

Karen Civil Society Organizations have lost trust in the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) negotiations as a Gateway to Political Dialogue

4th of October 2015

We, the undersigned civil society organizations and individuals from across Burma and the globe, have steadfastly engaged in the movement for the recognition of our ethnic rights to self-determination, equality, democracy and human rights. We once had high hopes that the peace process and final NCA product co-created by Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAO's) and the government, even if not perfect, would be a window of opportunity to ink a durable nationwide ceasefire and move forward to the stages of political dialogue. However, in reality, the processes and the actors have failed miserably to:

1. Build trust between the EAO's and the government, to build trust among and unite the EAO's themselves or most importantly to unify the majority of EAO's to secure an inclusive NCA;
2. Negotiate with the government to accept the inclusion of all EAOs to sign the NCA to make it a truly nationwide ceasefire;
3. Stop the Tatmadaw's (Burmese army) offensives in Kachin and Shan states and its increased militarization in ethnic administration areas;
4. Create trust and confidence in the peace process among the Karen people as well as other ethnic people.

The latest summit of EAO leaders held on 28-30th September resulted in a split of seven in favor and eleven that will not sign the current version without the stopping of the Tatmadaw's offensives in ethnic areas and respecting the principle of all inclusiveness. The Karen National Union (KNU) Chairman and his allies have conspicuously led the grouping of seven in preparing the ground for what they hope will be the NCA signing event in the first half of October. We, Karen CSO's, are alarmed by the fact that:

1. Currently, the small group of KNU leaders has demonstrated a chronic lack of transparency and accountability to the Karen people and to their own organization by making the undemocratic and non-inclusive decision to rush to sign the NCA with the support of only a small minority of EAO's and against the will of the majority, disregarding the true meaning of "nationwide" ceasefire.
2. Currently this group of KNU leaders is in Yangon with the expectation of signing NCA. They do this in violation of KNU and KNLA official procedures and without properly informing or receiving the majority's consent from members of the KNU's Central Executive Committee or the Central Standing Committee.

3. These senior KNU leaders refuse to heed the concerns and voices of other Karen leaders, of civil society organizations, of community groups and the local people whom they claim to represent.

For the peace process to succeed in bringing actual peace it should not be rushed or forced. We earnestly recommend that:

1. It is time for the leaders of the EAOs and the government to find a realistic and acceptable alternative that will bring all conflicting parties into agreement.
2. Alternatives always exist if firstly there is enough democratic space for all concerned stakeholders to be involved, secondly, there is real commitment to respecting the needs and will of the people, and finally, there is a sincere will to address the root causes of the conflict to bring about lasting peace.
3. The small group of KNU leaders and the EAOs leaders, who decided to sign, should seriously consider the unifying call for the inclusiveness of all ethnic armed groups.

Unity is our strength. Now, more than ever, is the time for the KNU and EAO leaders to learn from past mistakes. Obviously, without the unifying principle, we will remain stuck in the too-familiar existing pattern of having ceasefires holding in one part of the country while conflict continues in other areas. The Burmese government and army claim they want peace. They must demonstrate sincerity as well as respect the bilateral preliminary agreements they have signed with individual groups since 2012. The ongoing military attacks demonstrate the opposite. There needs to be a decrease of militarization in the ethnic nationality areas.

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The undersigned groups;

1. Anglican Karen Church, TN, USA
2. Australian Karen Organization, Inc, Australia
3. Back Pack Health Workers Team, Burma/Thailand
4. Bowling Green Karen Baptist Church, KY, USA
5. Calvary Karen Baptist Church, Queensland, Australia
6. Ebenezer Karen Church, Dallas, TX, USA
7. Ethnic Nationalities Organization, Inc, Australia
8. Finland Karen Culture Association, Finland
9. Indiana Karen Baptist Fellowship, IN, USA
10. International Karen Organization
11. Israel Karen Organization, Israel

12. Jury's Orphanage, Thailand/Burma
13. Karen Affairs Committee, Burma
14. Karen American Organization, USA
15. Karen Association of Iowa, IA, USA
16. Karen Community Association of Wisconsin, WI, USA
17. Karen Community Association, UK
18. Karen Community in Norway
19. Karen Community of Canada
20. Karen Community of Colorado, CO, USA
21. Karen Community of Ft. Worth, TX, USA
22. Karen Community of Minnesota, MN, USA
23. Karen Environmental and Social Action Network, Burma/Thailand
24. Karen Klo Kwe La Organization, TX, USA
25. Karen National League, Japan
26. Karen Rivers Watch, Burma/Thailand
27. Karen Student Network Group, Burma/Thailand
28. Karen Swedish Community, Sweden
29. Karen Women Organization, Burma/Thailand
30. Louisville Karen Community, KY, USA
31. Malaysia Karen Organization, Malaysia
32. Methodist Karen Church, TN, USA
33. Mutraw Community Development Committee, Burma
34. New Bern Karen Community, NC, USA
35. New Zealand Karen Association, Inc, New Zealand
36. Quad Cities Karen Community, IL & IA, USA
37. Tabernacle Baptist Church, Karen Community, NY, USA
38. Taw Oo Humanitarian and Development Committee, Burma
39. Unity Karen Network in Highpoint, NC, USA
40. Utica Karen Baptist Church, NY, USA
41. Utica Karen Community, NY, USA