was negotiated together. This is our common position. We are standing on this common position, on this policy, so we can continue, which is good. Of course, the bad part is that some ended up going out and were not able to sign the agreement.

It was a big challenge, if not the biggest. That big challenge is always with us. If you look back to the 1990s, the SLORC government and the military regime government signed bilateral ceasefire agreements with many ethnic armed groups. You realize that most of the ethnic armed groups were forced to sign, not by their own people, not by the government, but by neighbouring countries where some are based. International pressure is always a very important factor. So the real split into Team A and Team B came not only because of what a lot of people think; they think that a main factor was inclusive policy. To me the main factor was not inclusive policy but the outside pressure. All-inclusivity was merely smoke but not the fire. [We also have to] realize the fact that we are in between two giant nations, two giant countries, India and China.

→ What were pivotal moments in the peace process?

I felt nothing on the day the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement was signed. Why? It is just a process. It's a long process. Because although we signed it, you must remember the trust and commitment issues regarding previous agreements. In our inner mind, trust still plays a very important role. Because there were peace talks organized by the government in 1958, 1963, and in the 1990s that broke down, again and again. We did not know how it would go. So we did not trust it, but we still saw that it was an opportunity. Based on that, we would take that opportunity, not as a granted opportunity, but as an opportunity that we can fight for. We can continue this struggle. So there was nothing guaranteed. For that reason, I felt nothing on the day of the signature.

Secondly, during the September 2015 conference,⁸ some of our leaders totally rejected the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement offer, while some of us said that it could be an opportunity. So since then, we had different approaches. Before then, we were under pressure, so we were united. But when some kind of opportunity came out then our opinions became divided. So it became harder to stick together under strong pressure. Sometimes peace divides us. This has been true until today.

But of course, we saw that it could be an opportunity then. But that opportunity we have to fight for. That argument was made more complicated when President U Thein Sein issued what he called the Eight-Step Process on the 3rd of May 2012. That process was clearly not designed for a negotiated settlement. It was more designed for a negotiated surrender, which we cannot accept. In such situations, you cannot be very hopeful for yourself, you cannot be enthusiastic. It can't be measured. These are some of the challenges we have been facing.

⁸ The ethnic armed organizations summit that took place before the signing of the agreement.

9 On 31 March 2015, the ethnic armed organizations and the government of Myanmar agreed on a draft text of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement.

For me, every step is a struggle, and every step is a challenge. So a lot of people ask me: “You should be so happy, on the day when we signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement.” But if you look back at my photo on that day, I stood together with some friends and we did not realize it ourselves but we were almost crying.

A lot of people think that we should have been happy on that day. But we were not all included. Half of our friends are no longer there. So how would you be happy? I published a book, but I did not include a single photo of that day. It was the most heartbreaking day for me. A lot of people might think that on the 15th of October we were happy. No, we were not. I was happy on the day in March because we were all there.⁹

→ What did you learn along the way?

I learned about all-inclusiveness: If one looks back at the Laiza and Law Khee Lar agreements and what we mean when we say all-inclusive, it means that when we solve this country’s problems, we should not leave behind important ethnic groups—the way some ethnic groups were left behind at the Panglong Conference in 1947. All the views should be included not as organizations, but as ethnic groups. So all ethnic groups should be included. All concerns should be included. When we solve this problem, no ethnic groups should be left out. That was what we meant when we say inclusiveness. For example, as the Chin National Front, we have a very clear concept of inclusiveness. When we say inclusiveness in terms of the Chin context, we should not leave out any types of groups, any area of the Chin. So the Chin National Front represents the entire Chin population. In order to include all the views from all the Chin, and we are six major tribes among the Chin, we should consult with all of them.

We have to consult with them. We have to bring their views instead of Chin National Front policy alone. So when we engage in a political dialogue, the Chin National

Front will be sitting in the room but maybe not presenting the Chin National Front policy. But rather the Chin people’s views, the desires that we get from the consultation process. This is the way we see inclusiveness. That’s one thing.

A lot of people think that we should have been happy on that day. But we were not all included. Half of our friends are no longer there. So how would you be happy?

Another important dimension when you talk about inclusiveness is the concept of a tripartite dialogue that we lobbied for in 1994. That tripartite dialogue in itself is inclusiveness. Why? Why a tripartite dialogue? What does it mean? A tripartite dialogue is one where we look at the three major problems that Burma is facing. Number one is that in this country, military dictators have ruled since 1962. So we have to solve the problem of military dictatorship. But how? Without the participation of the military itself, we cannot solve this problem. This problem is here in this country. Who represents the military? So that’s one problem and one “group.” The second problem is this: Since the 1988 movement of the people of Burma, on the streets, and then followed by the 1990 election, the people of Burma have expressed their willingness for democracy. But it was denied. So when we say tripartite dialogue, the second “group” and the second problem is democracy. Which was represented by the National League for Democracy in the 1990 elections when we demanded a

tripartite dialogue. So the democratizing process is still needed. Then the third problem started in 1949. Most of the ethnic groups in Burma called for armed struggle based on ethnic issues. We will not be able to solve this ethnic problem on its own without solving the other two either. So these three problems must be solved together. It was a big debate among ourselves when we campaigned at the United Nations in New York and Geneva. The UN General Assembly adopted the tripartite resolution in 1994 and then every year until 2008.

I want to see member states having the right to protect themselves as a people, develop their own land, officially speak their language and have their children learn in their language in schools.

At that time, other people thought that Burma's problems were a military dictatorship and democracy issues; these two issues only. So it was portrayed in the 1990s and early 2000s as the "Beauty and the Beast." The beauty is sitting under house arrest; the beasts were running the country. It excluded ethnic issues.

Now we are keeping the tripartite dialogue concept going, in which we have to include inclusiveness. There are three major problems. You cannot solve one problem without the other. So this is what we mean, when saying

inclusiveness in terms of problems and issues, and in terms of actors, meaning ethnic groups. All ethnic groups should be there to be sure that all issues are covered. Those ethnic issues cannot be represented by other actors. So that's where we don't want to miss out on one problem or another. That's where this was kind of a two-pronged approach. All ethnic groups should be included so we don't leave issues out- it is interlinked. One from an actor perspective and one from an issue perspective. In this way the peace process has more chances to become more comprehensive.

Sometimes until today we have problems because of these three issues. People think of the word tripartite to mean only three groups should be sitting at the table. To me, it is not about how many groups are sitting at the table. Five, six or seven groups—it is not the major problem. The major problem is three issues; we should not leave any issues out.

→ What is your hope or vision for the future?

I want to see all member states in this country enjoying their internal self-determination, with their own state constitutions, within the framework of the federal Constitution, and enjoying their cultural rights and their language rights. I want to see member states having the right to protect themselves as a people, develop their own land, officially speak their language and have their children learn in their language in schools. I want to see a country where many different ethnic groups, many different religious groups and many different cultural groups can live peacefully, and where pluralism flourishes.

Interview with Khu Oo Reh

[Khu Oo Reh](#) joined the Karenni National Progressive Party in 1977. He was elected head delegate of the ceasefire negotiation committee engaging with the U Thein Sein government. In 2013, he was elected as vice-chairman of the party at the 12th party congress, and in 2014 became General Secretary of the United Nationalities Federal Council. In the beginning of 2016, he was charged with leading the Delegation for Political Negotiation formed by the United Nationalities Federal Council to continue the peace talks with the newly elected government.

→ What was your role in the 2011-2015 phase of the peace process in Myanmar?

I have been in the Karenni National Progressive Party for almost 40 years now. I started to work with them when I was very young. I came across so many challenges, many obstacles and difficulties along the way. I understand that it is not an easy job; I do it just for my people. We have suffered under the military regime for so many years.

After a few months of the ceasefire offered by U Thein Sein's government, the Karenni National Progressive Party started to negotiate for a ceasefire with the government peace committee. I was elected to take a lead of the party's delegation, consisting of 12 members, for talks that exist in this configuration to this day. We have signed two different bilateral ceasefire agreements with the previous government—the first agreement was signed at the state level in 2012 and the second agreement was signed at the union level in 2012 and 2014. This is the second involvement in the peace process. The first time was in 1994 to 1996.

At the first conference of the United Nationalities Federal Council that took place in August of 2014, the Karenni National Progressive Party selected me to be a member of the council. At the conference, most of the members elected me as the General Secretary. My tenure in the council has lasted for two years and will thus end in August of 2016. There will be another election once again, but I do not know yet whether or not my organization will send me again as the delegate to the council. It also heavily depends on myself, whether I would like to work with the council as I am doing now or not. Because there are so many challenges working with the different organizations. We all come from different backgrounds, have a different history and different political goals, but our ultimate goal is to become a federal union.

In the beginning of 2016, at the annual meeting of United Nationalities Federal Council Central Committee we formed the Delegation for Political Negotiation with 12 members from all member organizations. I was elected as leader of the delegation to continue with the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement and to pave the way for political dialogue. We have met with the new government's delegation several times on the agreement and framework review for political dialogue.

→ How do you assess the peace process between 2011-2015?

When the former President U Thein Sein's government called for peace talks, originally the United Nationalities Federal Council decided to go together as a group to negotiate a nationwide ceasefire agreement with the government. Although some individual organizations had already reached bilateral agreements with the government, we still thought that we all need to come together for a nationwide agreement. When we look deeply into our United Nationalities Federal Council, we see several member organizations with different political positions: Some organizations have

reached bilateral agreements with the government, and some still have not had any talks with the government. Some groups have had no bilateral agreements at all. At the same time, the Burmese Army, as the main key player, still denied participation in the ceasefire agreement to a few groups, namely the Arakan Army, the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army. We [ethnic armed organizations] tried to ask for their inclusion in the process. But when we formed the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team to talk with the government collectively, those three groups were represented within the team as well, talked with the government several times, and several times the government and the army didn't say anything. But just at the last minute, before reaching the agreement to sign the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, they said that now these groups are rebelling against them, so they denied their inclusion in signing the agreement.

For example, with smaller armed groups with a few armed men, there is no need for them to sign the agreement. However, they can join the political talks when the political talks come. They can be represented in the political dialogue after the agreement. For the Arakan Army, they can only live in the Kachin area, as they are found in Kachin State. They are also working with the Kachin Independence Organization, so if the latter signs the ceasefire agreement, this could be interpreted as also including the Arakan Army, according to the Burmese Army. Or the Ta'ang National Liberation Army, for example. At the time there was so much fighting between the Burmese army and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army, still up to this day, also joining hands with the Kokang Group. We all agreed to call for "inclusiveness" in the ceasefire agreement, based on all the armed groups coming together [under it]. Because we really wanted to see every corner coming to peace. No more fighting anywhere.

We all come from different backgrounds, have a different history and different political goals, but our ultimate goal is to become a federal union.

Before the general election came, the former U Thein Sein government might have viewed that if they lose the election, what would happen to them? So they really wanted to see something before the general election to prove that they have some achievement and that they have been trying very hard to move the peace process forward. They really wanted to show something of their achievement before their term ended. And they tried. That is why they rushed to get the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement done. We called for inclusiveness, but they didn't try hard to include all. They didn't try hard to bring all to come to talk with them. Even sometimes they were launching heavy military offensives against some groups. The Kokang and Ta'ang are good examples.

At the summit in Laiza, the concept of the "open book policy" came about: Those who are ready to sign, they can sign. Those who are not ready to sign, they can come later and sign. This was what U Aung Min said during several negotiations with the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team. The Karen National Union's chairman who served as President on the second day at the second Laiza summit asked everyone in his closing speech whether it is a trap or whether it is an opportunity. The open book policy is very dangerous. For me, it is a trap. We have to understand it; we have to unite.

No matter that we [ethnic armed organizations] are so different in many ways, for political goals, we should be together. The ultimate goal is to stay together.

→ What were pivotal moments in the peace process?

Before the eight groups signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, we were all happy and standing in unity, going together for the agreement. Signing the pact together. Then, you see, some leaders talked about signing the agreement when the others were not ready to sign. If we see that some are not ready to sign, would you wait for them? When we have waited for a long time? We can no longer wait for others.

At the time of the signing on the 15th of October, I was abroad. I was not at the last meeting among the groups. When the decision came, I was not part of the discussions. So I am sad for that. But on the day before the signing, the question became: Who will still remain in the United Nationalities Federal Council? Other groups are also not ready to sign. They also view the signing as a trap. When we called for inclusiveness, the government tried to bring on all for talks, but on the other hand, the army disagreed to bring all for the talks—they had different views.

So now you can see the signatories, the eight who signed at this time and the non-signatories. We are becoming two groups, having different interests or

having different stances. We are also working for people in different ways as signatories and non-signatories.

Let me be honest. We didn't go in any direction. We still remain in the same situation I feel. Because in the past, as I said, around 1989 to 1995 and 1996, there were ceasefire talks between the armed groups and the military regime. Most of the armed groups in the northern part of the country reached a ceasefire agreement with the government. Most of the groups in the southern part of the country were still fighting, including our Karenni National Progressive Party. We were under a lot of pressure. But now, most of the groups who have had ceasefires in the past are currently fighting. That is the reason why I am saying we are in the same situation. We didn't go anywhere. What most we need now is TRUST.

→ What did you learn along the way?

Because we [ethnic armed organizations] have the same political goal, to introduce a federal union, we have to speak with one voice. Because when Burma came to independence, we all came together with the one goal, to make together one country, to share everything. So now at this time, as we all suffer in the same way, we should commit to one goal, [one political goal] or goal to reach. No matter that we are so different in many ways, for political goals, we should be together. The ultimate goal is to stay together.

As we are in different positions, this is another challenge that we have in the United Nationalities Federal Council: to share with one another and to have a mutual understanding, and mutual respect and unity. We always talk about unity. Unity is a strength. But if you ask whether we are truly united or not, you can see the situation just by yourself. And you will find the answer for yourself.... If one by one, we decide to go and sign the

Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, with our own decision, with our own will, leaving some behind, it will not cover the whole country. Now we are working for reform.

Without knowing the past,
there can be no present.
Without the present, there
will be no future.

As we now have a change in the government, whatever happened to us in the past four years is a good example for us to learn from. We now have to think seriously about how we can all come together to talk with the new government, just for the betterment of the entire population of the country. We cannot only talk about our own people who we represent. As we are also citizens of this country, we are equal owners of the country as well. So what will we talk about? About peace or unity? We have to talk for all, not only for the group of people that we are representing.

I am seriously worried about this time. We are still different in many ways from one to another. Based on our thinking for the future, having different thinking or new approaches, everyone has different approaches. So nobody can say that theirs is the best approach. You see, I am so frustrated at the moment and worried. This is a great challenge for us—we cannot ignore that we are in the process. We still have to keep working, we cannot simply walk away.

→ What is your hope or vision for the future?

We really want to see our people living in peace. We are willing to ensure that we are in peace now. No more

fighting. We ALL must agree to ensure that our people are in a safe and secure situation. That is what we really want to see. Because they have been suffering for over 60 years. That is a really long time to suffer, don't you think?

We have to look back to our past. We can find, through looking back to our past, the situation that we were in at the time, how Burma came to independence, how ethnic armed organizations came to be, how things happened [to affect] the way that we are in now, etc. All these things help us to understand the present and help us shape the future. Without knowing the past, there can be no present. Without the present, there will be no future. When you look at the entire population, the majority has a low level of knowledge about politics, about the past, and they have never been allowed to be part of voting.

For those who were born after 1962, even for me, I was born the year before the military coup, I just tried to explore this history. In the past, in the past of the country, who we are, how we are and where we all came from.

So before independence came to Burma, all ethnic [groups] living in this country also came from different situations. For the Karenni, we were independent, we were recognized by the Burmese King and the British government, and they signed an agreement on June 21st, 1875. We were the only ones enjoying independence recognized by the Burmese King and the British government. But for the Shan, Kachin and Chin, they were under indirect administration of the British. Ruled by acts (law). When the Burmese struggled to free themselves from British colonization, all of us came together and agreed to enjoy full and complete independence from the British. That was the main reason we all came together to free Burma, to be independent. We have to know that. We have to agree on that. As the

majority of us only has little knowledge, not knowing very much of our past, and also not having a good understanding about politics, playing the game on one another... it is not a good sign for a better future, you see?

There are so many countries that have shared the same situation. I know that South Africa, but also Nepal, Philippines, Indonesia, Timor-Leste—so many of these countries have shared a situation like Burma. But most of them are in a different situation now, in better shape than we are. For the Burma case, we are still in deep conflict. It is still quite hard to sort out our problems. So even after I have lived here, trying to understand my own situation and feeling that I do not know anything about my own situation—how can outsiders understand our situation? Because they have experienced other countries in conflict? I have met so many people who have experiences in South Africa, Nepal, South Sudan, Indonesia and Northern Ireland. I don't really know how they understand the Burmese situation. I have no idea. I myself still don't know my own situation, so I wonder about it very much. It is so complicated.

At the same time, we try to differentiate ourselves ethnically, but whether we are truly different ethnically, whether we fully understand our background, our past, our history or not—I don't think we are so different. By knowing very little about our past, we should not try to differentiate ourselves from others, whether we are the same or whether we are different.

For example, we try to differentiate among ourselves, saying we do have nine different ethnicities living in the state. But actually, for me, as I have been learning from the books, from the people, I came to understand that we are not that many. We are not that much different from one to another. We are similar.

We need to know our past, as we have never had our own script. We need to recover this and maintain our oral history, to maintain our experience, or part of the history that we had before.

Interview with Ja Nan Lahtaw and Nang Raw Zahkung

As Director of the Nyein (Shalom) Foundation, [Ja Nan Lahtaw](#) leads one of the key peacebuilding civil society organization in Myanmar. Trained in both law and at the seminary, Ms. Lahtaw is an advisor to ethnic armed organizations and a facilitator in the current peace process. Ms. Lahtaw also initiated the Ethnic Civil Society Leaders' Forum to broaden participation in the democratic transformation of Myanmar. She is a member of Action Asia's peacebuilder network. Previously, she taught for four years at Pannasastra University's Masters of Applied Conflict Transformation Studies program in association with the Center for Peace and Conflict Studies in Cambodia. She earned her master's degree in conflict transformation from Eastern Mennonite University in Virginia and served as a Chevening Fellow in 2008 at Birmingham University in the United Kingdom.

[Nang Raw Zahkung's](#) early work led to a Fulbright scholarship in international development, conflict resolution and public administration. She brings both practical and academic knowledge to her roles as a member of the technical team involved in Myanmar's peace negotiations and as Assistant Director for Strategy and Policy at the Nyein (Shalom) Foundation. She draws on a reserve of trust built up during a decade of work with ethnic, religious and community groups as she supervised local peace committee activities and helped manage state-building projects. Based on her experience with the country's peace process, she has authored a booklet with reflections on the roles of women and civil society in building peace.

→ [What was your role in the 2011-2015 phase of the peace process in Myanmar?](#)

JN: From 2013 until the signing of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement in 2015, I was the Technical Advisor to the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team, and in addition to this role, I was then also asked to co-facilitate the ceasefire negotiation. I had somehow a double hat: an advisor to one party and a facilitator.

With the non-signatories [to the agreement], until now I played a technical consultant role to the Kachin Independence Organization Technical Advisory Team. So with that hat, I'm involved both in a bilateral process with the government and with the United Nationalities Federal Council in their peace delegation negotiation team. Here again, I have several roles.... In addition to these, from early 2016, I also facilitate the informal meetings between the ceasefire agreement signatories and non-signatories. With the Shalom (Nyein) Foundation that I'm heading, for instance, we invite all of them for an informal dinner, and that creates space for all to interact in an unofficial way. We offer space for exchange and interactions.

NR: My role, like Ja Nan's one, started as a Kachin Independence Organization technical advisor, and then continued with the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team in the negotiation process. My tasks were for instance to give advice and to prepare their talking points at the negotiation table. A key aspect of my role was also to document the process and prepare the text of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement. From the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team side, we have 3 to 5 people who note down all the decisions and remarks, and then we meet with the other side's team and compare notes. Sometimes teams have different notes so we have to go back to the voice recorder and

transcribe notes again to have all elements written down as accurately as possible. We had a team to transcribe every [round of] talks. So my main role was to lead the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team technical support team and talk with the person from the Myanmar Peace Center (the other side) on a daily basis, after each session, and come to agree on a joint document so that the next day the parties can agree on what was discussed and decided. If there was something wrong in the recording, then they reopened the discussion. So, as mentioned, a key task of mine was to have a single document at the end of each day that both parties [could] agree on. That document became then the ceasefire agreement document.

It's always easy to say "unity," but then when it comes to the structure, to who decides and who has power, then it's much harder.

Another important thing I have to do is to link up with the local resource people. Ja Nan takes care of international supporters, and I ensure the link with local experts. The roles were divided like this in a very natural way between us, and it seems to be efficient (laugh).

After signing of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, I have been focussing on the Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee side and the drafting of its [terms of reference], which took quite a while, and standard operating procedures... we are not there yet. My role

was a bit confusing, unfortunately, as it was a mix of technical advice and facilitation... not an easy one! And I was then asked to be an ethnic armed organization negotiator, and not only to provide technical expertise—my role was then less “supporting from behind” and more frontal in a way: I moved from advisor to negotiator.

JN: During the first Union Peace conference in early 2016, we were also among the 20 facilitators. I focused on the federalism and political thematic group, and Nang Raw focused on the security aspects group. As nothing was really well planned, we had to play several roles, and without a proper secretariat and office staff, we had to do so many different things. Some were negotiators and note takers at the same time, for instance.

At a certain point, I became the secretary of the ad hoc secretariat, and I was helping all participants to connect to each other, supporting the planning for the next session and clarifying what the agenda for the next day would be, etc.... so that was all very ad hoc and going in numerous directions. Until midnight we had to print the agenda and then discuss points again. There were no office facilities and no proper support so we had to improvise. But at least we had a copy machine so that helped (laugh). But that will change for future rounds—it will be less in a rush, I think. It was complicated because there was a change of government and a few things still had to happen before the new government came into power. That's the reality, and the peace process needs to adapt.

At the end, we never had job descriptions so (laughs)... this is very typical from this process.... Nothing was set and fixed, and it was developed on the go, a sort of constant work in progress.

We conducted all these roles in addition to heading our peacebuilding organization, the Shalom (Nyein) Foundation, which has a presence all around the country with more than 100 staff. A bit of juggling indeed (laugh)! It may also be interesting to mention that we play a role in the whole financial support management of the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team too. We were always perceived as not having a hidden agenda, and thus we were trusted by all these actors to handle their financial support in a neutral way. Still today because we do it for signatories and non-signatories, this puts us in a special role. We are perceived as not trying to make decisions for them, not influencing. But it's important to understand that we were trusted by the ethnic armed organizations, and thus were appointed to handle their financial mechanisms to support the peace process, and not the other way around.

In Myanmar, it's all linked to history. At the Shalom (Nyein) Foundation, we have had a program called the Ethnic National Peace Mediator Fellowship since 2002. This program reached out to several ethnic armed organizations, and that's how we started to work with different actors around the country. This program was actually how we started working on peace in Myanmar. We built the relationship over the years. When the President issued his Call for Peace in 2011, we met and discussed this development and what it meant for us. We shared our analysis on the context change, our views from inside the country, etc. Many of the members asked, "Is there any guarantee in this call?" and "Can we trust the government?" [W]e did not say, "Oh yes, you should trust them of course," but we said, "You don't need to lose anything. You can just come and test, just meet and test." [Those were] our words. "And if you don't think they could be trustworthy, then you can go back at any time." And we challenged them a bit by saying, "You

said, you want to protect your people. And are you protecting them now? Really? ...[Y]ou are not really protecting them now! Why not? Try other tools, other ways!" So they realized that we were not there to try to convince them and say, "Come, come, you should come." We were just simply giving an analysis: explaining who the different actors were, who was who in the new government, who was the commander in chief... We give them a power analysis of the government for instance. And what was the new structure in the parliament. That was also one way for us to build trust with them.

But to be honest, we were not convinced ourselves that the new government was worth being trusted. We were like the ethnic armed organizations: We were also in the "let's try and see" mode.

As for the new phase that is starting now, we don't know yet what will be the role that we would play in the talks.

→ How do you assess the peace process between 2011 and 2015?

NR: One thing that we can clearly see, from the government side in particular, is that there was a strong will to create this peace process as a locally driven process. Locally owned and led, as well as drafted by the locals. They wanted this for different reasons: for practical reasons like language issue as well as because there were too many internationals around. There were also political reasons, for instance, some sensitivity because they were still working with the military. I'm sure the government had thought of the pluses and minuses of having internationals leading the process and decided in an informed way.

And the second important aspect of this phase for me was that negotiation was first conducted bilaterally. From the very beginning of the process in 2011, when President U Thein Sein announced the three-step program for peace, the approach of the government was going to be bilateral. After several agreements with small groups, the government realized that it required a lot of negotiations on the territory issue, for instance, and thus decided to go into group negotiations because of timing issues and a certain level of complexity.

And the third point I would like to mention is that from the early process phase, nobody had a fixed design of the process in mind, and it was always movable. All along, and still now, the process is always reshaped, and it moves differently. For instance, in the beginning, the approach was bilateral and with two government negotiators, and then they realized that it was very confusing. With two negotiators, groups were not dealt with equally, and depending on the government negotiators, different groups were getting different results.... A very tricky and complex system! So as a result, they shaped the process from the bilateral process to a legal collective process at the end of 2013. So that's a reason why the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team was born, for example. All along it was a work in progress. And it still is!

A big challenge on the side of the ethnic armed organizations is their diversity. They don't have one entity, and in comparison with the government, which is one strong entity in the negotiations, it's hard. The government knows who is speaking. Same for the military. But the ethnic armed organizations can't have only one voice, only one representative. We used the breaks a lot to support them to get their act together and come as one. Language was also sometimes an issue. Trainings and backgrounds were diverse, and levels of understanding varied a lot. Getting all of them

on the same page in terms of understanding was often a challenge. It is all going smoother along the way, and now after four years of work together, we are much more efficient and quicker. We still do a lot of preparations, and a lot of debriefing and we all learn along the way... again and again!

I also learned the power to just ignore from time to time. Just ignore things, because some issues are just not worth going through. Sometimes it's better to just stay quiet. To let it pass.

→ What were pivotal moments in the peace process?

NR: One of the key moments for me was when all parties agreed to a federal union. This was something I myself wouldn't expect that we were going to agree on so soon. That was amazing.

JN: For me, one of the key moments was when we decided to form the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team. It was also a very difficult moment. There were a lot of tensions between the ethnic armed organizations. Particularly dynamics between the Karen National Union and others. And when we started discussing the options of the team, we did not know what was the union's opinion... when they finally said, "Okay, everybody in!" it was such a relief.

It was the first time that 17 groups decided to come together. So at that meeting, they decided “Okay, we need to be united.” So, there was such a big energy! No... massive energy (laugh)! It was then followed by more difficult moments: when it came to the leadership of the team, for instance. It’s always easy to say “unity,” but then when it comes to the structure, to who decides and who has power, then it’s much harder. So from the very beginning of the meeting, after they agreed on the principle, they also realized: Okay, the team mandate is to negotiate. Thus we would need a practical team. But when you negotiate you also need to decide. So how much of the team will be mandated for the decision? The group could not agree on this... and discussions went all day. At the end, they decided to have another layer of decision-making—some sort of “sub-political leadership.” But this has stayed a very sensitive part of the group. And just recently, they have decided on the three tiers structure: the political leadership, the peace process steering team and then the coordination team. This shows how unity is difficult to implement. The ethnic armed organizations are all different geographically, politically, etc.... so they don’t want to put their face into one group. Decisions can’t be taken by one team, one group only. That’s why the biggest challenge among the organizations in the peace processes is always: They need to have their representation, equal representation, at all levels. And it’s hard.

→ What did you learn along the way?

JN: I learned so many things. First, how to work in a more neutral sense. Yes, nothing is neutral I know, but trying to work with the maximum neutrality possible. Trying to show the neutrality by the way of doing things, the way of talking and of facilitating, so that way I will keep the trust of both parties. Even though I am not sure whether

I managed this successfully as we all have views and opinions, and it’s hard to keep them secret (laugh). We always have to remind ourselves that we are not decision-makers and even though there may be things we would like to say or do in a certain way, this is not our decision. But we could guide the ethnic armed organizations to think in a way or another. So therefore, after two years of working together, when we said something on some aspect, “Oh, maybe you should be thinking of including this and that...,” just to get them to think, our ethnic armed organization representatives said, “Now, just tell us you should do this or that rather than asking these questions!” And I said, “Oh no no no no. You have to decide. I’m just offering paths.” They need to stand behind their decisions. They need to move them forward. We are just accompanying.

I also learned to manage different public opinions and different perceptions. One is at the table, the perception of the government. And outside the negotiation table, the perception of the public, the people. For example, where you sit gives different perceptions, and we need to pay attention to this. Once I sat on the Myanmar Peace Center side, and a picture went on Facebook, and people were asking me: “Have you changed sides?” So all these details matter a lot!

I also learned the power to just ignore from time to time. Just ignore things, because some issues are just not worth going through. Sometimes it’s better to just stay quiet. To let it pass.

And lastly, always trying to be as objective as possible. In the facilitation process, we are not favoring the armed organization over the government, we are trying to be as fair as possible, so the government also feels I’m not facilitating for the interests of the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team only... but for the people... of Myanmar.

I think it's hard to always remember that your role is not the one of a decision-maker. We are not a key stakeholder here, but our role is to give people advice, to provide them with the support, so that they can do better negotiations and take better decisions. So that has been at the heart of our civil society organization work.

NR: I learned to better understand the armed organizations' working culture, and I'm learning how to approach them to be able to get the work done. We joke about whether we'll follow their pattern or they will follow our pattern.... But we can't really pull them to work according to our ideas and principles. For example, when it comes to the decision-making and the process design of the internal meetings, the ethnic armed organizations cannot be straightforward about it because of all the internal politics among themselves. [There is] sensitivity, particularly in the bigger organizations, and they always have to be careful, mindful about how other organizations would view them, etc. So we can for instance get an agenda ready for the meeting so that we will save time.

JN: I learned about authority also. Facilitating my organization's senior management meeting is a different case than facilitating a discussion within ethnic armed organizations... because I have authority at the Nyein (Shalom) Foundation, and I can direct my team and can guide them to do this and that, and I can propose whether we should be thinking this or that, but in the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement negotiation, I of course cannot do that. It takes time, energy, cleverness... (laugh).

I have to constantly remind myself of who I am, what role I am playing, and in which setting I am. Some

days I would be wearing three different hats. Organization hat in the morning, and then during the day the ceasefire negotiation facilitator hat, and then in the evening I would debrief the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team as an advisor. So it's a constant mindfulness of who you are, in which role. That requires reflective skills, which I think I probably got from my counselling training. I had two years of counselling training where you listen to others, and you are thinking about what that person is saying, and you always remind yourselves what we are hearing. Counselling skills are listening skills, communication skills. How you communicate, it's two ways: You listen, and you say. That's a two-way communication that I learned in my two years of counselling training. That was very helpful: I did it in the United States. So I read the body language, and this way you can also listen to what [is said] behind the word.

Good governance should be strengthened in a way that civil-military relationships will be smoother, well, any relationship between uniformed, armed personal and citizens would be smoother and without barriers.

In addition to this, I also had training in peace-building, which really helped. I spent two years at Eastern Mennonite University in the United States and studied, among other things, facilitation, conflict analysis and peace processes. I always remember that process is more important than results. The “how” is more important than the “what,” they told us there. When I think of the process we’re in now, I think most actors consider only the results and not the process enough. The “how” is underestimated and is even often lacking.

→ What is your hope or vision for the future?

NR: My hope is that there will be no boundaries, no mental boundaries between all ethnic nationalities in Myanmar. I hope for the society to be more liberal in its thinking. I would like the governance system to be much stronger. Good governance should be strengthened in a way that civil-military relationships will be smoother, well, any relationship between uniformed, armed personal and citizens would be smoother and without barriers. Yes, that is what I would like to see. And I hope to have citizens more active in politics.

JN: Personally, in 20 years, I hope to be with my grandchildren somewhere in Myanmar... or elsewhere at a lake... And you know, I have a property by the river up north (in Kachin State). Even now I am still trying to convince my husband that I would like to have a three-story building by the river and that building would look like this: The first floor will be the dining area, the second floor will be the meeting hall, and on the third floor, any friends, any of us that are visiting could stay for the night. And in front of the house, there will be the river and the green garden...and there I will have a strawberry garden.

That’s my dream.

Conclusion

An aim of this publication is to give space for reflection to some of the people who have been deeply involved in Myanmar’s peace process from 2011 to 2015. We are very aware that the people expressing their views here are some among many, and that their insights are a mere glimpse into the complexity of the multilayered transition taking place in Myanmar. The sheer number of actors and groups involved make this a very rich and complex process. What unites the myriad of views ultimately is the common goal of peace and prosperity for their country.

Voices from other institutions central to the future of the peace process do not directly appear in this publication. We hope to address this in future publications. Furthermore, although U Aung Min figured officially as head negotiator for the government’s side, his role is seen by many observers as more complex than this, verging into the role of a mediator. This exemplifies the uniqueness of the Myanmar peace process, and how traditional theories on mediation do not fit the Myanmar case: There was no formal third-party intervention, but several actors playing facilitation roles including U Aung Min, who could be characterized more as an “insider mediator.” Moreover, various other groups including from civil society acted as facilitators before and during the actual negotiations. Classical Western mediation theories are too rigid to be applicable to a case like this, which makes it the more fascinating and important for cross-case comparison and future lessons learned for the mediation field. Agendas for further research based on the exploratory methodology used for this publication include the conditions under which non-international facilitation can move a peace process forward, trust and confidence-building in complex multiparty processes, and coalition-building within armed groups.

Even though the people expressing their views here highlight just some aspects of the past five years, we feel they provide a collective account of some of the developments, challenges and determinations that have shaped this major moment of transition, and continue doing so.

We hope that the narratives in this book not only document knowledge about the past and contribute to the institutional memory of the peace process, but also that they inform the future. First and foremost, national actors and the new government, which has come in at a pivotal point in the process, can hopefully build on the substantial efforts made by countless individuals in the past five years. As repeatedly noted in the narratives, trust lies at the heart of a transition that hopefully leads to lasting peace and reconciliation. This trust is fragile and needs to be nurtured. Hopefully, the new government will find ways to build on it and strengthen it further.

This publication should also inform international actors, many who have started their engagement in Myanmar since this transition. They should have a thorough understanding of the ground they are standing on and the internal dynamics among the various actors they are facing. These dynamics have decades-long histories. We hope international actors find some of the insights they need to have a sensitive approach to engagement in Myanmar.

Ultimately, the peace process in Myanmar is not happening in a vacuum; it is embedded in a political and economic transition, which will fundamentally shape the country. Although some circumstances are not ideal, and the peace process still stands on shaky grounds, major steps have been achieved in a little amount of time, which this publication has hopefully highlighted.

As stated before, the mere fact that the views of these diverse peacebuilders can be assembled in one publication demonstrates the giant steps Myanmar has taken in the past five years. Although differences and obstacles persist, we hope that the remarkable individuals at the forefront of this transition sustain their common conviction that the goal of peace remains a uniting force.

About swisspeace

swisspeace is an action-oriented peace research institute with headquarters in Bern, Switzerland. It aims to prevent the outbreak of violent conflicts and to enable sustainable conflict transformation.

swisspeace sees itself as a center of excellence and an information platform in the areas of conflict analysis and peacebuilding. We conduct research on the causes of war and violent conflict, develop tools for early recognition of tensions, and formulate conflict mitigation and peacebuilding strategies. swisspeace contributes to information exchange and networking on current issues of peace and security policy through its analyses and reports as well as meetings and conferences.

swisspeace was founded in 1988 as the “Swiss Peace Foundation” with the goal of promoting independent peace research in Switzerland. Today swisspeace engages about 40 staff members. Its most important clients include the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) and the Swiss National Science Foundation. Its activities are further assisted by contributions from its Support Association. The supreme swisspeace body is the Foundation Council, which is comprised of representatives from politics, science, and the government.

swisspeace is an associated Institute of the University of Basel and member of the Swiss Academy of Humanities and Social Sciences (SAHS)