

Briefing Note

**By H.E. Deputy Prime Minister PRAK Sokhonn,
Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation,
on the Outcomes of the Second Visit of the Special Envoy of
the ASEAN Chair 2022 to Myanmar, 30 June-2 July 2022
MFAIC, Phnom Penh, 6 July 2022**

- *Excellencies Ambassadors, members of the diplomatic corps,*
 - *Members of the media, Ladies and Gentlemen,*
1. Thank you for joining the briefing this afternoon on the outcomes of my second visit to Myanmar in my capacity as the Special Envoy of the ASEAN Chair on Myanmar. I am sure that you have read the press release which has briefly explained the outcomes of this visit.
 2. Like the first visit, the second mission aimed to move forward the progress in the implementation of the Five-Point Consensus (5PC), namely on cessation of violence, the expediting of the delivery of humanitarian assistance and joint vaccination program, which were endorsed at the Consultative Meeting on ASEAN Humanitarian Assistance to Myanmar on 06 May 2022 in Phnom Penh, and the engendering of a conducive environment for an inclusive political dialogue.
 3. We have carefully prepared, before the trip, the list of persons, institutions, stakeholders to meet, topics to be raised, questions to be asked, possibilities to explore and expected outcomes to achieve. An advance team led by Secretary of State Kung Phoak, Head of the Office of the SE went to Myanmar to coordinate, even negotiate with Naypyitaw on the details of the program and I think I can say that they did a great job on the preparation of this visit.

I. Whom have we talked to?

4. From the side of the SAC, we met with Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, Chairman of the State Administration Council (SAC), Foreign Minister H.E. Wunna Maung Lwin, H.E. Ko Ko Hlaing, the Chairman of Myanmar Task Force on ASEAN Humanitarian Assistance along with the Minister of Health and the Minister of Social Welfare, and H.E. General Yar Pyae, Chairman of National Solidarity and Peace-making Negotiation Committee (NSPNC).
5. Our team has also met an extended number of interlocutors, especially the non-SAC stakeholders such as 7 Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs)¹ and 7 political parties² who won seats at the 2020 election. We were not able to meet with 4 other political parties as requested, namely the National League for Democracy, Shan National League for Democracy, Kaya State Democratic Party and Kachin State People's Party as these parties were found to be in breach of the existing laws. The Wa National Party was unable to attend the meeting due to traveling issue. Three EAOs, namely Karen National Union (KNU), Chin National Front (CNF) and All Burma Students Democratic Front (ABSDF) could not participate for various reasons.
6. We met a group of ambassadors, namely Australia, European Union, France and US, and exchanged our views on a wide range of issues related to the situation in Myanmar. The discussion was not at all intended to interfere into internal affairs of Myanmar but simply to

¹ 1. Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS) 2. Pa-O National Liberation Organization (PNLO) 3. Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) 4. Karen National Union/ Karen National Liberation Army-Peace Council (KNU/ KNLA-PC) 5. Arakan Liberation Party (ALP) 6. New Mon State Party (NMSP) 7. Lahu Democratic Union (LDU)

² 1. Arakan National Party 2. Ta'ang National Party 3. Pa-O National Organization 4. Mon Unity Party 5. Arakan Front Party 6. Union Solidarity and Development Party 7. Zomi Congress for Democracy

understand the situation on the ground as viewed by those embassies and to share the main outcomes of the visit.

7. Cambodia as well as many Myanmar observers still hold that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is one of the most important actors in advancing inclusive dialogue and promoting the principle of non-violence. Despite our consistent request, we were not be able to meet with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, nor with her lawyer, nor with Daw Su Su Lwin, the spouse of Myanmar's former president. They told us that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is still under the court process, while Daw Su Su Lwin was unable to meet us due to health problem.

II. What we have discussed?

8. I would like to arrange the gist of the discussions based on the three priorities of our works, namely the reduction/cessation of violence, delivery of humanitarian assistance to those most in need in an impartial manner, and the enabling of a conducive environment for peaceful and inclusive dialogue.

A. Reduction/Cessation of Violence

9. I recalled the conversation between my Prime Minister, Samdech Techo Hun Sen, with Senior General Min Aung Hlaing on making efforts towards cessation of violence and his request to exercise utmost restraint from all sides. Through the long discussion I had with Senior General Min Aung Hlaing (more than two hours) and a separate conversation with Lt. General Yar Pye, it is fair to say that other armed groups also have their share of responsibility on the violence, the destruction of public property, the killings of civil servants, teachers, medical staff who resume their work to address the peoples' medical needs and children' studies.

10. Ending violence can only be achieved with sincere will and through participation and restraint from all sides. All the EAOs and political parties we met have expressed concern on the ongoing violence, threats and intimidations against civilians in their controlled areas.
11. There are two aspects of violence. Firstly, the one that is caused by the long-standing fights between the Tatmadaw and the EAOs. Secondly, frequent and severe armed clashes between the Tatmadaw and the People's Defence Forces (PDF), which has emerged after February 2021.
12. The SAC showed us reports of brutality from the part of other armed groups such as beheading and cutting off limbs. Murders, bombing and assassinations constitute the vicious cycle of revenge and threats that have disrupted the normal livelihood of the people, cut off people's lifelines and public services. We also heard the cases of burning of villages and harassment against the delivery of humanitarian assistance. This vicious cycle of revenge can push the country into a full-fledged civil war.
13. I reiterated the call from SPM to the SAC to exercise utmost restraint and not to use disproportionate response. I also urged all the EAOs and political parties to adhere to non-violence principle. The EAOs and Political parties we met assured us that they were against violence in any forms and manifestations. Of course, parties that have the capacity and capability to inflict harms have to go beyond mere promise. They need to prove themselves with real deeds, and they must stop fighting.
14. An encouraging sign is that with the ongoing Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), there is a certain degree of stability and I welcomed the designation by the SAC of the year 2022 as the year of peace. Senior General Min Aung Hlaing shared with us his efforts to achieve the NCA by

meeting personally with the EAOs - 8 at the time of our discussion and more to come in the short while. I am also encouraged to hear that children can resume their schooling. They are the future of the country, and their education should matter to all sides of the conflicting parties. Some political parties also informed me about their humanitarian acts in receiving Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) from other regions. I am touched to hear that there is still a sentiment of humanitarianism amid this unfortunate environment of violence.

15. On this particular issue, I shared with all my interlocutors the priceless value of peace, and Cambodia's lessons in ending our war through the Win-Win Policy initiated by Samdech Techo Prime Minister Hun Sen. We feel that people only value peace when it is lost.

B. Delivery of Humanitarian Assistance

16. This priority has enjoyed the most visible progress. The reason is simple. It is because those works are not related with politics or have less political color. We have witnessed the contribution of 2 million doses of vaccines from the government of the People's Republic of China to Myanmar through the ASEAN-led framework. Let me also take this opportunity to acknowledge the good works of the Ministry of Health of Myanmar, which has managed to vaccinate a large number of the population during such challenging time. Of course, more need to be done, and we will spare no efforts to bring more vaccines to the arms of the people.
17. I wish to recall that at the Consultative Meeting in early May in Phnom Penh, Cambodia initiated the joint vaccination program on top of the aid delivery, and we are pleased that this initiative receives concrete support from ASEAN's dialogue partner. In the ceremony of handover

of the vaccine, I underlined that “humanitarian assistance should bear no color” and all sides should put political differences aside so that we can take the first step forward in terms of delivery of humanitarian assistance to the needy people.

18. At the meeting with Myanmar Taskforce, we deliberated on how the UN Specialized Agencies and international non-government organizations can engage in this ASEAN-led humanitarian works with the cooperation and facilitation from Myanmar. The request was raised to the Myanmar Task Force in facilitating and simplifying procedures while Myanmar side called for more cooperation with local authorities and avoid political distancing from the side of international organizations and partners.
19. I also underscored that we have to do our utmost ability to support the AHA Centre in completing the Joint Need Assessment (JNA) the soonest possible, because the findings from this assessment will guide ASEAN on the second phase of humanitarian assistance to Myanmar. Furthermore, I was encouraged by the willingness of the Myanmar Taskforce to allow UNOCHA and WFP to join the AHA Centre to observe the conduct of the JNA.
20. I also conveyed the willingness of Samdech Techo Prime Minister to dispatch Cambodia’s voluntary health personnel to help administer vaccines in Myanmar, which was strongly welcomed by Myanmar’s Task Force. We will work out the details on this initiative with the ASEAN Secretariat, the AHA Centre and other relevant stakeholders in Myanmar in due course.
21. In the larger sense of cooperation, I have urged the SAC to explore ways to work with the United National Secretary-General’s Special Envoy, Mme Noeleen Heyzer so that we

can further enhance synergy between ASEAN and the UN as agreed by ASEAN FMs during the AMM Retreat last February.

22. Let me move on the third priority.

C. Enabling Conducive Environment for Peaceful and Inclusive Dialogue

23. This is by far the most difficult issue to tackle. Conflict in Myanmar is deeply rooted in history for over seven decades. There are many aspects to the conflict from politics, power-sharing, to history, to culture and identities.

24. When meeting with the EAOs and the political parties, quite all of them called for help from the Special Envoy to seek political solution to the long-term crisis. While I am being heartened by the sincere request, I have to admit that that would be an over-expectation on the mandate of the Special Envoy. I informed them that ASEAN is just the facilitator and not a direct participant of the Myanmar's conflicts, which can only be settled through Myanmar-own and Myanmar-led process.

25. With only six months to go in my capacity as the Special Envoy, I should say that I don't have a panacea [a magic elixir] to Myanmar's crisis.

26. To be realistic, what ASEAN and myself can do is to help facilitate Myanmar's peace and dialogue process to be inclusive and acceptable by all. What we can do is to help put the brake on violence and alert all stakeholders not to push the country into full-blown civil war that may trigger region-wide instability and insecurity and cause deeper tragedy to its people.

27. Since last year, all of us have asked this question: **What can be the way out from the current political crisis in Myanmar?**
28. As the Special Envoy, I have lent my ears to all voices coming from inside and outside of Myanmar. Everyone expressed their intention to end the current conflicts and bring about long-lasting peace to the country as soon as possible.
29. The SAC, in its 5 Point Roadmap, has set a general election in 2023 as the exit way for the country to get back to normalcy with the promise to transfer the power to the winner of that election. The 5 PC of the Leaders of ASEAN said nothing about election and subsequently the Special Envoy has no mandate with regards to election.
30. Through our discussion before and during the visit, we heard the voices of the people and external partners who were against the proposed election in 2023 and those people have urged for re-instatement of government based on 2020 election results.
31. On the other hand, we also heard concerns that such preference is pushing for a stalemate and prolongation of the current instable security situation. The EAOs and political parties we have met in Naypyitaw and in Yangon were in favour of general election as long as it is inclusive and acceptable.
32. The SAC affirmed their determination to hold the election and made commitment that it would be free and fair. Some countries have expressed silent support for the election as they are concerned of popular backlash and criticism that this option would provide legitimacy to the SAC, and that any election organized by the SAC would not be inclusive, free and fair nor credible.

33. The question is: is there any other peaceful option apart from election? If election stands a chance as the only peaceful exit from the current political crisis, how do we make that election inclusively participative, free and fair?
34. Another interesting point that I heard is that many stakeholders have expressed views that the 2008 Constitution has no sufficient provisions to resolve the current crisis and they also raised that the 2008 Constitution has been one of the root causes of Myanmar's long-term political crisis and there is a need to amend or draft a new one.
35. These are phenomenal task to deal with. Again, I cannot stress enough that decision on whether or not to have election, or to amend or to rewrite the Constitution, are totally questions related to destiny of the country that must be decided by all the concerned parties of Myanmar. Outsiders can only share views, suggestions, and recommendations.
36. If Cambodia's case can be of any reference, peace-talk needs time, patience, and concessions from all parties concerned. Due to differences of interest, peace talk is like a lengthy bargaining process. Cambodia needed 20 years to achieve full peace. Only after 8 years from the liberation from the Khmer Rouge genocidal regime, that we could start to conduct the first peace talk, which took us four years of intense negotiations before all parties could sign the Paris Peace Agreements. Election was held two years later, enabling the establishment of a new constitutional parliament, who formulated and adopted a new constitution. But peace was not there yet as the Khmer Rouge boycotted the process and still controlled some parts of the country. It took us five more years of fighting

and negotiations before we can fully realize the full peace and unity through the Win-Win policy.

37. These are the steps that Cambodia had to go through. There is no shortcut nor absolutely perfect process. In calling for an inclusive dialogue, I shared that designating each other as terrorist group or organization cannot engender a peaceful and inclusive dialogue. I urged that the door remain open for any party, regardless of their designation, to join the peace process, and I am encouraged to hear that the SAC has let the door open for dialogue, especially for those who are considered as terrorists, although with some conditions.

Conclusion: How do I evaluate the result of the visit?

38. Simply put, the result is leaning toward some positive progress. I am optimistic to claim that we have achieved some significant progress.

(1) We have met more stakeholders and we have been able to raise more topics for discussion. In addition, we have managed to open new space for political dialogue. On this point, it should be noted that previously there was no possibility at all for any negotiation with persons or groups that the SAC considers as terrorist. We raised the following question, especially to Lt. Gen. Yar Pyae, who is in charge of the peace talks: What do you think if there are individuals or groups that the SAC considers as terrorist but those persons and groups want to give up fighting and join peace talk with the SAC? I added that in case the current position persists any negotiation with groups that are considered as terrorist is denied, then it will lead to endless fighting. If we do not negotiate with them when they already gave up fighting, then they would have no other choice but to return to arm themselves and continue fighting. We

also received an encouraging answer that those who are already classified as terrorists can negotiate, but they have to change their mindset, meaning they have to follow three conditions. Firstly, they must show that they have no intention to destroy the government. Secondly, they have no intention to replace the government. Thirdly, 2008 constitution shall be used as the basis for peace talks. Despite the conditions raised, I understand that at least we have managed to open the door of possibility for negotiation. We managed to move the wheel of peace talks forward. The conditions, however, depend on the relevant parties in Myanmar to work together. At least the door is now open and whether or not parties want to enter into the negotiation, it totally depends on Myanmar. As I already mentioned above, this peace talk is a process that must be Myanmar-owned and Myanmar-led.

- (2) We have continued to push forward humanitarian assistance by continuing to address operational challenges and finding more common grounds.
- (3) We have mobilized more support to the ceasefire, the protection of civilians and the need for a political solution to the current crisis. All EAOs and political parties we met have expressed a desire to achieve peace as soon as possible, and they all pay great attention to the protection of lives of civilians and want to focus on nation's reconstruction.

We have been working very hard to push forward for advancement of the implementation of the 5PC.

39. I would like to emphasize on one important point, which I also pointed out with Excellency the Foreign Minister of Myanmar, that Cambodia and myself in the capacity as the Special Envoy of the ASEAN Chair, will do our utmost to assist Myanmar and its people as long as the ASEAN unity

is maintained for the best interest of the whole region and people. We agreed to a high degree of commitment to maintain ASEAN unity regardless of circumstances. Even if we have to fulfil any duties, to address any crisis, those actions should not by any means break the unity of ASEAN.

40. My team and I would like to thank all partners and friends for their patience in listening to our views and patience in providing us time, space and understanding, which I and my team appreciate very much.
41. Thank you for your kind attention.
