State Counselor, NCA Signatories Meet to Increase Peace Cooperation

By HTET NAING ZAW | THE IRRAWADDY | 24 January 2017

NAYPYIDAW — Burma’s State Counselor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and signatories of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) met in the administrative capital Naypyidaw on Monday to discuss the second round of the Union Peace Conference, also known as the 21st Century Panglong peace conference.

Discussions focused on strengthening the cooperation between the two sides to achieve better results at the conference, which is slated to be held at the end of February.

“The meeting was mainly about how to cooperate for the success of the peace process and to ensure that the second round of 21st Panglong Conference yields the political results we desire,” Col Khun Okkar, of the Pa-O National Liberation Organization (PNLO), told the media after the meeting at the National Reconciliation and Peace Center in Naypyidaw.

The meetings were held following a request from NCA signatories to meet Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and Burma Army Chief Snr-Gen Min Aung Hlaing.

Those who signed the NCA in Oct. 2015 include the All Burma Students’ Democratic Front, Karen National Union (KNU), Chin National Front, PNLO, Democratic Karen Benevolent Army, KNU/KNLA Peace Council, the Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army-South, and the Arakan Liberation Party.

The eight groups’ combined Peace Process Steering Team (PPST) held an urgent two-day meeting from Jan. 10-11, and decided that they should meet Burma’s top decision makers.
“Many things happened last year, and so in the urgent meeting of the PPST we decided that we should meet the State leaders. We at first decided to dispatch a five-member delegation, but then we came as a six-member delegation,” said Col Khun Okkar.

The delegation was led by Pado Saw Mutu Say Poe of the KNU. The PPST said they came to discuss cooperation, as Daw Aung San Suu Kyi said during her peace talks with youth in Naypyidaw on Jan. 1 that 2017 would be a “peace year.”

Divisional level political dialogue will start soon in Dawei and Irrawaddy Division in the run-up to the second round of the peace conference.

In addition, discussions with ethnic minority groups will be held in Chin State and also among Pa-O communities before holding the 21st Century Panglong Conference, according to Col Khun Okkar.

He said that he hoped that discussion between the Burma Army and Chinese delegates would pave the way for the Northern Alliance—the Kachin Independence Army, Ta’ang National Liberation Army, Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army and Arakan Army—to join the 21st Century Panglong Conference.

“If the channel for negotiation is opened, clashes may deescalate,” Col Khun Okkar said.

In a meeting with Northern Alliance representatives in Kunming on Jan. 19, China’s Special Envoy of Asian Affairs Sun Guoxiang requested that the ethnic armed coalition begin peace talks with the Burma Army, and asked that fighting subside during the upcoming Chinese New Year.