

Updates archive: <http://www.burmalink.org/peace-conflict-updates/>

## ACRONYM DICTIONARY

AA	Arakan Army
AAPP	Assistance Association for Political Prisoners
ANC	Arakan National Congress
BA	Burma Army (Tatmadaw)
CNF	Chin National Front
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DASSK	Daw Aung San Suu Kyi
DKBA	Democratic Karen Buddhist Army
DPN	Delegation for Political Dialogue (negotiating body of the UNFC)
DVB	Democratic Voice of Burma
EAO	Ethnic Armed Organisation
FPNCC	Federal Political Negotiation Consultative Committee (FPNCC)
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IOM	International Organization for Migration
JICM	Joint Implementation Coordination Meeting
JMC-U	Joint Monitoring Committee Union-level
KCSN	Karenni Civil Society Network
KNLA	Karen National Liberation Army, armed wing of the KNU
KNU	Karen National Union
KNU/KNLA-PC	KNU/KNLA Peace Council
KIA	Kachin Independence Army, armed wing of the KIO
KIO	Kachin Independence organization
KNO	Kachin National Organization (unarmed Kachin group)
KSNG	Karen Student Network Group
LDU	Lahu Democratic Union
MNDAA	Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army
NCA	Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (in name only, not inclusive and not nationwide)
NLD	National League for Democracy
NMSP	New Mon State Party
NSCN-K	Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland
PC	Peace Commission
PNLA	Pa-O National Liberation Army
PSLF/TNLA	Palaung State Liberation Front/ Ta'ang National Liberation Army
RCSS/SSA-S	Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army (South)
SSPP/SSA-N	Shan State Progress Party/Shan State Army (North)
ToR	Terms of Reference
TNLA	Ta'ang National Liberation Army
UNFC	United Nationalities Federal Council
UPDJC	Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee
UWSA	United Wa State Army
WLB	Women's League of Burma
WNO	Wa National Organisation
21CPC	21st Century Panglong Conference

For more acronyms, go to <http://www.burmalink.org/background/acronym-dictionary/>.

## JUNE IN BRIEF: WHAT HAPPENED

- UNFC Congress and elections resulting in new leadership for the armed alliance
- World Refugee Day on June 20<sup>th</sup> called attention to the plight of Burma's refugees in Thailand
- 6<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Kachin conflict was commemorated in Kachin State
- Armed conflict in Tanai Township, Kachin State, between BA and KIA, hundreds displaced and stranded
- Conflict rages on in Kachin and Shan States between BA and TNLA as well as RCSS and TNLA
- Three journalists were arrested under the Unlawful Associations Act after returning from a TNLA drug burning ceremony
- Various protests took place across the country against harmful development projects and for freedom of press and expression
- A new labor law in Thailand was enacted, resulting in tens of thousands of migrants returning to Burma

## DISPLACEMENT UPDATE

### *Refugees and IDPs*

- Around 100,000 refugees remain in the Thailand-Burma border refugee camps. 664,000 remain internally displaced, around 400,000 of them in Burma's southeast.
- Hundreds were newly displaced in around the Tanai Township in Kachin State, where up to 1,000 remain stranded (*see armed conflict update for more details*).
- IOM report published on June 19 announced record suicide and attempted suicide numbers in the Karen refugee camps in Thailand in the last two years (28 and 66 respectively), over three times global figures.
- Over 100 people (around 50 households) are preparing to leave Ei Tu Hta IDP Camp in Karen State (currently sheltering about 3,000 IDPs) as food rations are reducing and due to stop in September 2017.

### *The World Refugee Day on June 20<sup>th</sup>*

- The World Refugee Day was commemorated in refugee camps along the Thailand-Burma border. With repatriation plans under way, the day serves to remind that the return of refugees cannot be effectuated without guaranteeing their safety, access to land, voluntary and sustainable return (without direct or indirect coercion and in full respect for their dignity) and their involvement in the repatriation process.

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- The KCSN released a statement calling for the withdrawal of BA from the Karenni State, the continuation of adequate humanitarian aid for refugees and an end of dam projects, which are being undertaken without the consent of local populations.
- The KSNG released their [position paper on repatriation](#) in a press conference in Mae Sot, raising concerns over premature funding cuts on the border, a lack of planning regarding return and reintegration, the non-recognition of refugee and ethnic education systems, insufficient job opportunities, etc.



KSNG press conference in Mae Sot

## ***Thailand labor law and migrant crisis***

- On June 23 a new labor law, with severe consequences for illegal migrant workers in Thailand, was enacted, fines for illegal labor practices ranging from 400,000 to 800,000 baht (US\$12,000-\$24,000).
- The regulations come after criticism last month from the US, which maintained Thailand on the human trafficking watch list.
- According to IOM estimates, there are over 3 million migrants from Burma in Thailand, 2 million of them illegal.
- Police crackdowns began on June 22 and several of the 69 migrant schools in Tak Province closed. In Mae Sot, the headmaster and a teacher from the New Wave migrant school were arrested despite showing ID cards issued by the local Migrant Education Coordination Center. The Joint Action Committee for Burmese Affairs declared around 1,000 workers from Burma had been detained.

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- DASSK met with the Thai Ambassador Jukr Boon-long on June 30 to discuss the issue. Subsequently, the Thai Government announced a 120-day delay in enforcing the new labor regulation, later extended to 180 days (until January 1 2018).
- The new law and accompanied police raids and crackdowns led app. 60,000 people to return to Burma between June 23-30.

## ARMED CONFLICT

### ***KACHIN STATE – The 6<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Kachin conflict on June 9<sup>th</sup>***

- The Kachin Peace Network organized a commemorative event in Rangoon to mark the anniversary.
- The Kachin Global Action Statement called for UN fact-finding commission recognition and UN Security Council discussion of war crimes committed by BA, continuation of EU and US arm embargoes, withdrawal of BA troops from ethnic areas, replacement of the 2008 constitution, and a meaningful Peace Agreement, among other issues.
- A prayer ceremony in Manau Park in Myitkyina and Maingmaw Townships was attended by over 7,000 residents and IDPs.
- Three Kachin men in Myitkyina were charged under Article 19 of the Peaceful Assembly Law for using slogans which were not pre-approved by authorities and for walking, in a manner which resembled a march, to a commemoration for the anniversary.

### ***KACHIN STATE – TANAI TOWNSHIP CONFLICT***

#### ***Tanai background and conflict situation***

- The Tanai Township area is home to about 150,000 people. The township's amber and gold mining activities provide the KIA with an important source of income and maintaining control over the area is thus crucial for KIA.
- Clashes between BA and KIA started on June 3. The KIA, reportedly aware of the BA intentions to attack the area and block the KIA from their revenue, launched an offensive against the BA.
- Three residents (woman and her two children) of Naung Lone Kaung Yar village northwest from Tanai were injured on June 4 by an unidentified artillery shell. Four other shells were heard falling outside the village. The next day, three civilians were injured by KIA fire according to an unconfirmed BA press release.
- Since then, clashes between the KIA and BA have numerous times by local habitants.

## **Evacuation of the population**

- On June 5, Tanai Township inhabitants were made to leave the area after receiving BA army orders (in the form of air-dropped leaflets stating that remaining citizens after June 15 would be considered as associated with the KIO). BA cited environmental concerns deriving from mining activities as the reason for the clearance operation. On June 9, when asked, DASSK stated she was not aware of the forced evacuation of Tanai ordered by BA. On June 20, 29 Kachin CSOs released a joint-statement questioning BA's intentions, suspecting the attack aimed to hinder KIA revenue flows.
- Civilians began leaving following BA orders to evacuate, but with the surrounding roads blocked by the conflict and travel restrictions, thousands have been stranded (mostly workers in local gold and amber mines). 12 boats were sent to rescue some of the workers trapped in the mines, but the transportation capacity was not sufficient.
- On June 7, 500-700 civilians who tried to circumvent road blocks to flee by boat from their villages to Tanai were stopped by BA authorities. KIA issued travel warning on the same day (from 7pm to 6am) in Mogaung and Hpakant (Kachin State's notorious jade town) townships app. 45 miles from Tanai.
- Since June 12, 350-500 people from over ten villages are sheltering in churches and monasteries. Others remain in nearby villages and wait to return to Tanai, totaling around 1,000 new IDPs. Authorities barred the opening of new IDP camps.
- The BA closed off remaining routes to/from Tanai on June 15.

## **SHAN STATE**

- Armed conflict occurred throughout June between BA and TNLA and to a lesser extent, RCSS and TNLA.
- The Northern Alliance (TNLA, KIA, AA, and MNDAA) released a statement accusing BA of conducting offensive operations.
- 100 families from Namtu Township returned to their original village after been forced to flee fighting between BA and TNLA in May.
- BA-backed Manpang People's Militia Force was reportedly forcibly recruiting young men from villages near Lashio, northern Shan State.
- Around 200 people from Manlan village in Namhsan Township fled to Lashio Township and are taking refuge in monasteries after claims that the BA arrested and interrogated individuals thought to have connections with the TNLA. Local reported that one person died and seven were arrested in the BA operations.
- BA is accused of detaining over 300 Ta'ang (Palaung) villagers and causing hundreds more to flee to Ma Lwal and Nam Lin villages. Villagers were reportedly kept in detention and beaten by BA soldiers in Manlan monastery.

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- Two locals from Peinhwe village in Kuktai Townships were shot on June 26 in a crossfire between the TNLA and the BA.

## PEACE PROCESS

For an overview of the peace process and the main actors, go to <https://www.burmalink.org/peace-process-overview/>

### ***The UNFC Congress and other updates***

- During the first week of June, the DPN – negotiation body of the UNFC - and the PC held a preliminary discussion in Chiang Mai about their upcoming meeting in July. PC presented the outcomes of the 21CPC and the parties also discussed the international community's role in ceasefire and conflict-resolution mechanisms. The UNFC is favorable to grant the international community a 'tribunal role' during ceasefire breaches and moderator role in case of disputes between government and EAOs. BA disagrees and sees this as undermining state authority.
- The UNFC held a conference on June 20-29 in Chiang Mai to discuss memberships and hold new elections. All 21 EAOs (except NSCN-K) were invited to the second part of the meeting (June 27-29) to discuss the 21CPC and common programs based on decisions previously made during the 2016 ethnic leadership meeting in Mai Ja Yang.
- The KIO and the WNO received permission to leave the alliance. The TNLA and MNDAA also departed. The KIO departure was to be potentially replaced with a new membership-bid by the KNO, an unarmed Kachin group (KNO and KIO used to be separate entities but merged upon their entry in the UNFC alliance).
- PC member Zaw Htay told the media that the government only recognized the original 21 EAOs that were involved in the peace process from the beginning and would only negotiate with them.
- Other groups whose UNFC applications have been pending for several years include the Kuki National Organization, Zomi Group and the DKBA. The membership application of the CNF, who was expelled after they signed the NCA, is also pending.
- The UNFC continues to insist on the 9-point proposal amendment to the NCA before any signing. DPN and PC discussions concerning the proposal have stalled to "agreed in principle" postures.
- The new UNFC leadership is as follows:
  - Chairman: Nai Hong Sar (NMSP)
  - Vice-chairman: Dr. Khin Maung (ANC)
  - General Secretary: Khu Oo Reh (KNPP)
  - Joint-general secretary-1: Say Onn (SSPP)

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- Joint-general secretary-2: Solomon (LDU)



UNFC Congress press conference in Chiang Mai

## ***Other peace process updates***

- FPNCC met from June 15 to 19 in Panghsang. The alliance insists on meeting with the PC as a group, while the government prefers to hold talks with FPNCC members individually.
- PC asked China to organize a meeting with the FPNCC along the Chinese border. China has sent both sides invitations to the meeting, but no specifics about the meeting have been made public yet.
- After a meeting in Chiang Mai on June 17-18 between eleven EAOs, the JMC-U, the UPDJC and the JICM, an agreement was reached regarding amendments to a draft version of the ToR surrounding EAOs' liaison offices (regarding the implementation and maintaining of ceasefires). Approval of the amendments by the government is pending.

## **HUMAN RIGHTS**

### ***General***

- An Amnesty International publication on June 14 reports various crimes by the BA, and to a lesser extent by EAOs, such as non-respect of principle of distinction, indiscriminate attacks, denial of humanitarian access, forced labor, and recruitment of child soldiers.

## **Land Confiscation**

- Lower House Speaker U Win Myint stated that confiscated lands should be returned to their rightful owners when proposed projects have not been implemented and the land remains inactive.
- In Myaungmya Township, Irrawaddy Division, 32 local farmers demanded the return of 250 acres of land in a press conference on June 13 (the land was confiscated by the government in 1996 and subsequently abandoned).
- The Committee on Confiscated Farmlands and Other Lands opened an investigation regarding 140 acres of land which have been confiscated by five former government officials against small or no compensation, after ninety farmers lodged reports saying that the land is not being used for cultivation.
- Businessman and former KNU/KNLA-PC member Michael Kyaw Myint, and Daw Chaw Kay Khaing, held a press conference in Tamwe Township to protest against the government's takeover of farmer U Ohn Han's land. On the same evening, Tamwe police opened a case against Michael Kyaw Myint under Article 19 of the Peaceful Assembly Act.
- Two dozen Sittwe farmers protested on June 9 and continue to reject compensation for their land, demanding restitution at market value. The dispute has been ongoing for 25 years.

## **Unlawful Association Act – The case of Lawi Weng, U Aye Naing, and U Pyae Bone Naing**

- On June 26, seven people were arrested in Northeastern Shan State, including three journalists: Lawi Weng, also known as U Thein Zaw (The Irrawaddy), U Aye Naing and U Pyae Bone Naing (both from DVB), after reporting on a TNLA drug burning ceremony. They were stopped by authorities while driving back from event, and transferred to the Lashio police station. They were detained under the Unlawful Association Act, routinely used by the government and military to arbitrarily detain people (often journalists or ethnic nationalities) associating with "unlawful" EAOs such as TNLA.
- Amnesty International issued a statement on June 26, calling the act "vague and repressive". On June 27, the Myanmar Journalists Association and the US embassy in Rangoon also voiced their concern.
- On June 27, 25 Burma media organizations who were attending the annual ethnic media conference in Loikaw, Karenni State, from June 26-28 sent an open letter to the President, State Counselor and the Burma Army commander-in-chief, calling for the immediate release of the journalists.
- On June 28, an unidentified NLD spokesman expressed support for the prosecution of the journalists, whilst Nyan Win, another NLD spokesperson, stated that the BA did not have the right to arrest the journalists.

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- The three men have been transferred into police custody in Hsipaw and charged with article 17(1) of the Unlawful Association Act.

## ***2013 Telecommunications Law – The case of Kyaw Min Swe***

- On June 2, The Voice Daily editor Kyaw Min Swe and satire columnist Ko Kyaw Zwa Naing were charged with defamation under article 66(d) of the 2013 Telecommunications Law for criticizing a military propaganda film.
- On June 6, over 100 reporters rallied in Rangoon to protest the lawsuit. The Committee for the Protection of Journalists, comprising of 21 members, formed to advocate for freedom of expression and the abolishment of article 66(d), announced the beginning of a white armband public awareness campaign entitled “Freedom of the Press”. Kyaw Zwa Naing was later released upon Kyaw Min Swe taking full responsibility.
- On June 29, 61 CSOs published a joint statement condemning the repeated governmental attacks on freedom of expression and asked for the amendment or repeal of the article 66(d) in accordance with International Human Rights Law.

## ***International community involvement***

- While the UN began a probe last year into alleged human rights abuses against Rohingya people – approving the formation of an independent fact-finding mission this March – in a speech on June 12 DASSK warned such a probe would inflate ethnic tensions and rejected the UN fact-finding mission. DASSK said she would only accept former UN Chief Kofi Annan advisory commission issued recommendations on this issue.
- Renata Lok-Dessallien, the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, was announced to be leaving her post before the end of her five-year term after being heavily criticized of not doing enough to address the current situation in Burma.
- The BA discharged 67 child soldiers on June 23 as part of a 2012 pact with the UN.

## **VOICES FROM THE GROUND**

### ***Karen and Mon States***

- Community representatives from 22 Karen villages requested Thailand’s National Human Rights Commission to investigate three mining companies: East Star Co., Thai Asset Mining Co. and Energy Earth PCL, accusing them of land confiscations and significant negative impacts on the environment and livelihoods.
- 1,000 civilians submitted a petition to the KNU on May 27, asking for a permanent stop to the construction of a temporarily suspended quarry and cement factory in Min Lwin Mountain, fearing the destruction of the environment, pollution and depletion of resources.

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- Mawlamyine Cement Limited (MCL)-run cement factory started commercial operations in Kyaikmayaw Township, despite long-standing opposition from local residents who are concerned about negative environmental impacts.
- Hundreds of residents protested demanding the immediate closure of a 225 acres rock quarry in the Kalama Mountain Forest Reserve, which is damaging farmlands and the environment.

## ***Shan and Kachin States***

- In response to the protests on April 11 by over 4,000 Mong Kung residents in Southern Shan State, which led to an agreement to halt the coalmining project, Burma's Minister of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation Ohn Win told the parliament that the project would have no negative environmental impact.
- Protests were held on June 21 by Muse Township residents against the construction of a tollbooth by the Myoma People's Militia at local pier.
- On June 23, 600 people from over 30 villages around Hsipaw Township, Northern Shan State, held a religious ceremony led by 15 monks to bless the environment. The villagers, who all belong to the Nam Ma village tract, are concerned about the negative impacts that coal mining has had on the forest and water supplies in the area.
- The report 'Life on Hold' contains over 100 interviews of displaced women from the Kachin State.

## ***Elsewhere in Burma***

- On June 8-18, the Myanmar Deitta gallery in Rangoon showcased the "Let My Voice Be Heard" photography exhibition, which focused specifically on women and youth IDP in Northern Burma.
- On June 26, the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, Vimutti Women's Organization (VWO), AAPP, WLB, ND-Burma, and Asia Justice and Rights (AJAR) organized a commemorative public event in Rangoon.
- On June 30, 50 journalists protested in Rangoon for the immediate release of the three journalists arrested under the Unlawful Associations Act and calling for the repeal of Article 66(d) of the Telecommunications Law.

## ***Burma communities in third countries***

- After Padoh Kwe Htoo Win (KNU), Lian Sakong (CNF), Khun Myint Tun (PNLA) and Sai Leng (RCSS) toured Canada on June 3-10, the local Karen community expressed their deception at the KNU leader's decision not to visit or address the Karen community reportedly due to a tight schedule.

# PEACE & CONFLICT UPDATE – JUNE 2017



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- The Karen Community of Canada (KCC) released an open letter concerning the issue of the militarization of the Karen State, asking the Canadian government to address this issue with DASSK during her visit on June 5-9. A public demonstration was organized on June 9 and a statement criticizing DASSK and the NLD was released.