Activists say it’s critical that more women participate in Myanmar’s peace process

Katherine Ronders, director of LIMPAL Colombia, was invited by the Norwegian Embassy to participate in a Women, Peace and Security workshop in Yangon on December 14-15, 2017, conducted in collaboration with Myanmar Alliance for Gender Inclusion in the Peace Process (AGIPP).

Ronderos spoke with The Irrawaddy on Friday, 15th of December about her views on Myanmar’s peace process and the importance of including women in this process.

Ronderos stated, “Women’s participation in peace process is very important because we are citizens of this country. We have the right to participate. Nobody should discriminate [against] our participation just because we are women. Secondly, women are the center of the family, are the center of the society, are the ones holding families together, are the ones holding communities together, and they are the ones who know how to reconstruct the social fabric of the society.

“Research shows that when women participate in peace negotiations there is a better chance that peace is sustainable, that it will last longer. So we need to make sure that every effort includes women’s voices and women’s participation to make sure that it will be sustainable. Because they know the risk society faces when conflicts happen, and we have the right to decide what we want for our country.”

AGIPP’s Second Annual General Meeting

AGIPP held its second Annual General Meeting in Nay Pyi Taw on the 28th and 29th of October 2017. AGIPP’s Chair Mi Kun Chan Non opened the meeting with welcoming remarks, followed by UPDJC Secretary Member Dr. Salai Lian Mung Sakhwng, who shared a presentation on the current peace process. Women activists from different states presented their updates on the situation of Women, Peace and Security in their respective states. A panel discussion was conducted afterwards as well as presentation by AGIPP’s International Adviser Erin Kamler on creative communication strategies for WPS advocacy.

2017 November-December in Review

- We can vote on it
- Myanmar Government and armed groups agree on continued peace process
- Women targeted by rampant human trafficking in Kachin
- NCA signatories begin five-day preliminary talks
- Women’s League of Burma expresses concern about outgoing conflicts
- Civil society organizations seeks greater participation in Panglong Peace Conference
- Shaken but not deterred
AGIPP has seen a busy past few months as it continues to implement activities in the women, peace and security space in Myanmar. Some highlights of our activities are noted below.

**Colombia exchange visit on Women, Peace and Security**

In collaboration with the Royal Norwegian Embassy, Alliance for Gender Inclusion in the Peace Process (AGIPP) conducted a two-day exchange event focusing on Colombia and Myanmar’s approaches to Women, Peace and Security. The event took place on 14th and 15th at the Jasmine Palace Hotel in Yangon. 48 participants attended and actively exchanged the experiences of women’s participation in the peace process together with Ms. Katherine Ronderos, Director of LIMPAL Colombia, a sectional branch of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF).

This program was held for the purpose of facilitating the exchanging experiences between women’s organizations in Colombia and Myanmar in order to strengthen good practices around Women, Peace and Security policy-making.

**Women, Peace and Security Technical Working Group Meeting**

In December, AGIPP hosted a meeting of the Women, Peace and Security Technical Working Group, which is housed under the Myanmar National Committee for Women’s Affairs (MNCAWA). AGIPP is serving as co-chair of this group, which is tasked with the development and planning of the National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women (NSPAW).

**Press conference on Women, Peace and Security Technical Working Group**

On 9th of October 2017, AGIPP hosted a press conference, met with journalists from different media outlets and shared about the current situation and future plan of Women, Peace and Security Technical Working Group, and issued a statement regarding AGIPP’s Annual General Meeting.

AGIPP Steering Committee members Nang Phyu Phyu Lin, Daw Thuzar Tin and AGIPP Coordinator Ban Seng Bu led the event and answered the questions of the reporters. The event took place at the AGIPP office in Yangon.

**Roundtable discussion on Women, Peace and Media with Internews**

AGIPP’s Steering Committee members, partner organizations and Secretariat staff participated at a round table discussion on ‘Women, Media and the Peace process in Myanmar organized by Internews at Naypyidaw on 17th of November.

**Participation in High Level Conference on Sustainable Development Goal 5**

On the 26th and 27th of October, AGIPP Steering Committee members and Secretariat staff participated in two-day High Level Conference on "Sustainable Development Goals 5 (SDG 5),” held in Naypyitaw. The conference was held with the purpose of raising awareness on sustainable development goals and gender consideration in the government’s policies. On day two of the conference, two panel discussions were conducted on topics relating to Women, Peace and Security and violence against women, with recommendations for respective pillars following. The Department of Social Welfare (DSW) is working closely with development partners on next steps for implementing these recommendations.
EMPOWERING QUOTE

“For too long, women have not been heard or believed if they dared to speak their truth to the power of those men but their time is up.”

-Oprah Winfrey, American media proprietor and actress

NEWS on Women & Peace

We can vote on it!

A new law protecting women against domestic violence should be enacted this year – though we’ve heard that before.

As the Myanmar Times reports, domestic abuse in Myanmar is a reality, but a reality which is not reflected in official statistics. According to the Myanmar Police Force website, the total number of reported abuses from 2014 to 2016 was 176. As a point of comparison, in France, in 2016 only, 225,000 women were identified as victims of domestic abuse. Does that mean that French men are more violent than Burmese ones? Not so sure. But French women might feel more at ease to go to the police and report their partners than here in Myanmar. And yet, in France, only half of the victims ever press charges.

Most laws in Myanmar are colonial hangovers and the penal code is a maze of outdated articles and unfair ones.

Click here.

Civil society organizations seek participation in Panglong Peace Conference

Civil society organizations (CSOs) specializing in conflict resolution have asked that they be allowed to send delegates to the 21st Century Panglong Peace Conference and called for an equal opportunity to participate in discussions on all topics related to peace.

A number of CSOs made this request in an open letter to leaders of the peace process including State Counselor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and military chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing. Some 145 representatives of 92 CSOs participated in the 17th Civil Society Forum for Peace (CSFoP) in Yangon on Dec. 4th and 5th, 2017. They discussed key developments and challenges facing the 21st Century Panglong Peace Conference, including women’s and security affairs, as well as the current conditions faced by people living in the country’s various states and regions.

In the open letter published on Wednesday, 10th of December representatives made more than a dozen recommendations concerning the 21st Century Panglong Peace Conference, military affairs and the joint monitoring of ceasefires.

Mi Kun Chan Non, a spokesperson for the Mon Women’s Organization and a delegate to the CSFoP, told The Irrawaddy that CSFoP representatives should be entitled to delegate status at the Panglong conferences, rather than their current role as observers. Click here.

Women should be at the heart of all we do!

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Women’s League of Burma expresses concern about ongoing conflicts

In a statement to mark the 18th Anniversary of the founding of their organization, the Women’s League of Burma expressed concern about the ongoing conflicts in Myanmar, the negative effects of conflict on civilians, and the fallout from the Rakhine crisis.

The mission of WLB is to promote a transition towards a federal democracy in Burma, support women's empowerment, and advance the status of women on every level. The organization also works to increase the participation of women in all sectors of society and at all levels of the struggle for democracy and lasting peace.

WLB is an umbrella organization that comprises 13 women's groups of different ethnic backgrounds from across Burma.

While the Union Government continues to implement a Burma/Myanmar peace process aimed at stopping ethnic conflicts, military offensives is still continuing in ethnic conflict zones. Civilians continue to face serious human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings, forced labor, threats, torture, rape, sexual harassment, and physical and economic insecurity. Thousands of local people have been internally displaced. Click here.

NCA signatories begin five-day preliminary talks

On December 14, 2017, the Peace Process Steering Team and working committees of eight ethnic armed organizations that are signatories to the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) began five days of preparatory talks in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) are separately reviewing the current political situation, said one source. Some are NCA signatories and have not yet signed on.

“Fundamental principles related to democracy and the federal Union that all parties have already accepted ought to be discussed first. Fair and just political dialogue and successful results will encourage the would-be NCA signatories to participate in the signing,” said General Saw Mutu Say Phoe, Chairman of the Karen National Union (KNU). The leaders of five working committees of the eight EAOs will submit five proposed papers concerning various sectors to the PPST and then seek their approvals. The previous second meeting of the 21st Century Panglong Conference laid down 37 points, but nothing was discussed about contentious federal issues. Click here.

Women targeted by rampant human trafficking in Kachin

Women’s groups in Kachin State say understaffed police with inadequate resources are hampering investigations into human trafficking and contributing to a crime wave in Myitkyina, in which women are often the target. Since the conflict between the Tatmadaw and Kachin Independence Army resumed in 2011, bringing to an end a 17 year ceasefire, almost 100,000 people have been displaced.

The majority of those displaced live in camps close to Myitkyina, the state capital, and neighboring Waingmaw. Women and children comprise more than half of the IDPs, and human traffickers are a constant menace, looking to take victims over the border into China. Nang Pu, Director of the Htoi Gender and Development Foundation said that at many of the police stations in Kachin State, there were not enough police officers to conduct investigations. A total of 95 human trafficking cases have been filed at police stations across Kachin since 2011, 28 of which have occurred this year, according to police figures. Click here.

More Women = Better Peace

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**Myanmar Government and armed groups agree on continued peace process**

The Myanmar government and eight signatory armed groups have agreed on seven points with their continued peace process at the 6th Joint Implementation Coordination Meeting (JICM) held in Myanmar’s capital, Nay Pyi Taw.

The JICM meeting agreed to continue implementing a union agreement in accordance with the Nationwide Ceasefire Accord (NCA), said a statement released by the State Counselor's Office late Monday.

A report by a task force reviewing the implementation of the NCA was approved at the meeting and a decision was made to continue working on the political framework’s Terms of Reference (ToR) and Standard Operating Procedure (SOP).

State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi, Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Defense Services Vice Senior General Soe Win, and leaders of eight signatory armed groups to the NCA attended the JICM meeting. [Click here](#).

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**Upcoming AGIPP Steering Committee Meeting**

On February 8th and 9th, the AGIPP Steering Committee will convene its regular meeting in Myitkyina. Details forthcoming.

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**Upcoming EVENTS**

**Security Sector Reform training**

A Security Sector Reform training will be held for three days on the 14th, 15th and 16th of February for AGIPP steering committee and secretariat team members. Details forthcoming.