

STATUS OF HUMAN RIGHTS & SANCTIONS IN MYANMAR

JUNE 2019 REPORT

Summary. This report reviews the June 2019 developments relating to human rights in Myanmar. Relatedly, it addresses the interchange between Myanmar’s reform efforts and the responses of the international community.

- I. Political Developments.....2**
 - A. Rohingya Refugee Crisis.....2**
 - B. Corruption.....2**
 - C. International Community / Sanctions.....3**
- II. Civil and Political Rights.....4**
 - A. Freedom of Speech, Assembly and Association.....4**
 - B. Freedom of the Press and Censorship.....4**
- III. Economic Development.....5**
 - A. Economic Development—Legal Framework, Foreign Investment.....5**
 - B. Economic Development—Infrastructure, Major Projects.....7**
 - C. Land Seizure.....8**
- IV. Peace Talks and Ethnic Violence.....8**
 - A. Ethnic Violence.....8**
 - B. Peace Talks.....9**

I. Political Developments

A. Rohingya Refugee Crisis

From June 20-23, the ten leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (“ASEAN”) met at the 34th ASEAN Summit in Bangkok, Thailand. Prior to the summit, ASEAN’s Emergency Response and Action Team (“ERAT”) prepared a “preliminary needs assessment” on repatriation for the approximately one million Rohingya currently in Bangladesh.¹ According to Human Rights Watch, this report was developed without input from Rohingya refugees and does not condemn the Myanmar government’s atrocities that led to the mass displacement.² Furthermore, the ERAT report, while focused on the issue of repatriation, does not identify the causes of the crisis that must be resolved before refugees may return to Myanmar safely and with dignity.³ At the ASEAN summit, Southeast Asian leaders refrained from collectively demanding that Myanmar provide citizenship for Rohingya.⁴ However, some leaders of ASEAN nations spoke in favor of furthering the rights of Rohingya. Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad vowed to help Rohingya Muslims seeking refuge in Malaysia, and declared that Rohingya should be consulted on the process of returning to Myanmar.⁵

The repatriation of the Rohingya, previously scheduled to commence last year, has not yet started because the current conditions in Rakhine State are not conducive for voluntary, safe or dignified repatriation of the Rohingya. The situation in Rakhine State remains volatile due to fighting between the Myanmar army and ethnic armed groups. Moreover, the Rohingya remaining in Myanmar are confined to camps and villages without freedom of movement, are subject to ongoing violence and do not have access to basic humanitarian services.⁶ The Myanmar government and the Rakhine State government have not taken action to improve conditions or address the issues underlying the crisis.⁷

B. Corruption

The Myanmar police force released a list of twenty fugitives wanted for corruption.⁸ The individuals—including six judges, two district administrators, a head of a police station, a public prosecutor, and a lawyer—are wanted for violations arising under the Anti-Corruption law.

The Anti-Corruption Commission (“ACC”) charged senior police and administration officials of Pauk township in the Magwe Region, alleging that the administrators accepted money from “unlicensed oil drilling and transportation businesses.”⁹

The ACC announced that four Mandalay police officers are being sued for violation of the Anti-Corruption Law.¹⁰ Police Lieutenant Kyaw Thu and Police Sub-Lieutenant Kyaw Naing Oo allegedly accepted combined bribes of 2.65 million kyat to free two suspects on bail. Police Lieutenant Kyaw Thu, along with Police Major Thein Naing and Police Sub-Lieutenant Tun Tun Lin, also accepted a one million kyat bribe from a separate suspect. Police Lieutenant Kyaw Thu is a plaintiff’s witness in the trial of Ko Swe Win, the editor of Myanmar Now.¹¹

Nine individuals filed a complaint against Mon State’s chief minister, alleging violation of tender procedures in connection with bids offered for a road construction project.¹²

C. International Community / Sanctions

According to an independent review released on June 17, the UN's approach to Myanmar prior to the 2017 military crackdown is best characterized as a "systemic failure."¹³ Gert Rosenthal, former Guatemalan Foreign Affairs Minister, who was appointed to review UN involvement in Myanmar from 2010-2018, authored the report.¹⁴ In reaching his conclusion, he cited the lack of unified strategy and the lack of UN Security Council support.¹⁵ After visiting Rakhine State last year, the epicenter of the Rohingya crisis, the other members of the Security Council have been deadlocked with China and Russia as to the best way to handle the current situation, which has significantly contributed to general inertia regarding Myanmar.¹⁶ Moving forward, Rosenthal suggests that the UN place greater emphasis on coordination and strategic development.¹⁷

On June 18, a day after the internal UN report was released, Amnesty International published its own report highlighting the disproportionate suffering of the elderly throughout the Rohingya crisis.¹⁸ The report concludes that the elderly's vulnerability is due in part to lack of mobility and inadequate access to healthcare. Among other things, the report cites an instance of people being burned alive in their homes and notes the general failure of the international community to alleviate the crisis.¹⁹

In the United States, the Burma United through Rigorous Military Accountability (BURMA) Act was approved by the U.S. House of Representatives' Committee on Foreign Affairs and, as of June 21, awaits consideration by the full House of Representatives.²⁰ The Act seeks to prevent further expansion of U.S. military assistance to Myanmar until certain reforms have been put into place—namely, reporting crimes against humanity and ensuring that the individuals accused of perpetrating these crimes are investigated and held accountable via sanction.²¹ The bill comes several months after the Council of the European Union extended a ban on selling arms to Myanmar—a move that has had questionable efficacy as members of Myanmar's military were spotted at the Israeli Defense and Homeland Security Expo (ISDEF) in early June.²²

At the 34th ASEAN Summit on June 23, 2019, leaders from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations reaffirmed their commitment to support humanitarian efforts in Myanmar and to repatriate the Rohingya. Repatriation has been a goal since November 2017, when Myanmar and Bangladesh signed a repatriation agreement. However, implementation has yet to occur.²³ Activists have described this latest declaration as "lacking teeth and spine."²⁴

On June 21, the Myanmar government began a media blackout, which, as of June 30, is still ongoing.²⁵ The government cut internet access across northern Rakhine State and the neighboring Chin State in the midst of conflict between the Arakan Army and the military.²⁶ The order was issued by Thant Zin Maung, the National League for Democracy's appointed Union telecommunications minister.²⁷ According to Yanghee Lee, an independent expert who reports to the UN Human Rights Council, the Tatmadaw is currently conducting a "clearance operation," which may "be a cover for committing gross human rights violations against the civilian population."²⁸ The internet blockade has effectively choked reporting, as journalists travelling to the active combat zones have difficulty sending video and text reports to their newsrooms.²⁹

II. Civil and Political Rights

A. Freedom of Speech, Assembly and Association

On June 6, the court in Mandalay's Amarapura Township dropped one of the charges that the military filed against Thawbita, a Buddhist monk who allegedly posted material criticizing the military on Facebook.³⁰ The dropped charge was filed by a senior military official in May under Articles 505(a) and 505(b) of Myanmar's Penal Code, which attach criminal liability to circulating any information likely to cause failure of military duty or offence against the state.³¹ Although the court dropped the charge under the Penal Code, Thawbita still faces a lawsuit under Article 66(d) of the Telecommunications Act for his previous Facebook posts, which accuse the military of being more destructive than a natural disaster and compared the commander-in-chief to a cow.³² Article 66(d) of the Telecommunications Act contains a provision for criminal defamation, and the Irrawaddy reports that, by June 24, the total number of cases filed under Article 66 has reached 200.³³

On June 2 and June 3, the Mandalay Regional Police arrested 7 protesters and charged another 25 under the Peaceful Assembly Act and related laws.³⁴ According to prison authorities, one of the arrested, Ko Tun Myint Win, died while in prison on June 5, allegedly due to high fever and alcohol withdrawal syndrome.³⁵ Ko Tun Myint Win's relatives, however, believe that his death was not due to alcoholism and accused the police and prison authorities of torture, while denying Ko Tun Myint Win's participation in the protests.³⁶ Earlier in May, about 50 to 100 protestors participated in a demonstration against the construction of a coal-powered cement plant, a \$200-million project to be operated by China's Myint Investment Co., in Patheingyi Township of the Mandalay Region.³⁷ On May 15, the police authorities used rubber bullets and tear gas to disperse the sit-in assembly and accused the protestors of "act[ing] anarchically and lawlessly."³⁸

B. Freedom of the Press and Censorship

On June 17, the lawyer representing Ko Swe Win, an editor of the Yangon-based news publication Myanmar Now, submitted a request to the Maha Aungmyay Court to dismiss a defamation lawsuit against Ko Swe Win filed under Article 66(d) of the Telecommunications Act.³⁹ Ko Swe Win's lawyer claimed that the plaintiff's witnesses have repeatedly failed to present to court, and the journalist has been on trial since July 30, 2017.⁴⁰ In 2017, Myanmar Now published an article accusing Wirathu, a nationalist monk, of essentially nullifying his status as a monk by supporting the perpetrators of the assassination of Ko Ni, a Muslim lawyer. One of Wirathu's followers subsequently filed a case against Ko Swe Win.⁴¹ Since then, the Myanmar Now editor has made over 50 journeys from Yangon to the court in Mandalay to appear for court hearings.⁴²

On June 19, Tatmadaw Captain Aung Myo Tun filed a lawsuit against three reporters for their coverage of a farmers' protest in Kayah State under Article 12 of the Privacy Law.⁴³ According to the military, the protestors trespassed into the compound of the battalion and the reporters are accused of assisting the protestors by filing real-time reports from the scene.⁴⁴ If convicted, the journalists face imprisonment of one to five years and an additional fine.⁴⁵ On June 25, the Myanmar Press Council sent a letter to the military chief arguing that only the

Media Law is applicable to the case of the journalists, who “were only doing their job of reporting.”⁴⁶ Article 12 of the Privacy Law, in contrast, imposes liability on privacy violations and trespassing, including assisting or abetting trespassing.

During the military’s monthly press conference on June 21, Major-General Tun Tun Nyi (vice-chairman of the Tatmadaw True News Information Team) accused the media of unfair coverage for financial gain.⁴⁷ Tun Tun Nyi claimed that the news agencies should devote more coverage to the Tatmadaw’s positive contributions and “help people make informed decisions,” rather than “do[ing] business.”⁴⁸

On June 21, Myanmar’s Ministry of Transport and Telecommunications ordered an internet shutdown, including mobile data services, in nine townships across Rakhine and Chin States.⁴⁹ The Ministry acted under Article 77 of the Telecommunications Law, which permits the suspension of telecommunications service in the case of an emergency,⁵⁰ and the Ministry referred to “disturbances of peace and use of internet services to coordinate illegal activities” as the grounds for its decision.⁵¹ Fighting between the Tatmadaw and the Arakan Army has escalated in recent months in Rakhine State. Much of this region is off-limits to journalists, so internet access is crucial to reporting the conflict⁵² and the internet blackout “deliberately impedes journalists’ ability to send, receive, and publish reports from Rakhine and Chin States.”⁵³

III. Economic Development

A. Economic Development—Legal Framework, Foreign Investment

In the first-half of the current fiscal year, Myanmar received only \$2.5 billion of foreign direct investment. As a result, only 45% of the \$5.8 billion targeted by the Myanmar Investment Commission (“MIC”) for the fiscal year 2018-19 has been achieved, with only four months remaining to reach the annual target. Since 2012, the MIC’s annual target for FDI has been consistently met.⁵⁴

According to the World Bank’s June 2019 Myanmar Economic Monitor, growth in Myanmar has stabilized and the economy is expected to expand at a rate of 6.5% in the current 2018-19 fiscal year. Supported by higher productivity in sectors currently undergoing liberalization, such as the retail and wholesale and insurance sectors, and backed by a continuous roll-out of the state reform agenda, the World Bank expects that growth should accelerate to 6.7% by the fiscal year 2020-21. The World Bank also believes that implementation of projects under the China Myanmar Economic Corridor as well as a pickup in the transport, energy and manufacturing sectors will help sustain the pace of growth in the coming quarters. The World Bank notes, however, that the agriculture sector is underperforming because of reduced external demand for commodities produced in Myanmar. According to the World Bank, Myanmar needs to invest twice as much and implement projects three times faster to address its rapidly growing electricity demand. The report also highlights a persistent deterioration in state spending. According to the World Bank, the budget deficit for the fiscal year 2018-19 is projected to be considerably lower than the target of 5.4% of GDP. Indicative data suggests that actual spending was nearly 20% less than the half-year spending target, with capital spending just above 55% of the half-year target for the fiscal year.⁵⁵

The MIC has recently approved 12 local and foreign investments worth over \$174 million. The investments are in the agricultural and breeding, industry, education, transportation and mining sectors. The new investments are expected to create up to 2,909 jobs for citizens.⁵⁶

Aung Naing Oo, the permanent secretary of the Ministry of Investment and Foreign Economic Relations, said recently that a lack of coordination between the unions and regional governments on development policies and weak implementation of new laws has hampered the flow of foreign direct investment into Myanmar. He added that political uncertainties, poor infrastructure, lack of skilled labor, an underdeveloped capital market, high taxes and a legal system with ancient laws dating back to the British colonial era has held back investment. In his opinion, the Myanmar legal framework requires an overhaul.⁵⁷

Following liberalization of the banking and insurance sectors, which now permit 100% foreign direct investment, Myanmar plans to launch a financial inclusion road map according to Thant Zin, director at the Financial Regulatory Department. With the support of the United Nations Capital Development Fund, the road map will aim to improve the nation's financial sector through 2022. It will oversee three key sectors – demand, supply and regulations. According to Myanmar officials, the road map will improve financial access, usage and quality of financial services to all and will mainly focus on four areas – supporting the national financial inclusion strategy and implementation plan, elevating capacity building to enhance the ecosystem, promoting innovations via digital platforms and increasing awareness on financial education and consumer protection.⁵⁸

Myanmar recently announced the first power tariff increase in five years. Electricity rates will increase substantially beginning in July 2019 for both residential and business users.⁵⁹

International Finance Corporation, a member of the World Bank Group, has converted its 2014 loan to Yoma Bank Limited, one of the largest banks in Myanmar, into a 5% equity shareholding. With this conversion, IFC becomes the first international investor in a commercial bank in Myanmar. This marks an important milestone in the country's banking sector.⁶⁰

A Chinese petrochemical giant and a Myanmar firm have jointly proposed the development of nearly \$800 million worth of projects near the Kyaukphyu Special Economic Zone's deep seaport and Ramree Island in Rakhine State. The centerpiece of the proposal is a new logistics terminal on Maday Island, situated 10 kilometers east of Kyaukphyu, to support the deep seaport project. It also includes a project in Za Yet Pyin Village on Ramree Island called the Sea View Beach, 40 kilometers south of Kyaukphyu District, as well as a \$5 million fishery in the Than Zit River⁶¹

The Myanmar Ministry of Commerce announced it will propose draft legislation later this year to relax the decades-old ban on alcohol imports. The liberalization is expected to pave the way for more direct foreign investment in the beverage industry and depress the thriving black market. The restriction on alcohol imports has resulted in massive quantities of foreign alcohol being smuggled into Myanmar, fueling illicit trade. Customs department data suggests that 1.3

million liters of distilled spirits valued at almost \$8 million was legally imported in 2017, while the black market is estimated to be worth several hundred million dollars on an annual basis.⁶²

B. Economic Development—Infrastructure, Major Projects

The Myanmar Times reports that electricity rates will substantially increase from July 2019 for both residents and businesses.⁶³ This increase is the first change in tariffs in the last five years and will result in consumer monthly bills increasing by over 70%. However, investors and analysts in the energy sector welcome the increase because Myanmar's present electricity price is financially unsustainable, with the lowest rates in ASEAN.

The Ministry of Electricity and Energy announced that the demand for electricity in 2019 is expected to be higher than projected as a result of the late arrival of the monsoon.⁶⁴ The ministry had originally estimated a 15% increase in demand for power this year, but to date, demand has already risen 19%. Additionally, the capacity of Myanmar's hydropower plants is unable to keep up with the country's total power needs. Electricity generation is being carried out using generators powered by natural gas and diesel to keep up.

The first phase of electricity generation from Myanmar's first solar power plant was completed on June 27.⁶⁵ Located in Minbu Township, in upper Myanmar's Magwe Region, the Minbu Solar Power Plant was developed by Green Earth Power (Myanmar) under a build-operate-transfer contract. It will have a total capacity of 170MW and produce 350 million kWh per annum, electrifying about 210,000 households, according to a government announcement. Each of the first three stages of construction will add 40MW of power generation capabilities while the fourth and final stage will add 50MW.

Construction of an offshore supply base will begin in November on the beach at Palin Chaing in Ngapudaw Township, Irrawaddy Region.⁶⁶ The \$55 million project was approved by the Myanmar Investment Commission and will be built by Myint and Associates Offshore Supply Base. The company has signed a pledge to meet local residents' demands regarding environmental impact. Additionally, traditional fishing will continue through construction. When complete, the base will supply, transport and store necessities for the exploration of offshore oil and gas fields.

On June 5, the deputy minister of the Ministry of Construction, Kyaw Lin, submitted a bill entitled "Urban and Regional Development Planning," which aims to prompt a more systematic development of the country's urban centers and includes recommendations for how cities should be developed with the goal of reducing the gap between urban and rural areas. Kyaw Lin said that when the bill becomes law, urban development projects can be carried out in accordance with the objectives of the Myanmar Sustainable Development Plan.⁶⁷

On June 11, PTT Public Company Limited, a Thai state-owned oil and gas company, announced plans to build an oil product and liquefied petroleum gas ("LPG") storage terminal in Myanmar through a joint venture between its retail arm, PTT Oil and Retail Business Public Company Limited, and Myanmar's domestic private-sector firm Bright Energy. The warehouse and port project will be located in Thilawa, near Myanmar's commercial capital Yangon, and

will be the largest oil depot in the country when completed in 2021. PTTOR and Bright Energy will also set up wholesale and retail sales operations, targeting 1,000 t/month of LPG sales.⁶⁸

C. Land Seizure

The Tatmadaw filed a lawsuit against three reporters who covered a farmers' protest in Kayah State's Loikaw under Article 12 of the Law Protecting the Privacy and Security of Citizens.⁶⁹ According to the Tatmadaw, farmers trespassed into the compound of the battalion, destroying its fence and hundreds of trees grown as a windbreak. The Tatmadaw also accused the reporters of assisting the protesters by filing real-time reports from the scene. According to locals, the battalion seized the village area in 1989 without compensation to villagers. The latest protest was staged after the military took more land and fenced off the route to the area's farms.

IV. Peace Talks and Ethnic Violence

A. Ethnic Violence

Twenty civilians were killed in fighting between the Tatmadaw and the Arakan Army ("AA") in Rakhine State in the past five months, according to a spokesperson for the President's Office.⁷⁰ During the same period, about 100 AA soldiers and 31 police have been killed. It has been reported that several Tatmadaw officers have also been killed,⁷¹ but the spokesman did not reveal casualty figures for government forces. He said 32 police and 43 civilians had been wounded, and six police officers have gone missing since clashes began. Fighting between the Tatmadaw and the AA, which seeks greater autonomy in Rakhine State, intensified after the AA attacked police outposts in northern Rakhine on January 4.

At least five more civilians were killed in northern Rakhine State's rural Minbya area on June 3 when artillery landed near a monastery sheltering more than one hundred villagers during the ongoing fighting between the Tatmadaw and the AA.⁷² The shelling was part of fresh clashes that broke out between the Tatmadaw and the AA in the mountains along the eastern bank of the Laymyo River.⁷³ Due to the chaotic situation, the victims have not yet been identified by relatives. Nine other villagers were wounded in the shelling. On June 6, one civilian was killed and three others were wounded by artillery shelling in the village of Ganan Me in Rakhine State's Ponnagyun Township.⁷⁴

On June 14, at least three men and a child from northern Rakhine State's Mrauk-U Township were wounded when a military unit opened fire along a village road.⁷⁵ A local abbot said that the army unit had accused the villagers of planting landmines on a nearby highway and began indiscriminately firing at a village primary school that was in session. Locals say there was no armed engagement between the AA and the Tatmadaw in the village immediately prior to the incident. The Tatmadaw said that military soldiers responded to where bullets were coming from and that AA fighters were using the monastery compound as cover while ambushing the military unit.

Over 750 civilians from rural parts of Chin State's Paletwa Township have fled to urban areas of the township to avoid being trapped by the fighting between the Tatmadaw and the AA.⁷⁶ The internally displaced persons ("IDPs") are taking shelter at three camps and the houses

of relatives. According to local humanitarian groups, more than 40,000 people have been displaced by clashes in Kyauktaw, Buthidaung, Minbya, Rathedaung, Mrauk-U and Ponnagyun townships in northern Rakhine State.

The Tatmadaw suffered two casualties in a navy tugboat attack by the AA in the creek of Set Yoe Kya, near Sittwe, in Rakhine State on June 22.⁷⁷

The Tatmadaw has refuted the AA's claim that the military has suffered over 1,000 casualties in fighting with the AA in western Myanmar since early this year.⁷⁸ On June 8, the AA released a report in which it listed Tatmadaw fatalities and injuries in the five-month period from January through May in six northern Rakhine townships and Chin State's Paletwa Township. The report estimated that 1,144 military soldiers were killed in clashes. Tatmadaw spokesman Brigadier General Zaw Min Tun said that the actual figure "is even less than 10 percent of what they said." He went on to say that the Tatmadaw does not publish casualty figures of either side while a conflict is ongoing.

Over 220 people from four villages in rural parts of Kutkai Township, in northern Shan State, have fled their homes following military tensions between the Tatmadaw and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army ("TNLA") on June 16.⁷⁹

The Tatmadaw said that there were fewer clashes in May in five regional commands where the military has declared a unilateral ceasefire.⁸⁰ "Outbreaks of fighting have significantly declined. It is a good sign," Major General Soe Naing Oo told a press conference. Six armed clashes occurred in May – five in the North Eastern Command and one in the Triangle Region Command. In the past five months, the military has clashed 59 times with armed ethnic groups, and the groups have fought 45 times among themselves in the five regional commands, he said.

The Tatmadaw also denied reports by Indian news agencies that the armed forces of the two countries have been conducting joint military operations against rebel groups fighting the Indian government from bases along the border.⁸¹ According to the reports, the Indian and Myanmar armed forces have conducted joint military operations against outposts of the United Liberation Front of Assam ("ULFA"), the National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang ("NSCN-K"), the National Democratic Front of Boroland ("NDFB") and the Kamtapur Liberation Organization ("KLO"), which are active along Myanmar's borders with the Indian states of Manipur, Nagaland and Assam. Speaking to The Irrawaddy on condition of anonymity, a source close to the NSCN-K also denied there had been any joint military operations between India and Myanmar.

The Tatmadaw extended its unilateral ceasefire across five regional commands in Kachin and Shan States for two additional months, concluding on August 31.⁸² This is the second time the military has extended its unilateral ceasefire since it announced its original four-month truce on December 21, 2018.

B. Peace Talks

The National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang ("NSCN-K"), based along the Myanmar-India border in northwestern Myanmar, said that they will not sign the Nationwide

Ceasefire Agreement (“NCA”).⁸³ Joseph Lam Kan, the NSCN-K’s public relations officer, said that Naga people want an independent state from both India and Myanmar for the Naga people, that the NCA is not written for the Naga people and that it puts too much trust in India. The NSCN-K signed a regional bilateral ceasefire with the Sagaing Region government on April 9, 2012, and the Myanmar federal government had invited the group to sign the NCA. The Tatmadaw said that it will continue its operations against the NSCN-K and Indian insurgent groups working from its soil.⁸⁴ The Tatmadaw has been in control of the NSCN-K headquarters in Taga, in Nanyun Township of the Naga Self-Administrative Zone in Sagaing Region, since a raid on January 29, which was instigated by claims that the group was giving refuge to Assam and Manipur (Meitei) rebels from India. The military arrested 24 Assam and Manipur rebels and police charged them under Article 17/1 of Myanmar’s Unlawful Association Act. They were each sentenced to two years’ imprisonment on May 15. Five NSCN-K leaders were also detained in the raid and their trials are ongoing. Both the NSCN-K and the military have accused each other of violating the 2012 bilateral agreement.

Critics say that the Tatmadaw’s successful effort to shut down a discussion of the peace process by Myanmar ethnic armed organizations (“EAOs”) in Chaing Mai, Thailand violated the rights of EAOs to gather and the principles of the NCA.⁸⁵ Thai authorities canceled the planned working group discussion of the Peace Process Consultative Meeting (“PPCM”) at the request of the Myanmar military attaché in Bangkok. The attaché objected to the meeting because it would have been joined not only by the ten NCA signatories, but also by two non-signatories – the Karenni National Progressive Party and the Kachin Independence Organization. Critics said the move could set back trust-building efforts between the Myanmar military and the EAOs before either side is ready to move on to formal peace negotiations. However, military spokesman Brigadier General Zaw Min Tun said he did not believe this would be the case.

The Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee (“UPDJC”) secretariat held an informal meeting at the National Reconciliation and Peace Center (“NRPC”) in Yangon to try to find solutions to break the impasse in the country’s peace process.⁸⁶ Speaking at the meeting, Khin Zaw Oo, who is also the secretary of the government’s Peace Commission, called on all parties to continue to work within the peace process, instead of complaining about it from the outside. “It is important that everyone comes inside and discusses [the issues] frankly,” he said, seemingly frustrated at some ethnic armed groups’ decision to stay away from peace talks. “Informal talks contribute to trust building, but they are not enough. There is a need to hold formal meetings in line with procedures to reinforce the relations. Decisions reached at the formal meetings are key to overcoming the obstacles and keep the negotiation process going. We have to admit that the negotiation process has stalled, as formal meetings have stalled,” Khin Zaw Oo said.

The National Democratic Alliance Army (“NDAA”) chairman Sai Lin pledged to preserve “eternal peace” at an address marking the 30th anniversary of the group’s truce with the government.⁸⁷ High-ranking officials of both signatories and non-signatories to the NCA, representatives of political parties and local residents attended the event.

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