

Civil Society Forum Calls For Greater Participation in Decision Making



Maran Jaw Gun (standing_ with other CSFoP working committee members holds a press conference about their 15th forum meeting results, in Rangoon, on Jan.20, 2017

By **NYEIN NYEIN | THE IRRAWADDY** | 20 January 2017

Civil society organizations called for the government to work towards ending fighting in order to achieve peace in the country, as well as to immediately respond to the needs of civilians trapped by fighting between the Burma Army and ethnic armed groups in the country's northeast.

Some 135 representatives from 79 civil society organizations (CSOs), as well as individuals working in peacebuilding, held the 15th Civil Society Forum for Peace (CSFoP) in Rangoon from Jan. 18-19, urging for a more effective peace process and for support for internally displaced people (IDPs). CSFoP members have held the quarterly meeting since August 2012.

“The government must respond urgently to the needs of the internally displaced people [in Kachin and northern Shan states],” said Maran Jaw Gun, a CSFoP working committee member. “The civilians are unprotected and had to flee from current fighting between the government army and the ethnic armed groups. They are in desperate need of food support,” he told The Irrawaddy.

The CSO representatives urged the Tatmadaw to call off the military offensives against the non-signatories of the country's nationwide ceasefire agreement (NCA). They added that both sides involved in the armed struggle “need to uphold to negotiations meant to resolve the conflict.”

Participants also highlighted their experiences and challenges regarding public consultations on the national dialogue, which were held in Tenasserim Division and Karen State. CSOs were able to participate in the consultations on short notice, but with a reported lack of collaboration with other participants.

They also shared their concerns on the war, which has intensified since August 2016. One prominent issue of discussion was the move by the Shan State parliament to label the Northern Alliance armed groups as “terrorists,” as well as protests in Rangoon and elsewhere in support of the Tatmadaw’s actions as part of “a just war.”

The government is planning to hold its own civil society forum at the end of the month, prior to the second 21st Century Panglong peace conference in February. Yet criticism remains regarding a lack of government acknowledgment of the CSOs’ proposed recommendations in convening such forums.

CSO representatives have urged the inclusion of all stakeholders and experts in the national level political dialogue and for every participant to have equal space to speak.

“The government needs to ensure that those stakeholders of the peace process are able to participate in the upcoming 21st Century Panglong peace conference,” read its recommendation from the two-day forum.

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