The performance of the Ministry of the Office of the State Counsellor during the two year term of the Union Government

AFTER the enactment of the State Counsellor Law on 6 April 2016, the Ministry of the Office of the State Counsellor was established in accordance with this law, with the following objectives:

(1) emergence of multi-party democracy.

(2) flourishing of a market-oriented economy.

(3) establishment of a Federal Union.

(4) promoting Union peace and development.

The Ministry of the Office of the State Counsellor is performing a coordinating and supportive function in implementing the four duties assigned to the State Counsellor stipulated in the State Counsellor Law, and in carrying out the policies laid down by the State Counsellor. It may be said that the activities performed by this Ministry and the activities of the State Counsellor are in line with each other.

The three goals laid down by the State are peace, prosperity and democracy, in short PPD - Peace, Prosperity and Democracy. The first goal Peace and the second goal Prosperity are related. Just as internal peace is needed for strong economic development, achievement of peace is related to the smooth transition towards the establishment of a Democratic Federal Republic which is our third goal. That is why in the performance of its duties, this Ministry does not act on each goal separately but looks at the three goals in relation to each other and as one integral whole.

U Kyaw Thit Swe, Union Minister for the Office of the State Counsellor. **PHOTO: MNA**

The Peace Process

Since assuming its duties, the incumbent Government has been working on the peace process as its priority policy goal. To effectively implement the tasks related to national reconciliation and peace, it established the NRPC - National Peace and Reconciliation Centre with the State Counsellor as Chairperson. The Peace Commission was also formed to implement the policies laid down by the NRPC and to conduct peace negotiations with the ethnic armed organizations.

Just as we are negotiating and coordinating with the ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) which have signed the NCA (Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement) for implementing the points agreed in the NCA for durable peace, we have left the door open for negotiations and have been in constant contact with the leaders of those ethnic armed organizations which have not yet signed the NCA, to establish mutual respect and trust.

To solve the roots causes of armed conflicts which are the political problems, it is necessary to have political dialogues. The UPDJC – Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee which has been formed in accordance with NCA has been conducting political dialogues. The UPDJC has been formed with the State Counsellor as Chairperson and with (16) representatives from the Union Government, Hluttaw, the Tatmadaw, (16) representatives from the Ethnic Armed Groups and (16) from the political parties to ensure that all groups are included. The UPDJC was thus formed with 48 members. During the term of this new Government, (9) meetings of the UPDJC were held. We were thus able to move from the path of armed conflicts to the negotiating table.

In the NCA there are two main tasks namely, to maintain the ceasefire and to continue with the conduct of political dialogues. The JMC – Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee was formed to successfully implement the tasks of maintaining the ceasefire with representatives from the Tatmadaw, Armed Ethnic Organizations, and citizens respected by the people. The Code of Conduct to be observed by military personnel of both sides as well as Ceasefire Rules and Regulations; these are being observed and practiced. This has resulted in the reduction in differences of opinion among the Ethnic Armed Organizations which have signed the NCA, and this has consolidated the ceasefire process.

> Just as internal peace is needed for strong economic development, achievement of peace is related to the smooth transition towards the establishment of a Democratic Federal Republic which is our third goal.

Union Peace Conference - 21st Century Panglong

The first meeting of the Union Peace Conference – 21st Century Panglong was held at the Myanmar International Convention Centre – 2 Nay Pyi Taw from 31 August to 3 September 2016 with the aim of solving political problems through negotiations and to allow the positions and views of all ethnic nationalities to be presented openly and freely. United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki Moon attended and delivered a speech. Not only this, EAOs which have already signed the NCA, and leaders from EAOs which have not yet signed the NCA also attended. Since the proceedings of this conference were televised live all the people living in various parts of the country were able to see and listen to the positions and opinions of all ethnic national races and organizations. This has resulted in heightened public interest. At the same time, this has enabled the entire people to see, listen and understand the different views of the ethnic national races which have existed for many years.

Once again, the Second Meeting of the Union Peace Conference – 21st Century Panglong was held at the Myanmar International Convention Centre – 2 in Nay Pyi Taw from 24 - 29 May 2017. Based on the policy of including all groups in political dialogues, representatives from Government, Hluttaw, the Tatmadaw, Ethnic Armed Organizations – EAOs, Political parties, Ethnic national races, and individuals who should be invited were all invited to attend; a total of (700) delegates attended. This Conference may be considered as 21st Century Panlong Conference where negotiations for political agreements were initiated and adopted.

In accordance with the basic guidelines, headings chosen for discussions and TOR – Terms of Reference of the UPDJC, the following meetings were held:

- (3) National level political dialogues for Races.
- (3) Region National level political dialogues.
- (1) CSO – Civil Society Organizations Forum.

The UPDJC made a summary of all the views presented at the above-mentioned meetings and has submitted these to the Second Meeting of the Union Peace Conference – 21st Century Panglong as policy proposals. These policy proposals were discussed sector by sector by the respective groups stage by stage. Thus agreement was reached to incorporate these proposals as part of the Union Accord.

In part (1) of this Union Accord, there are (12) political sector proposals; (11) economic sector proposals; (4) social sector proposals; and (10) land and natural environment sector proposals; all in all a total of (37) points. In accordance with Section 20, Sub-section (e) of the NCA, all the leaders of the various groups and witnesses signed Part (1) of the Union Accord at the Union Peace Conference – 21st Century Panglong – Second Meeting.

We were able to put on record that the (37) policy proposals from Part 1 of the Union Accord may be seen as the first time in Myanmar's political history, agreement has been reached on basic federal principles. During the tenure of the new Government, political dialogues have been held to solve political problems. Furthermore, we were able to show in practical terms that we were able to work hard and thus begin to get political agreements. If we strive together with united strength there is nothing we cannot achieve. This is a big result of the success of the peace process.

Peace and regional development

The NRPC which is chaired by the State Counsellor is composed of Union Ministers, Peace Commission members, senior officials from the Tatmadaw, and Hluttaw members.

The NRPC has been doing coordination and support work in cooperation with the respective Union Ministries and states/regional governments to fulfill the needs of the EAO's – Ethnic Armed Organizations in the economic, social, education, health and development areas.

The Union Government has been providing funds to support the needs of ethnic nationals in the conflict zones. Additionally funds from the NRPC and funds from donors at home and abroad are being used to support the needs of ethnic nationals. In order to undertake development works in the ethnic areas and to use the Peace Fund effectively, the JCB - Joint Coordinating Body has been established with the State Counsellor as Chairperson and representatives from Government, Ethic Armed Organizations who are signatories as well as those who are not signatories of the NCA. In using the funds donated by foreign countries for the Peace Fund, four categories have been assigned namely: - a) Ceasefire b) Negotiations c) Development works supporting peace d) peace process activities of the NRPC In order to undertake development works in areas afflicted by conflict using the PPP - Public Private Partnership model, seminars have been organized to work according to free market principles and to better understand modes of operation.

Union Minister for the Office of the State Counsellor U Kyaw Tint Swe shakes hands with Chinese Foreign Affairs Minister Mr. Wang Yi. **PHOTO: MNA**

New Signatories to the NCA by EAO's

On 15 October 2018, eight EAO's - Ethnic Armed Organizations signed the NCA - Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement with the Union Government and this Agreement was confirmed and approved by the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw on 8 December 2015. In order to encourage the EAO's to sign the NCA, the Peace Commission conducted (9) informal meetings and (9) formal meetings with the DPN and encouraged them to sign the NCA based on the (8) recommendations of the DPN - Delegation for Peace Negotiations. As a result of these negotiations, the NMSP (New Mon State Party) and the LDU (Lahu Democratic Union) were able to agree on (8) points and eventually signed the NCA on 13 February 2018 at a ceremony held at the MICC - 2 in Nay Pyi Taw. State leaders, leaders of Ethnic Armed Organizations and foreign and local attendees signed this document as witnesses. Thus the NMSP and the LDU went on record as the two EAO's which have decided to walk the path of peace during the tenure of the current Government. Furthermore, we are conducting negotiations with the KNPP (Karenni National Progressive Party) to urge them to sign the NCA. In addition, we have been conducting informal talks with the UWSA "Wa" Special Zones number (2) and (4), Maing La and KIA-KIO. We are coordinating with them so that they would sign the NCA. The Peace Commission is also conducting formal negotiations with the SSPP – Shan State Progressive Party (Wan Hai) in order to bring them to the negotiating table. The main objective of the Union Government is to work for the emergence of political dialogues and cessation of armed conflicts and thus to bring as many ethnic armed organizations as possible under the NCA umbrella and also to bring all those who should be included to the conference table. The Union Government will devote special attention to this endeavor.

Two year journey of the NCA and future prospects

The current peace process gradually developed based on the NCA. (8) Ethnic Armed Organizations signed the NCA and during the two year term of this NCA, two more EAO's namely the NMSP (New Mon State Party) and the LDU (Lahu Democratic Union) signed the NCA. The door to peace is open to the remaining EAO's and negotiations are being conducted to urge them to sign the NCA. We are working hard to adopt basic federal principles and to firmly establish the foundations for federalism at the forthcoming Union Peace Conference – 21st Century Panglong (Third Meeting).

> The only solution to end the armed conflicts which have been raging for many years is a federal system which is effective and practical and also compatible with the Myanmar situation.

Peace Talks

The future generations of youths will be the ones who will suffer the impact of whether we attain peace or not. With this in mind and for the benefit of the future generations, the State Counsellor organized Peace Talks in the following towns and villages:-

1) Nay Pyi Taw – 3 times
2) Shan State, Panglong – 1 time
3) Mandalay Region, Wuntwin township, Myetaingan village – 1 time
4) Kayah State, Loikaw township – 1 time
5) Ayeyarwady Region, Myaungmya – 1 time.

Thus in total (7) times.

Informal talks, workshops and foreign visits

The only solution to end the armed conflicts which have been raging for many years is a federal system which is effective and practical and also compatible with the Myanmar situation. Furthermore, the platform for discussing and negotiating about this federal system is the Union Peace Conference – 21st Century Panglong.

That was why foreign legal experts and subject experts well-versed on the subject of federalism were invited to ensure that those representatives from Government, the Tatmadaw, and Hluttaw can acquire knowledge and gain experiences about federalism. Two workshops on the basic principles of federalism were conducted in Nay Pyi Taw. From these two workshops, advice and recommendations for the peace process as well as for the establishment of a federal union were realized.

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Union Minister U Kyaw Tint Swe exchanges the signed MoU document on Return of Displaced Persons from Rakhine State with Bangladesh Foreign Minister Mr. Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali. **PHOTO: MNA**

The performance of the Ministry of the Office of the State Counsellor during the two year term of the Union Government

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In addition we have been conducting from time to time, foreign visits for delegations composed of representatives and leaders from Government, Tatmadaw, Hluttaw and Ethnic Armed Organizations, to promote understanding, confidence and trust among delegates, and to broaden their knowledge and understanding about political dialogues and federal principles. Also, we are having frank and open informal discussions with Ethnic Armed Organizations and have moved from the stage of holding meetings to the stage of exchanging views, discussing to have advance agreements and to understand their concerns and fears.

Furthermore, with regard to national reconciliation and the peace process, we are conducting "Stakeholder Meetings" by inviting descendants of leaders who signed the Panglong Agreement, learned professionals, ethnic leaders, leaders of Civil Society Organizations and observers, to ascertain their views and advice.

NRPC Vice Chairman U Kyaw Tint Swe attends the coordination meeting to hold race-oriented political dialogues at the national level in Mawlamyine, Mon State. **PHOTO: MNA**

Our endeavors for peace and stability in Rakhine State

To seek practical and sustainable solutions and implement them to meet the deep-rooted problems and challenges which have existed in Rakhine State for many years is one of the priority tasks of the new Government.

Therefore, the Central Committee for Stability, Peace and Development in Rakhine State was established on 30 May 2016 with the State Counsellor as Chairperson and four work committees were formed to support this central committee to work for stability, peace and development in Rakhine State. Thus these work committees have been conducting field visits continuously to know the real situation at the ground level and have been working for stability, peace and development of the region as needed on a priority basis.

The nature of the Rakhine State issue is delicate and complex. Therefore in order to find lasting solutions, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Ministry of the Office of the State Counsellor and the Kofi Annan Foundation to establish the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State with former UN Secretary General Mr. Kofi Annan as Chairman on 24 August 2016, to give advice and support to the Union Government in its endeavors for attainment of a comprehensive solution. This commission is composed of (6) Myanmar nationals, and (3) internationals making a total of (9) members.

As the Union Government was working for peace and development in Rakhine State, terrorist attacks occurred on 9 October and from 12 to 13 November in 2016 which further complicated the situation. An enquiry commission headed by Vice President U Myint Swe with (13) members was formed on 1 December 2016 with the following tasks: a) to make an enquiry in order to find out the truth with regard to the background situation leading up to the terrorist attacks; b) to make an enquiry about allegations of human rights violations in Rakhine State; and c) to make sure that such types of events do not occur in the future.

This enquiry commission came up with (48) recommendations for providing security and ensuring the human rights of the people. This has given much support in working for stability and rule of law in the region.

The final report of Dr. Kofi Annan, former UN Secretary General based on field visits and interviews made by members of the Advisory Commission of Rakhine State was submitted on 24 August 2017. Eighty eight recommendations were presented by the Commission. These recommendations would be of much support in finding good and lasting solutions for the issues of Rakhine State.

As work was being done by various levels of committees for regional stability, ARSA extremist terrorists, the original root cause of the Rakhine issue, staged simultaneous attacks on (30) security outposts on 25 August 2017. As a result large numbers of people from Rakhine State left their homes which led to misguided accusations from the international community. The Union Government had to work for stability among racial groups professing different religions and for rule of law.

After this, an Implementation Committee to implement the recommendations of the Inquiry Commission headed by Vice President (1) and the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State headed by Dr. Kofi Annan was established with Dr. Win Myat Aye, Union Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement on 9 October 2017.

As it is a requirement that the progress report of the Implementation Committee for implementing the recommendations related to Rakhine State needs to be submitted every four months, we were able to release such a report to the public on the 13th and 17th of February 2018 through the government newspapers.

Furthermore, the UEHRD – Union Enterprise for Relief, Resettlement and Development was established on 17 October 2017 with the State Counsellor as Chairperson and relief, resettlement development works for the displaced persons were undertaken with the cooperation of the relevant ministries and the people.

> As work was being done by various levels of committees for regional stability, ARSA extremist terrorists, the original root cause of the Rakhine issue, staged simultaneous attacks on (30) security outposts on 25 August 2017.

So that the Committee for the Implementation of the Recommendations on Rakhine State could carry out its implementation tasks based on the actual ground situation with good results and effectiveness, an Advisory Committee for the above committee headed by former Thai Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Dr. Surakiart Sathirathai was established on 8 December 2017 composed of local and foreign experts to give necessary advice.

To monitor and study the provision of humanitarian assistance in Rakhine State, the implementation of tasks related to the Myanmar-Bangladesh agreements and the verification process for displaced persons, a Special Task Force was formed on 7 January 2018 headed by U Khin Maung Tin, Deputy Minister from the Ministry of the Office of the State Counsellor. Likewise, a Committee for Repatriation and Resettlement of Displaced Persons was formed on 15 March 2018 headed by Dr. Win Myat Aye, Union Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement respectively.

In the performance of tasks for rehabilitation and provision of humanitarian assistance to both communities in Rakhine State, the Union Government has taken the lead in distribution operations through the Red Cross Movement, AHA Centre (ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance), the Philippines Red Cross, Thai Red Cross and local volunteers. International organizations such as the WFP – World Food Programme have been given permission to operate and approaches have been made to UNHCR and UNDP to cooperate in this effort.

Since efforts have been made to further elevate the relations between the two countries with respect to border affairs and bilateral relations, an "MoU on establishment of Border Liaison Office – BLOs" and "MoU on Security Dialogue and Cooperation" have been signed. Furthermore, we have been cooperating with Bangladesh to repatriate displaced persons successfully; in this regard, an "Agreement on Return of Displaced Persons from Rakhine State" was signed by the Union Minister from the Ministry of the Office of the State Counsellor and the Foreign Minister of Bangladesh.

The TOR (Terms of Reference) for the implementation of the said agreement was signed in Bangladesh on 19 December 2017, the "Physical Arrangement for Repatriation of Displaced Myanmar Residents from Bangladesh Under the Arrangement on Return of Displaced Persons from Rakhine State" was signed in Myanmar on 16 February 2018 step by step.

In accordance with the agreement reached between the two countries in the "Physical Arrangement", reception centers were built in Taungpyo Letwe and Ngakhuya and a Transit center was built in Hlaphokhaung and arrangements were made to receive the displaced persons beginning from 23 January 2018. To ensure that the process of verification and handing over of displaced persons is carried out in a smooth and easy manner, the particulars of the first batch of refugees namely 508 Hindus and 750 muslims were handed over to Bangladesh. However, as the duly filled in prescribed forms were not received from the Bangladesh side even though the agreed date had passed , this operation could not be completed. With regard to the first group to be handed over by Bangladesh, out of 1673 families, the name list and personal details of 8032 were sent. However, the forms used were not the forms agreed between the two countries in the "Physical Arrangement", the main points namely that the return was voluntary and that the returnee would abide by prevailing laws of the country were not filled up. Furthermore, these forms did not have signatures and detailed particulars of each individual. The Bangladesh side have therefore been informed to send back the requested information in the agreed prescribed forms. Although the returned forms were not the mutually agreed ones, with a view to making the process more efficient, verification work was done with great difficulty. Up to now more than (700) persons have been verified. The Bangladesh side have been informed that if they were ready to hand over the said displaced persons, the Myanmar side was ready to receive them. Negotiations have also been made with the Bangladesh side to receive those displaced persons living along the Myanmar-Bangladesh border line in Taungpyo Letwe, and resettle them on the Myanmar side. It is hoped that a solution would be found through cooperation between the two countries. Efforts are being made to resolve this problem using the best possible methods. Regarding the closure of IDP (Internally Displaced Persons), the Thetkaepyin IDP camp in Sittway and the IDP camp in Myebon township have been closed according to international standards and work for resettlement is being done.

To ensure that the real situation on the ground could be studied, a total of (10) visits have been arranged for the benefit of Ambassadors, Heads of Mission, Heads of UN Agencies and International Organizations beginning from 2016 to present. Visits of local and foreign media groups were also arranged for (9) times. We have also arranged for local and foreign media groups to visit twice a month to allow them to gather news. In order to release news about progress and developments in Myanmar including events in Rakhine State on a real-time basis, an Information Committee has been set up and genuine news are being disseminated via the media as well as through social media networks to the public.

Although the Rakhine State issue is an internal conflict, since it is under the scrutiny of the United Nations and the countries of the world, it is indeed an important issue. We have to strive to ensure that all communities in spite of their differences coexist in peace. Furthermore, if the conflicts could not be resolved, it would cause great difficulties for the people and their difficulties would grow bigger; therefore it is vital to handle and solve the said problems successfully. Thus it is important to be able to implement initiatives for ensuring peace, justice and development. In this situation when pressures from the United Nations and the international community are mounting, the Ministry of the Office of the State Counsellor is working strenuously for the success of the leadership provided by the State Counsellor for the perpetuation of State Sovereignty and safeguard territorial integrity.

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Meeting with foreign diplomats

During the two-year period from July 2016 to February 2018, Union Minister U Kyaw Tint Swe from the Ministry of the Office of the State Counsellor held (108) meetings with foreign diplomats and representatives of international organizations.

During these meetings, explanations have been given regarding the guidance provided by the State Counsellor, current implementation works being undertaken by the Union Government, matters relating to Rakhine State, and matters relating to internal peace with a view to informing the rest of the world.

During the meetings with foreign diplomats and various representatives, the following matters were discussed in a frank and cordial manner so that they would know the current situation of the country.

- Humanitarian assistance.
- Citizenship matters for Muslims in Rakhine State.
- Providing food, medicines and other necessities in conflict zones of Rakhine State.
- Establishment of industries in zones free from conflicts in Rakhine State.
- Provision of Vocational Training opportunities for returnees.
- Development of Rakhine State and Rule of Law.
- Closure of IDP camps

With regard to the Peace Process, the Peace processes of the current government, the need to encourage more EAO's to sign the NCA, the progress made in the area of achieving ceasefires, including how they could participate and support the peace process were explained.

Actions taken to fight against corruption

In a country the absence of corruption is one of the main fundamental and vital factors for the emergence of good governance, rule of law, development of the economy and increase in foreign investments.

To eradicate corruption in various organizations of the government machinery, the Ministry of the Office of the State Counsellor has been working in accordance with the instructions of the State Counsellor to accept registered letters, faxes and emails sent by the people to take action against the corrupt and improper practices of various levels of government personnel. A total of (2516) letters were submitted during the two-year period. The majority were land cases, administrative/ management cases, corruption, judiciary and improper conduct in social relations. Action is being taken in cooperation with the Office of the President regarding the complaints submitted by the people.

As the Ministry of the Office of the State Counsellor is a Ministry which came into being to provide assistance and support to the State Counsellor, during the two-year term of the incumbent Government, it has been performing the following duties in accordance with the guidance given by the State Counsellor in the following areas – matters relating to national reconciliation and the peace process were given special attention; furthermore, implementation of the policies of the State Counsellor, carrying out the duties given by the State Counsellor, performing coordination duties between the State Counsellor and the various Union Ministries and state/regional governments, performing intermediary and coordination duties as needed between Myanmar and the international community. In addition, we wish to submit that during the remaining three-year period of the new Government, the Ministry of the Office of the State Counsellor will be diligently performing its tasks for the successful implementation of the policies and guidance given by the State Counsellor.

Ambassadors and diplomats led by Union Minister U Kyaw Tint Swe talk to villagers in Ngakhuya village, Maungtaw. **PHOTO: MNA**

(Translated by Kyaw Myaing)