



FORUM: DISARMAMENT AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY COMMITTEE



UNITED NATIONS

QUESTION OF: THE KAREN-MON CONFLICT

INTRODUCTION

Myanmar, a diverse nation with numerous ethnic groups, has faced protracted conflicts between ethnic minorities and the central government. The Karen conflict is one such instance, marked by historical grievances, human rights abuses, and displacement. The peace process, aimed at addressing the concerns of various ethnic groups, has been ongoing for years. The conflict is part of the wider internal conflict in Myanmar between the military government and various minority groups, who have been fighting for autonomy or independence since the country's independence from Britain in 1948. The main area of contention between the Karen and Mon groups is the control of the border area near the Three Pagodas Pass, which is a strategic trade route between Myanmar and Thailand. The conflict has caused human rights violations, displacement, and environmental degradation in the affected areas.



DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Karen and Mon Ethnic groups

Indigenous communities in Myanmar with distinct languages, cultures, and histories. The Karen and Mon people have long sought greater autonomy and recognition of their cultural identity.



Karen

An ethnic group in Myanmar, with a population of 5 to 7 million. They speak around 20 different dialects, of which Sgaw and Pwo are the most common. Karen languages are among the Tibeto-Burman languages, which are a branch of the Sino-Tibetan languages.

Mon

An ethnic group in Myanmar, with a population of 1 to 2 million. They speak the Mon language, which is a member of the Monic branch of the Austroasiatic languages. They are one of the oldest civilizations in Southeast Asia and have a rich cultural and historical heritage.

KNU

The Karen National Union is the main political organization of the Karen people. It was founded in 1947 as a successor to the Karen National Association. It aims to establish an independent state for the Karen people, known as Kawthoolei.

KNLA

The Karen National Liberation Army, the armed wing of the KNU. It was formed in 1949 as a successor to the Karen National Defence Organisation. It is the oldest and largest ethnic armed group in Myanmar, with an estimated strength of 6,000 to 7,000 fighters.

NMSP

The New Mon State Party was the main political organization of the Mon people. It was founded in 1958 as a successor to the Mon People's Front. It aims to establish a federal union in Myanmar, with autonomy for the Mon people.

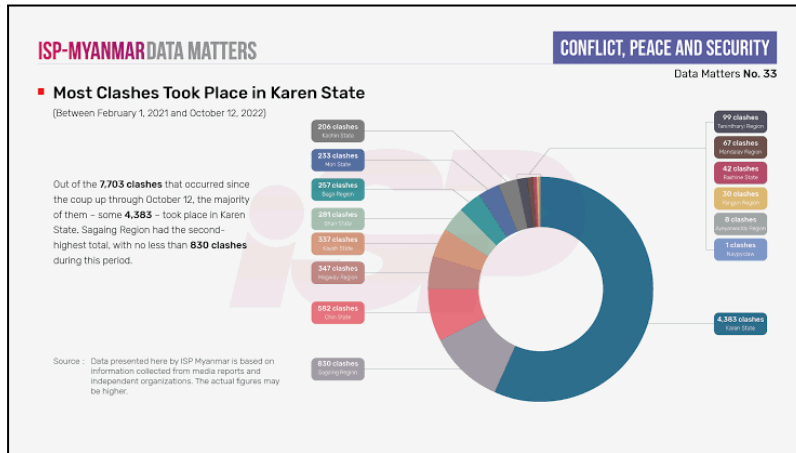
MNLA

The Mon National Liberation Army, the armed wing of the NMSP. It was formed in 1958 as a successor to the Mon People's Army. It is one of the oldest and most active ethnic armed groups in Myanmar, with an estimated strength of 1,500 fighters.



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Karen and Mon people have a long history of coexistence and cooperation, dating back



to the ancient Mon kingdoms of Dvaravati and Hariphunchai. They share some cultural and religious similarities, such as Buddhism and animism. However, they also have a history of conflict and rivalry stemming from the

colonial era and the post-independence period. The British used the Karen as a buffer against the Burmese, recruiting them as soldiers and administrators. The Karen supported the British during the Anglo-Burmese wars and World War II, while the Mon sided with the Burmese nationalists and the Japanese. After Myanmar gained independence in 1948, the Karen and Mon groups demanded autonomy or independence from the central government, dominated by the ethnic Bamar majority. The government refused to grant their demands and launched a military campaign to suppress their rebellions. The Karen and Mon groups formed their own political and military organizations, joining the National Democratic Front, an alliance of ethnic armed groups, to fight against the government. The Karen and Mon groups initially cooperated and established a joint administration in the border area near the Three Pagodas Pass. However, in 1988, cooperation broke down, and the two groups clashed over the control of the area. The conflict lasted for 27 days, resulting in serious casualties and displacement. The NDF intervened to end the conflict, brokering a ceasefire and a revenue-sharing agreement between the two groups. The ceasefire was maintained for almost 28 years until 2016 when the two groups resumed fighting over a land dispute in Yebyu Township, Tanintharyi Region. The fighting escalated in 2018, spreading to other townships in Kayin State and Mon State. The two groups accused each other of territorial invasion and illegal logging activities. The Tanintharyi Region government mediated talks between the two groups but failed to resolve the dispute.

CURRENT SITUATION



The Karen-Mon conflict is still ongoing, with sporadic clashes and skirmishes occurring in the border area. The conflict has disrupted the peace process between the ethnic armed groups and the government and has undermined trust and cooperation among the NDF members. The conflict has also affected the civilian population, who have suffered from human rights violations such as killings, torture, rape, extortion, and forced labor by both sides. Many civilians

have been displaced from their homes and have fled to neighboring Thailand or other parts of Myanmar. Some civilians have also been caught in the crossfire or have been used as human shields or minesweepers by the armed groups. The conflict has also caused environmental degradation, as both sides have engaged in illegal logging, mining, and plantation activities in the forested areas. Deforestation has led to soil erosion, landslides, floods, and the loss of biodiversity. The mining and plantation activities have also polluted the water sources and the soil, affecting the health and livelihood of the local communities.

MAJOR PARTIES INVOLVED

The major parties involved in the Karen-Mon conflict are the KNU/KNLA and the NMSP/MNLA, as well as their respective allies and supporters. The KNU/KNLA is supported by some other ethnic armed groups, such as the Arakan Army (AA) and the Arakan Liberation Army (ALA), who have also clashed with the NMSP/MNLA in the past. The NMSP/MNLA is supported by some other ethnic armed groups, such as the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS) and the Shan State Army-South (SSA-S), who have also clashed with the KNU/KNLA in the past. The government of Myanmar is also involved in the Karen-Mon conflict, as it has tried to exploit the division and weakness of the ethnic armed groups and extend its control and influence





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over the border area. The government has also tried to mediate the conflict and persuade the ethnic armed groups to join the nationwide ceasefire agreement (NCA) and the political dialogue. However, the government's sincerity and commitment to the peace process have been questioned by many observers and stakeholders, especially after the 2021 military coup that ousted the elected civilian government led by Aung San Suu Kyi. The government of Thailand is also involved in the Karen-Mon conflict, as it has provided refugee and humanitarian assistance to the displaced civilians and the ethnic armed groups. Thailand has also facilitated peace talks between the ethnic armed groups and the government of Myanmar and has hosted the NCA signing ceremonies and political dialogue meetings. However, Thailand's role and interest in the conflict have also been criticized by some analysts and activists who have accused Thailand of interfering in Myanmar's internal affairs and of exploiting the natural resources and the cheap labor of the border area.



RELEVANT INTERNATIONAL DOCUMENTS

- The relevant international documents that relate to the Karen-Mon conflict are the following:
 - The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, affirms the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all human beings, regardless of their race, ethnicity, religion, or any other status.
 - The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1966, obliges the states parties to respect and ensure the civil and political rights of all individuals within their territory and jurisdiction. These rights include the right to self-determination, the right to life, the right to liberty and security, the right to freedom of expression, and the right to freedom of association.
 - The International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1966, obliges the state parties to take steps to progressively realize the economic, social, and



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cultural rights of all individuals within their territory and jurisdiction. These rights include the right to work, the right to education, the right to health, and the right to an adequate standard of living.

- The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (CPPCG), adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, defines genocide as any of the following acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group. Such acts include killing, causing serious bodily or mental harm, deliberately inflicting conditions of life calculated to bring about physical destruction, imposing measures intended to prevent births, or forcibly transferring children.
- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1979, obliges state parties to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in all fields of life. It aims to ensure the full development and advancement of women, including the right to participate in public life, the right to equality before the law, and the right to be free from violence and coercion.
- The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989, obliges the state parties to respect and ensure the rights of all children within their territory and jurisdiction.

SOLUTION ALTERNATIVES

- **Negotiation and Mediation:** The two groups could resume dialogue and seek to resolve their differences through peaceful means, with the help of a neutral third party, such as the NDF, the government of Thailand, or the United Nations. The two groups could agree on a mutually acceptable arrangement for the sharing of the border area, the protection of the environment, and the respect of human rights. They could also cooperate on common issues, such as the peace process with the government of Myanmar, the humanitarian situation of the displaced civilians, and the preservation of their cultural and historical heritage.
- **Ceasefire and Demilitarization:** The two groups could agree to stop fighting and withdraw their troops from the conflict zone, allowing the monitoring and verification



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of the ceasefire by an independent observer, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), or the European Union (EU). Both groups could also agree to disarm and demobilize their fighters, integrating them into civilian society with the support of the international community. They could further agree to clear the landmines and unexploded ordnance from the area and rehabilitate the infrastructure and public services.

- **Reconciliation and Integration:** The two groups could agree to reconcile and heal the wounds of the past, fostering mutual understanding and trust among their communities. Engaging in dialogue and exchange programs, such as cultural festivals, sports events, educational workshops, and joint projects, could be beneficial. Additionally, the two groups could also agree to integrate their political and military organizations into the federal system of Myanmar, participating in the democratic process and the development of the country. They could also commit to respecting and protecting each other's rights and interests, promoting the diversity and harmony of the nation.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What is the best possible approach to defusing the current situation in Myanmar?
2. Considering the stance of the military, claiming the righteous approach towards announcement of emergency, and every further action taken in line with legal amendments, what is the scope of deference of claim of the current holders of power in Myanmar?
3. Can a responsibility for civilian security be established or urged, towards the global community considering the supposed internalization of the current situation?
4. Peacebuilding, irrespective of the resolution approach, will have to be kept on the center stage, thus, what can be the proper mechanism to be adopted for the same, in Myanmar'?
5. Counter-action has to be taken against the perpetrators of the current situation. then who should be the one taking it and what should be the nature of the action?
6. Considering the recent calls for international intervention in the situation, is there enough ground for invocation of the responsibility to protect doctrine?

CONCLUSION



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The Karen-Mon conflict is a complex and protracted issue that has caused suffering and damage to both sides, hindering the peace and stability of the region. The conflict requires a comprehensive and inclusive solution that addresses the root causes and the consequences of the problem and respects the aspirations and dignity of both parties. Additionally, the conflict requires the involvement and support of relevant stakeholders such as the government of Myanmar, the government of Thailand, the NDF, the international community, and civil society, who can play a constructive role in facilitating and sustaining the peace process. The conflict can be resolved if the two groups show political will and goodwill, recognizing the benefits of cooperation and coexistence, and understanding the costs of confrontation and violence.

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