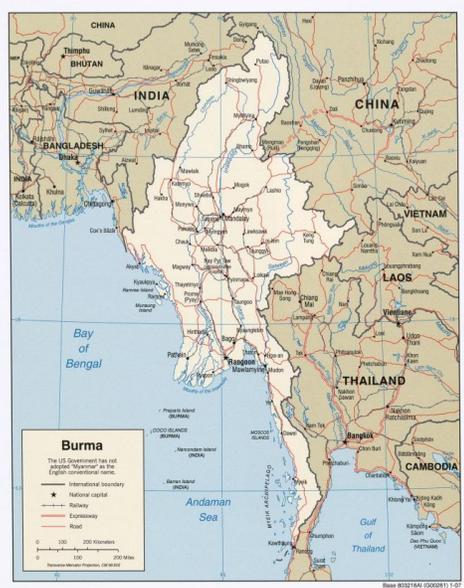


Republic of the Union of Myanmar



Form of Government: Military regime until 2010, when it became a Presidential Republic

Population: estimated 61 million people from over 130 different ethnic groups

Women's Participation: There is no quota for women in parliament; Women constitute less than 5% of lawmakers at the national level and less than 3% on local levels

Context & Background to the Conflict

Years of civil war and military regime have greatly impacted Myanmar's ethnic groups, many of whom struggled for autonomy after independence in 1948 and suffered under a policy of "Burmanization" – i.e. hegemonization of the Burmese population. In 1962, Ne Win led a military coup and embarked on "Burma's Way to Socialism" - which contributed to Myanmar's ranking as the world's least developed country (1987) - and increased centralization of the state, depriving ethnic minorities of many privileges and reducing their autonomy. As a result, several regionally based minority groups formed the opposition National Democratic Front (1976) and mounted guerrilla

insurgencies. Economic reforms, as well as government corruption and brutality, led to a wave of protests culminating on August 8th, 1988. The popular uprising prompted Ne Win to resign and General Saw Maung to stage a coup. Maung introduced martial law and cracked-down on the protesters, killing thousands. Shortly after coming to power, the military regime began pursuing a policy of ceasefires, signing agreements with 25 armed groups, including military groups from all major ethnicities except the Karen National Union. The bilateral agreements did not address the underlying political issues and were not formally signed, often functioning as a "gentlemen's agreement". Consequently, they were strictly military-controlled agreements and excluded all external actors, including civil society and, therefore, women. The ceasefires were relatively successful until 2007, when more and more groups began violating the agreements.

In 2007, the government's violent crackdown of the "Saffron Revolution" attracted international attention, causing the regime to propose a new Constitution (adopted May 2008). Although the Constitution allowed for a degree of civil participation, it still did not address several crucial issues, such as the autonomy of ethnic groups and minority rights. It also included some harmful provisions, granting 25% of seats in the parliament to the military. The Constitution is also gender-blind and does not include any provisions for women's participation. In 2010, the regime agreed to hold democratic elections. The outcome of the elections has been questioned, but they nonetheless resulted in a transition from a military to a civilian government. In 2011, the government called for a nation-wide, multilateral peace process. Although initially distrustful, the ethnic armed organizations (EAO) agreed to join the process. Some of armed groups agreed to ceasefires and some agreed to join the negotiations, without signing a ceasefire. Several armed groups formed a United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC), which serves as a platform for these ethnic non-state actors to prepare, debrief, and share information during peace talks. The government also agreed to have international observers to participate in some of the negotiations. Although the talks themselves can be viewed as a success, no major progress has been achieved yet in terms of addressing the policy issues.

Beginning in early 2014, a new negotiation strategy has been in place. In November of last year, 16 EAO got together to create The Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT), which will represent the member ethnic armed organizations in negotiations with the government. The government, which has been joined by members of parliament and the military, will engage in a dialogue with one block, rather than negotiating ceasefires with individual groups. The NCCT and the government have already had three rounds of talks, and are currently debating a joint text. Although there remain serious issues around implementation, most observers believe that a nationwide ceasefire will be agreed upon and signed before the coming elections in 2015. Although much more open than the pre-2011 agreements, the peace talks have been criticized for the lack of inclusion of civil society. In particular, women are largely excluded from the negotiations, despite numerous contributions from women-led civil society organizations. Furthermore, violence

continues in many parts of Myanmar. Since 2012, the country has been experiencing an extreme rise in communal violence against Muslims, in particular in the Rakhine State.

Key Players & Their Inclusion of Women

- **The Government of Myanmar:** President Thein Sein is from the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party. There are two committees in parliament: (1) the Union Level Peace Central Committee has 12 members, none of which are women; and (2) the Union Level Peace Working Committee has 52 members, of which 2 are women. There are currently only two women sitting at the negotiating table on the government's side, but their representation is not guaranteed, and they can easily be excluded from the next round of negotiations. In October 2013, Myanmar introduced a National Strategic Plan on the Advancement of Women. However, the representation of women in the government and in the peace process remains low and negative perceptions of women prevail in the country.
- **Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAO):** There are numerous EAO negotiating with the government. The two major groups are Karen National Union (KNU) and Kachin Independence Organization (KIO). Only three groups, KNU, Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), and New Mon State Party (NMSP) include women in their peace committees. The other organizations are generally composed of military men. These organizations formed the NCCT, which had included one woman until she was kicked out in the last round. However, some of the EAO – most notably the KNU – conducted consultations with civil society groups and also created a Working Group for Ethnic Coordination to develop a common peace plan. Since September 2012, two women representatives were added to the group. Although not formally EAO members, many women have worked creatively to influence these groups by providing technical expertise and creating platforms for dialogue.
- **Women's Organizations:** Women led CSOs (e.g., Women's League for Myanmar, Karen Women Organization, Kachin Women Association) contribute through reports, statements, conferences, monitoring and EAO consultations.

Timeline from 2011 to the Present

- Aug 2011** – President Thein Sein appeals to the ethnic military groups to start peace talks. The Union-Level Peace Team is created; it includes no women. Only 2 of 52 in working committee on peace are women.
- April 2012** – Karen National Union (KNU) – the only major EAO that hadn't signed a ceasefire with the government – agrees to sign an agreement and join the peace talks. The head of the organization at that time was a woman, Naw Zaporah Sein. This is viewed as a huge step forward in the negotiation process.
- June 2012** – Women's League of Burma delegation meets with Myanmar peacemaking team in Bangkok to discuss issues related to the peace process in Myanmar and women's inclusion.
- Sept 2012** – An Ethnic Nationalities Conference decides to add two women representative to the Working Group for Ethnic Cooperation, responsible for coordination of the peace process on the ethnic groups' end.
- Nov 2012** – The Shalom Foundation, Swisspeace and UNWomen hold a training on negotiations/participation for women coming from diverse ethnic groups; it is the beginning of a series of capacity building and support programs that are still ongoing
- Dec 2012** – Women's League of Burma calls for more women MPs and more women to be involved in the peace process.
- April 2013** – Comprehensive Union Peace and Ceasefire Agreement is signed. The Agreement includes a provision for women's participation in the peace process, recommending at least 30% of women participation in every process.
- Nov 2013** – 16 EAO form a National Ceasefire Cooperation Team (NCCT), responsible for representing them in the negotiations. There was 1 woman member but she was subsequently removed from the team.
- Sept 2013** – Myanmar Women's Forum, women at the meeting issue recommendations for the negotiating teams, including the call for addressing issues surrounding IDPs and women's rights.
- 2013** – Kachin Women Association calls on the cessation of violence between Kachin forces and the military.
- Oct 2013** – National Forum on Women in Leadership & Resolution 1325, co-organized by UNWomen and CSOs.
- Feb 2014** – Burmese government's chief negotiator calls for greater women's participation in the peace talks.

Recent Agreements and Documents

Panglong Agreement, 12 February 1947 <http://peacemaker.un.org>

Myanmar Women's Forum Recommendations, September 2012 <http://womenofburma.org>

Comprehensive Union Peace and Ceasefire Agreement, 8 April, 2013 www.burmalibrary.org

Kachin Women's Call for Cessation of Violence, October 2013 <http://kachinwomen.com>