National Network for Education Reform (NNER)

March 7, 2014

Re: NNER’s position regarding its loss of faith in the government and Ministry of Education's education reform process.

Dear Member Organizations of NNER and people of Myanmar,

Although the members of NNER were eager to partner with the Ministry of Education for the purpose of education reform, it has not been successful and we have lost faith in the government's educational reform process. This letter provides an explanation to the member organizations and the people of Myanmar regarding the communication between the Ministry of Education and NNER and the unfolding of events.

NNER is a civil-society organization that strives to provide students with increased knowledge, thinking skills and life skills and to put in place a free and equal-opportunity educational policy for all people. NNER is a network that includes teachers, students, parents, literature and culture representatives, religious representatives, political representatives, ethnic group representatives, people from every sector of education, and other scholars and experts.

Between October 2012 and May 2013, the members of NNER held numerous education forums in almost every state and division and received input on education from the people of Myanmar. In June 2013, a national education conference was held in Yangon, and a draft education policy was formed. The members of NNER presented that draft to both houses of Parliament and to the President.

On July 13, 2013 representatives of NNER met with the President and explained the draft policy's basic principles and the policy recommendations related to 13 areas education. In November 2013, those same principles and policy recommendations were presented at two meetings of the Education Promotion Committee of the lower house of Parliament to discuss a national education law.

We have met numerous times with the Education Promotion and Implementation Committee (EPIC) formed by the President's Office, but they have not been successful. In October 2013, Dr. Thein Lwin, a member of NNER was invited by the Deputy Minister of Education, Dr. San Lwin, to participate in the meeting in Nay Pyi Taw attended by the President which resulted in the formation of EPIC. Although Dr. Thein Lwin accepted the invitation, the invitation was withdrawn just days before the meeting took place.

On January 11, 2014 at the invitation of Director of the Department of Higher Education, a group of NNER representatives met with the President of EPIC, U Tin Naing Thein. The result of that meeting was an agreement that EPIC, the parliamentary Education Promotion Committee, and NNER would hold a national level conference in order to compare and discuss the education policy of each of the three groups and come up with a single national education policy.
On January 15, 2014 the parliamentary Education Promotion Committee, EPIC, and NNER held their first meeting. Dr. Mya Oo from the parliamentary committee, about 40 members from the EPIC working groups, and about 40 NNER representatives met in the Diamond Jubilee Hall at Yangon University. NNER presented its educational objectives and 14 educational principles, but the meeting ended in impasse between NNER and EPIC over issues of educational freedom, university students' freedom to choose a major, and issues related to the inclusion of ethnic groups' language and culture in education.

On January 21, 22, and 24, 2014 NNER was invited to the public consultations held by EPIC in the Diamond Jubilee Hall. However, rather than being a discussion of educational principles as had been previously agreed, it was only a presentation by EPIC working groups. Teachers from the University Teachers Union walked out of the meeting since restrictions were placed on their attendance at the meeting. The remaining members of NNER stayed in the meeting, wanting to leave the door open to future discussion of educational principles. In the presentations by EPIC at that meeting we were disappointed to see a desire to make only small, superficial education reforms while retaining the centralized control of the Ministry of Education.

When NNER expressed a desire for further discussion on principles of education, the Ministry of Education's Director of Higher Education agreed and set a date of January 26 for a meeting. However, he phoned on the night of January 25 to say that the meeting was postponed.

On January 29, 2014 Dr. Thein Lwin was invited, and met with Acting Minister of Education, Dr. Myo Myint. Two members of EPIC, Dr. Daw Than Nwe (a legal expert) and Dr. Thein Myint were also present in that meeting. In that meeting the Acting Minister explained the work of EPIC. Dr. Thein Lwin explained the differences between NNER's process of democratic educational reform and EPIC's process of centralized educational reform. He suggested that NNER and EPIC meet together to discuss and negotiate over their different principles of education.

On February 5, 2014, eight NNER representatives met with three EPIC officials: the Director of Higher Education and two university rectors. The EPIC representatives asked the NNER representatives to accept the statement in EPIC's educational objectives regarding "... comprehensive right thinking". NNER could not accept that because "comprehensive right thinking" implies one individual or group's influence over the thinking of others. Thus the meeting ended in an impasse.

On February 28, 2014 a Director of Basic Education from the Department of Education phoned to invite NNER representatives to attend the "National-level Practical Education Reform Conference" to be held March 5-6 in Nay Pyi Taw. He said that a total of 700 people would be invited and inquired how many NNER representatives would be able to attend. He also sent the conference agenda by email.

On March 1, 2014, the NNER working group held a meeting. We noted that in our previous meeting with the President of EPIC and the President's Office Minister U Tin Naing Thein we had agreed that such a national-level education conference would be held jointly by EPIC and NNER. Now, the invitation from the Director of Basic Education was simply an invitation for NNER to participate in a conference lead solely by EPIC. However, the working group decided that we would still attend this conference since we wanted the opportunity to present the desires of the people. We communicated this to the Director who agreed that 150 NNER representatives could
attend, promising to provide accommodation for them in Nay Pyi Taw and local transportation between the place of accommodation and the place where the conference would be held. We then sent word to NNER member organizations in each state and division asking them to attend the conference in Nay Pyi Daw.

At 9:30 pm on March 3, 2014 the Director phoned to tell us that the invitation had been cancelled. On March 4 the NNER working group held a meeting followed by a press conference regarding the above action of the Ministry of Education. No representatives of NNER attended the conference in Nay Pyi Daw. However, on March 5 and 6 the government owned media outlets including MRTV news, the New Light of Myanmar newspaper, and the Mirror newspaper falsely reported that the National Network for Education Reform (NNER) had attended the "National-level Practical Education Reform Conference" held in Nay Pyi Taw.

The repeated breakings of promises, cancelling previously agreed to arrangements, and spreading of false news as documented above, have caused us to lose all faith in EPIC and the Ministry of Education's process of education reform.

As the NNER working group, we have decided that we will continue to hold to the education policy that was formed with the input of experts and scholars, teachers, students, parents, literature and culture representatives, religious representatives, political representatives, ethnic group representatives, and people from every sector of education. We will continue to strive to implement the desires of the people of Myanmar.

We respectfully invite you, the member and partner organizations of NNER and the people of Myanmar to continue your cooperation with us and to give your input into the next steps that the working group should take.

Education Policy Working Group
National Network for Education Reform (NNER)

nnerr.mmr@gmail.com
www.facebook.com/NNER.mmr