

South-Eastern Myanmar Working Group Meeting Notes

6 May 2021, 10:00-11:30

On 6th May 2021, South-Eastern Working Group (SEWG) meeting was virtually convened with participations from the core members of the SEWG attended virtually. A summary of discussions is below.

Introductory Remarks by Co-Chairs	<p>Hai Kyung Jun (UNHCR Representative): Ms. Jun started her opening remarks by underlining the fragile situation in southeastern Myanmar particularly after February 1st, while previously the Southeast was a prospective model for refugee return and for the nexus work. UNHCR Representative expressed the need to strengthen the humanitarian leg of the working group in the view of the developments after February 1st and to look into different ways to strength the collaboration between humanitarian organisations. Ms. Jun added that the situation is very challenging in the region, which leads the SEWG to think out the box to access to people in need.</p> <p>Titon Mitra (UNDP Representative): Mr. Mitra expressed that, in consideration of new developments in the South East, the emphasis shifted towards humanitarian action and the leadership of this group needed to be with humanitarian actors given the understandable focus on humanitarian needs. UNDP would therefore step back for now to allow UNHCR to lead. UNDP will stay engaged and monitor to see some degree of consistency in the situation that would allow UNDP to engage on issues around the nexus and durable solutions. It was added that the issues are not just humanitarian, but also involve human rights, peace, cohesion, development and recovery.</p>
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<p>Update on political and conflict dynamics in the SE</p> <p><i>Catalina Uribe, Office of the UN Resident Coordinator</i></p>	<p>UNRCO provided an update on the political and conflict dynamics in the Southeast by giving an overview of the latest developments on the ethnic armed organisations (EAOs). Following highlights were provided on the National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) signatory EAOs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Peace Process Steering Committee’s (PPST) announced the suspension of peace talks on 20th February after the military coup and discussions took place on different options for engaging with the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) on 11th March. • Some of the PPST members (Restoration Council of Shan State, Karen National Union, New Mon State Party) announced a statement calling for release of detainees and resolving the crisis through dialogue. • Karen groups historically supported the pro-democracy movement in Myanmar and also started to play an active role after the coup. Currently, they are speaking against the coup, protecting the protesters in their controlled areas, providing support to the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) members. Karen National Union (KNU) was quick to create some distance to the PPST. • The outreach campaign of the CRPH started with the KNU and the CRPH called for a federal democratic union and constitution, the National Unity Government (NUG) and the formation of People’s Defence Force (PDF) which is a step towards future federal army. • However, there have been challenges for the formation of federal army due to diverging interests, as many EAOs want to focus to its own area of control. Therefore, many organizations (EAOs) are reluctant to give up on their own control mechanisms. At the same time, the EAOs don’t know what Aung San Su Kyi would do if or when she is released and she might not recognize or abide by the commitment made with the NUG. • Two smaller ethnic organisations, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) and KNU/the Karen National Liberation Army-Peace Council (KNLA-PC) met with the peace negotiation team of the de facto authority. • The KNU brigade (5) called the DKBA, KNU/KNLA-PC and the Border Guard Force (BGF) for unity. <p>Regarding non-NCA signatories, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) released a statement following the coup and restarted the confrontation on 8th March. Non-signatory EAOs (like the Karenni National Progressive Party, Karreni Nationalities People's Liberation Front, Ta’ang National Liberation Army, Arakan Army, Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army).</p> <p>It was added that the EAOs will play a key role in the future of the country in the pro-democracy movement.</p>
<p>Updates on the current situations in the SE</p> <p><i>Gokce Saraydin, Inter-Agency Coordinator, UNHCR</i></p>	<p>Key developments on the humanitarian situation, challenges and response by organisations in the southeast were highlighted as below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Briefly key developments were mentioned as indiscriminate mortar shelling and military attacks in Hpa-pun of Kayin State and Kyaukkyi of Bago East Region and airstrikes in Hpa-pun and Kyaukkyi townships in March and April 2021,

	<p>spread and escalation of violence in non-traditional conflict zones, and peaceful demonstration almost everywhere in SE.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over 7,000 people were displaced from 29 villages in Hpa-pun prior to airstrikes in March. Following the airstrikes at the end of March 2021, around 20,000 individuals were displaced inside Kayin and some 3000 fled to Thailand (as of 22 April all were returned to Myanmar from Thailand). In April, 2,946 people from 21 villages in Kyaukkyi were displaced due to the clashes and MAF troop deployment. Another mass displacement was also reported following the airstrikes in April and 3,000 individuals were internally displaced in Kayin, along with over 2,000 individuals that crossed to Thailand. As of 1 May 2021, it is estimated that around 40,000 people have been internally displaced in three months since the military takeover. • As far as humanitarian situation is concerned, the population continue to live in fear due to spread of fighting and increased of human rights' violations, access to affected populations remains as a major challenge due to road blockages, insecurity and logistical difficulties. Furthermore, more restrictions were introduced to cross border movements. Health services remain to be limited in the region, there are challenges to cash flow and shelter is among the priority needs in the view of the upcoming rainy season. • Despite the challenges, agencies are providing shelter kits, food, NFI, health services and WASH, undertaking MHPSS, COVID-19 prevention, child protection and cash assistance activities.
<p>Q&A Session</p>	<p>Questions: Challenges in cash transactions and whether any engagement and advocacy with de facto authorities to use the banking system were inquired.</p> <p>Answer: UN is looking into ways to overcome the mentioned challenge and discussions are ongoing at CMT level.</p> <p>Question: As it is 3 months after the coup and many people are facing a critical condition, a question was raised whether UN is planning or implementing any emergency response in the country.</p> <p>Answer: Participant was informed that UN declared an emergency and there are discussions on elevating the emergency level.</p> <p>Question: A question was raised on whether any development/recovery interventions are considered?</p> <p>Answer: For development and recovery type of interventions the population needs to be stable, which is not the case given the fluidity of the situation in the Southeast. UNDP also added that some sort of consistency is needed for the recovery stage and they are watching the space very closely to see when the best time would be to launch such interventions.</p>
<p>Updates by Organizations</p>	<p>TBC:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TBC has provided support to displaced persons and needs assessment was conducted.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For the coordination mechanism, TBC is involved in three coordination mechanisms at the moment in SE: one is the IAC in Kayin State under SEWG, one is the coordination between donors, UNHCR, and NGOs in Thailand on the response to influx into Thailand and another one is the operational coordination mechanism with border-based organizations for delivering lifesaving humanitarian assistance into the conflict affected areas. The challenge now is how to synergize between different operational coordination mechanisms and how to ride up to the strategic level coordination. <p>IOM:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IOM started to track the mobility in Myanmar, including in the SE, since 1 February 2021 based on IOM’s global displacement tracking matrix. IOM has been collection the data through key informant interview in both Myanmar and Thai side and expressed that they are keen to explore further partnerships in implementing the displacement tracking. • IOM is also providing humanitarian support to migrants returning from Thailand. Number of returnees since the 1st of February is quite high as 36.000 persons. They are returned to places of origin. • COVID 19 response project that was initiated earlier, is being re-programmed after February. • IOM is also looking at ways to continue some of its activities on safe migration and livelihood programming in Kayin, Mon and Tanintharyi. <p>MIMU:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MIMU informed that 3Ws are capturing information on the humanitarian and peace development related activities. It included a lot of Thailand based agencies with focus on information in Myanmar. The last round was August 2020 and it were due to start in February 2021, but, was delayed that due to agencies and donor not being assure of their activities as well as internet problem. • For the question of UNHCR on the interlink with IAC 5W, MIMU explained that MIMU 3W is 5W and it is basic overview tool which supports coordination. UNHCR noted the need for further coordination with MIMU’s 3Ws and IAC 5Ws. • MIMU prepares emergency response and dashboard for flood and would like to include the displaced population, asked the agencies to feed the data next month. <p>WFP:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WFP raised that different displacement figures are being used by different organisation in the Southeast and added that it would be better to come up with a single displacement figure. • WFP is planning to provide 1-month food support to 4,649 IDPs in Myaing Gyi Ngu and the Country Office decided to approach the SAC of Kayin State for approval. However, the SAC did not allow the distribution due to security reasons. Participants were also informed that there is a possibility that the authorities might accompany throughout the
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	<p>distribution and ask the food to be dropped somewhere safe for transportation to the camp by their own arrangement. Since, WFP would like to manage the food distribution itself, asked suggestions/experiences from other participants.</p>
AOB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To strengthen the humanitarian response and coordination, UNHCR and UNDP suggested strengthening the humanitarian wing of the SEWG through strengthened secretariat functions without revising the structure of SEWG, the nexus work would continue to be the foundation of the working group. For secretariat, OCHA already extended its support and alongside UNHCR and UNDP secretariat support from INGO forum is also recommended. Through strengthened secretariat functions, the agencies can respond better to the needs of people with better coordination. • SEWG secretariat introduced the information product such as early warning system, flash updates, weekly briefing notes with Kayin IAC and assessment repository and 5Ws. The group was also informed that preparations are on way in developing contingency planning and a joint donor briefing can be considered for upcoming periods.
Action Points:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting notes to be circulated to members. • Next meeting will be on 3 June 2021 at 10 am.