

## Civil Society Dialogue Network

### Looking forward in Myanmar's peace process: How can the EU and civil society provide constructive support?

23 May 2014, Yangon

#### Meeting Report

This report summarises the discussions and main recommendations from the meeting 'Looking forward in Myanmar's peace process: How can the EU and civil society provide constructive support?' organised by the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO), in cooperation with the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the European Commission (EC). The meeting took place in Yangon, Myanmar on 23 May 2014. This initiative was part of the Civil Society Dialogue Network\* and brought together over 40 participants from Myanmar civil society, representatives from non-governmental and international organisations present in Myanmar, representatives of EU institutions and the Member States, and observers from the Myanmar Peace Donor Support Group.

The meeting took place in accordance with the Chatham House Rule. The opinions and views expressed therefore cannot be attributed to any of the participants individually or to their organisations, nor do they necessarily represent the opinions of the organisers. Where deemed useful to facilitate clarity of reading, comments on similar thematic topics have been grouped together for the purposes of this summary report.

#### 1. Executive Summary and Main Recommendations

The CSDN meeting was divided into the following sessions:

- Opening remarks by the EU
- Session 1: Visions for Myanmar's National Dialogue
- Session 2: Challenges for a National Dialogue and for the Peace Process
- Session 3: EU and External Actors' Support to Myanmar's Peace Process

The EU opened the meeting by stating that both peace and civil society are top priorities, and that both are necessary to ensure Myanmar's development and stability. The EU welcomed the opportunity to hear civil society's views on the current peace process.

Discussions in the first session focused on the potential national dialogue for Myanmar. A core theme stated throughout was that civil society has an important role to play and that this should be recognized in the dialogue. The Civil Society Forum for Peace suggested four ways in which civil society could contribute to the national dialogue. It was noted that more work remains to be done on deciding the criteria for determining which civil society groups will participate in the dialogue. Many participants stressed their concern that up to now civil society has not had sufficient space to participate in the peace process itself, that local communities affected by conflict have also been left out, and that some ethnic and religious groups are also not part of it. Participants then discussed issues related to the timing of the potential national dialogue, and the impact that the 2015 electoral process may have. Finally, comparative experience from other national dialogues was shared.

In the second session, a number of key challenges to the peace process were noted. These included: a perception that the “playing field” is not level and that the government enjoys more resources and support than other stakeholders; legal statutes that endanger civil society; and the challenge of trusting and working with the government. Thematic challenges that were raised included ceasefire monitoring; large investment projects, natural resources, and land rights; challenges in areas not affected by armed conflict; the urban/rural divide; narcotics production and trafficking; providing information about the peace process to the general public; transitional justice; how to get the “buy in” of former combatants; and rising security threats, in particular at community level.

Finally, in the third session the EU described a number of its current projects and activities in the peace sector as well as its future plans, noting that there will be a call for proposals issued shortly focusing on providing aid in conflict affected areas. The EU also noted two issues of serious concern that it hoped civil society would be active on: the rise of hate speech in Myanmar and the potential laws relating to interfaith marriage. Comparative experiences of international support to peace processes and national dialogues was discussed, followed by comments from civil society participants regarding their analysis of international support to Myanmar to date. Two main themes were the need for more effective consultation with local communities and adherence to conflict sensitivity principles in all programming.

There were multiple recommendations made throughout the course of the day. For a full listing, please see the boxed “recommendations” following each section of the report. Selected key recommendations are listed below:

*To the EU and the international community:*

1. The EU and the international community should use its political leverage to support the inclusion of civil society in the peace process and in any future national dialogue as a key stakeholder, and should consider providing informal support to civil society to prepare for such participation effectively.
2. The EU and the international community should push for the repeal of the Unlawful Associations Act Article 17.1 which restricts civil society’s activities, as well as broader legal reform to ensure a conducive and open political environment.
3. The EU and the international community should engage in genuine and deep consultation with civil society and with local communities prior to starting development projects, as otherwise this poses a risk to the peace process. They should also ensure that their support reaches community level across the country.
4. The EU and the international community should seek to communicate more effectively and provide more information on their activities in Myanmar, should make this information more accessible to the public in local languages, and should regularly engage in dialogue and solicit feedback on their activities.

*To civil society:*

1. Civil society, and in particular women, should seek to play a more active and involved role in the peace process, and to help bring the views of local communities into the process. All communities including ethnic, religious, urban, rural, conflict-affected and otherwise should be included in the process.

2. Civil society should communicate to the EU the specific support it needs in order to participate effectively in a potential national dialogue.
3. Two priority areas that civil society should increase its efforts on are the rise of hate speech and the potential laws related to inter-faith marriage.
4. Civil society could help the international community to engage more effectively in Myanmar by providing positive examples of projects that have gone well or consultations that have been effective so that international donors could learn from them.

## 2. Opening Remarks

The EU opened the meeting with brief remarks on the peace process and on civil society. Key points are summarized below:

- Peace and civil society are top priorities for the EU in Myanmar.
- The EU is one of the largest donors for peace process support, and sees peace as the foundation for the country. Without peace there is no possibility of long-term stability, security, and economic development.
- Civil society is also a very important and foundational component for the long-term development of Myanmar.
- It is understandable that the peace process may take place on multiple tracks, such as a top-tier level and a broader, bottom-up level. However, it is important that these two tracks meet regularly in a way that is serious and productive and such that recommendations are followed through.
- Although the peace process is moving more slowly than everyone may like, it is important to remember that it is indeed progressing. It is very positive that everyone is still talking to each other, and this provides strong reason for optimism. The exact amount of time that it takes to reach agreement will ultimately be less important than the quality of the agreement that is reached.
- The situation in Rakhine State is very concerning in part because we don't see enough dialogue between the stakeholders. It is difficult to solve a problem if all sides are not speaking together regularly.
- The EU Delegation is relatively newly established in Myanmar and we are working to get organised in the new context. We are trying to interact with civil society as much as possible and to hear your recommendations and visions. We are happy to have this opportunity to do so via the CSDN meeting.

Recommendations to civil society:

1. Civil society should try to organise itself as much as possible in order to be most effective. When you work together, you can have a greater impact than any single organisation working alone.
2. Civil society should seek to play a more active and involved role in the peace process.
3. Women in particular should play a bigger role in the process as they are very important stakeholders.

### 3. Session 1: Visions for Myanmar's National Dialogue

In this session participants discussed the next phase of the peace process and the present plans for a national dialogue, lessons learned from national dialogues in other countries, and potential roles and challenges for civil society.

#### a. Opening remarks

Two civil society participants opened the session by identifying a number of key challenges for the next phase of the peace process:

1. **The lack of trust between ethnic armed groups and the government.** In particular, there is still considerable feeling within the ethnic armed groups that the government is not sincere about peace process. However, the ethnic armed groups' expectations for the government may also not be fully realistic.
2. **The question of mandates and representation.** Elements in the military question the mandate of the ethnic armed groups and who they really speak for. The same questions are faced by civil society – who does civil society really speak for and represent?
3. **The lack of a clear, mutually accepted vision for the country.** Some elements of the government still support the previous vision for a country with one language and one culture. Ethnic armed groups, many civil society groups, and others do not share this vision and wish instead to embrace diversity and a federal model of state structure.
4. **The need for continued discussion and planning for a national dialogue.** There are presently many different models proposed for a national dialogue, with differing stakeholders included. Additionally, decisions about civil society's role in the dialogue and the criteria for including civil society actors still need to be discussed.

The two speakers made the following recommendations regarding the national dialogue:

1. A **national dialogue is very important** for the future of the country – not only for the armed groups and the military, but for everyone in Myanmar.
2. **Inclusiveness will be a key factor for the success** of any national dialogue process. This means including representatives from all ethnic and identity groups, religions, and professions and particularly including the participation of women.
3. The national dialogue should be planned jointly by all relevant stakeholders (instead of a top-down approach) and **there should be an active role for civil society in the planning.**
4. In addition to the formal national dialogue process, there should be informal processes that take place in parallel, such as discussions within civil society about its role and objectives. **The international community should support such informal discussion processes** in addition to the main national dialogue.
5. To date there has not been sufficient attention to the need for healing and reconciliation. **One of the goals of the national dialogue should be to promote healing and reconciliation** between different groups and communities.

#### b. Open Discussion

Participants continued the discussion, making the following points:

*On plans for a national dialogue:*

- Most participants expressed the view that **civil society should have a key role in any future national dialogue.**
- A number of participants repeated the **challenge of how to decide which civil society groups or representatives would be selected to participate**, and how to ensure that the participants selected are representative of all the different communities that should be included. It was noted that more discussion is needed on this issue, and that the criteria for selection should be open and transparent.
- The Civil Society Forum for Peace has conducted internal discussions to plan for a future national dialogue, and has come up with **four potential roles civil society could play** in the dialogue:
  1. Political representation of civil society perspectives;
  2. Provision of technical expertise;
  3. Supporting public participation and awareness;
  4. Providing administrative, logistical, and facilitation support.
- It was noted that the **national dialogue should also be structured to ensure that it strengthens trust and does not increase divisions** between and among the different stakeholders. If all groups are included, this will help create trust. However, if some groups are included and others are left out, this will lead to serious problems. Additionally, sometimes certain initiatives do not have the intended effect. For example, the census process was intended to support peace, but instead led to increased divisions between and among different groups. The national dialogue should be well planned so that it does not suffer the same fate.
- A question was also raised as to whether “national dialogue” and “political dialogue” refer to the same thing or not, and how to clarify the two. It was noted that both the ethnic armed groups and the government are using the term “political dialogue” presently.
- It was reported that the **final clause of the nationwide ceasefire agreement is expected to provide the mandate for a national dialogue.** This should create an inclusive mechanism that will be in charge of planning the dialogue and that will include civil society, political parties, parliamentarians and others. It is likely that the national dialogue will lead to recommendations for constitutional change, so it is very important that the dialogue has a clear mandate.

*On the current peace process:*

- Several participants noted concern about the **lack of space for civil society in the peace process to date** and the “exclusive” nature of the process. One participant commented, “We still feel like we are a small animal that has to slide in through a crack in the door.” Another noted that civil society has tried to be an active and involved part of the process, but its efforts have been so far rejected. It was also noted that the peace process is presently perceived as a “top level” process and that the “real people” who have experienced and suffered through the conflict are being left out.
- One participant stated her view that **civil society should not wait for permission to be involved** in the ongoing peace process, and should instead be organised and proactive to make their voices heard. The recent delivery of a statement signed by dozens of civil society groups was cited as a positive example of this.
- Several participants commented that there were **still important groups that were left out of the peace process**, and that all ethnic and marginalized groups should be included. For example, the Ta’ang do not yet have a ceasefire agreement and so they are being left out of the wider process.

- There are also **other marginalized and discriminated communities, such as religious minorities, that are facing very serious problems but are not seen as part of the peace process** and participants felt they should not be left out either. For example, stateless people such as certain Muslim communities in Rakhine State should also have their issues taken up rather than set aside for later. Otherwise perhaps it will open up a new conflict. They must be included in the process, even if many people do not want it.

*On the timing of the national dialogue:*

- Some participants said that a **nationwide ceasefire agreement was needed in order to establish trust** and that it was therefore a prerequisite for a national dialogue. Without a strong nationwide ceasefire agreement, it would not be possible to engage in open and effective dialogue.
- However, other participants stated that the national dialogue should not wait until after a nationwide ceasefire agreement but should instead run in parallel. This view was held out of concern that **waiting for the nationwide ceasefire agreement could take too long**.
- Several participants noted that the **planned 2015 elections would have a serious impact on the national dialogue and the peace process**, and that time was short to achieve significant progress before the elections. There was concern that the process would suffer if the time frame is rushed due to the electoral calendar, and that key stakeholders may not yet be “ready” for political dialogue. However it was also noted that there are costs to delaying as well.
- It was suggested that several **symbolic “wins” prior to the 2015 elections would help demonstrate momentum in the process** and encourage any future government to continue it. If there are no achievements before the elections, there is a risk that the new government may not want to take up the process. Some examples of potential symbolic achievements that could occur before the 2015 elections were:
  - Chief Ministers being elected instead of appointed (an election could be held and then the elected individuals could be appointed);
  - Steps towards decentralization and providing more powers to the states;
  - Interim steps to address land concerns, such as a moratorium on land decisions until there is time to adopt a more comprehensive policy;
  - Giving communities greater say in the projects happening in their areas. For example, do you want a dam or a highway? If communities are allowed to have input on this kind of issue, it will give the peace process a very large boost;
  - Bolstering community security.

*Lessons from comparative international experiences with national dialogues:*

- It was noted that **strong political support is very important for a successful national dialogue**. Therefore, regarding the discussion about the best timing for the dialogue, a question for stakeholders in Myanmar to consider is when there will be the greatest political will to support the dialogue to ensure its strong mandate.
- It is also important for **civil society to be involved in the national dialogue, ideally from the very beginning**. There is usually a period of negotiation and preparation for the dialogue where the following issues are discussed, and civil society could have an impact on these discussions:
  - Who participates;
  - Who selects the participants and how;
  - What is the agenda of the dialogue.

- Sometimes civil society can spend all of its energy just trying to get a role in the national dialogue process, and then it does not have a strategy for what to do once it is there. It is therefore important that **civil society think about what substantive content it wants to contribute to the dialogue and what outcome it hopes to achieve**, in addition to the question of its role.
- **Public participation is also very important**, and civil society can contribute to this. There are many ways to include the views of the public in the national dialogue even if they are not represented as formal participants.
- **Civil society groups that are outside the national dialogue can still play an important role**. For example, in Yemen, women's rights groups that were not direct participants in the dialogue effectively influenced the dialogue by monitoring the discussions and providing timely submissions to ensure their views were being considered. They had time to conduct research and prepare briefs, while groups inside the dialogue were not able to do so.

### **c. Recommendations**

*To the EU:*

1. The EU should use its political leverage to support the inclusion of civil society in the peace process and in any future national dialogue as a key stakeholder.
2. The EU should consider supporting civil society to hold informal discussions in preparation for the national dialogue. This could include discussions on the criteria for deciding who will represent civil society in the dialogue, setting civil society's agenda for the dialogue, and potentially also training by experts familiar with national dialogues to support civil society's effective participation.
3. The EU should help ensure that the peace process and the national dialogue includes the views of: local communities affected by the conflict; the issues of ethnic, religious, and other minority groups; and groups that do not presently have a ceasefire with the government.

*To civil society:*

1. Civil society should communicate to the EU the specific support it needs in order to participate effectively in a national dialogue.
2. Civil society should not wait for permission to participate in the peace process but instead should continue to organise itself and make its voice heard loudly.
3. Civil society should be prepared to make substantive content contributions to the national dialogue.
4. Civil society should also play a role in ensuring the voices of local communities are included in the dialogue.

## **4. Sessions 2: Challenges for a National Dialogue and for the Peace Process**

This session focused primarily on the conflict risks and threats that could undermine the peace process.

### **a. Open Discussion**

*On key challenges facing civil society:*

- Several participants shared their perception that the **playing field is not even**, and that the government has more resources and capacity than the ethnic armed groups and civil society. It was suggested that civil society needs more recognition from both the government and the international community.
- One of the key stumbling blocks for civil society is the **lack of legal protection**, as well as some legal provisions that make civil society actors vulnerable. The need to repeal the Unlawful Associations Act Article 17.1 was mentioned several times.
- It was noted that the **government has a mistaken perception that civil society supports the ethnic armed groups** because it works in rural areas. This makes it difficult for civil society to work together with the government.
- Some participants noted the **challenge of trusting the government**, saying that there are a lot of good words spoken but there is a lack of implementation. It is also not clear whether the President really has control over the Army. One participant expressed concern that the current process is a kind of a “trap” because it is still fully controlled by the military and still following the Seven Point Roadmap laid out by the former military regime.
- However, others noted that while they agreed with this analysis, this was the best opportunity in decades to try to change the country’s trajectory and so **the opportunity should be seized nonetheless**. One participant said that it is possible to use the trap to push for civil society’s own objectives. For example, initially the government did not want to think beyond the 2008 constitution, and only wanted to talk to the ethnic armed groups individually. However, in both cases, it has been possible to push for a different outcome and the government has had to change its position. So it is possible to push for a different agenda and achieve a better outcome.

*On ceasefire monitoring:*

- One participant noted that some **ceasefire monitors are still struggling** to understand their contribution to the process and what the result of the monitoring will be, and communities are also struggling to understand what the monitors are doing. Civil society groups are trying to explain it to the community, but at the local level people do not understand the concept of national dialogue, the goal of the peace process, and the role of ceasefire monitors. They also cannot take much time to understand or participate in the process because they need to focus on their work and livelihoods.
- In answer to a question about the **value of monitoring in areas where there is no active conflict**, it was noted that this is indeed valuable. There are tensions in various areas that threaten local security even if there is no active conflict. The experience of ceasefire monitoring in Chin State can also provide some useful lessons for other areas of the country.
- Finally, it was noted that the way that the government and the ethnic armed groups see the ceasefire is very different, and this means that **ceasefire monitoring can be very dangerous for civil society groups**. One participant noted that his group had received threats already.

*On large investment projects, extraction of natural resources, and land rights:*

- Many participants emphasized that there is **not enough dialogue and communication between the government and the local communities regarding the allocation of large infrastructure projects and extraction of natural resources**. The newly established peace in some areas has led large companies to pursue commercial interests in these areas, without consultation with local communities. The rights of local communities to these resources are being exploited. This ultimately endangers the peace process.



- Another participant mentioned that **farmers and land rights activists are very concerned that their land is being taken** and ports are being used without their consent, and that no one is listening to them. One farmer told a civil society activist that perhaps they will need to take up arms in order to be heard by the government, a statement the activist found very concerning.

*Other challenges:*

Although not spoken about in depth, there were several issues that came up during the discussion. These included:

- The importance of focusing on **non-armed conflict issues and areas** (and not only on the armed conflict).
- The **significant divide between urban areas and rural areas that remains**. It was felt that the reform process has reached to the urban areas, but not yet to rural areas.
- The issue of transparency and sharing information with the public. It was noted that there are **very few news reports that explain the peace process in a way that ordinary people can really understand**. Transparency is very important, not only for the political elite but also for ordinary people. Just because the ceasefire stage has been reached, this is no excuse for not including the general public.
- The need for additional formal dialogues at the state and division levels that could feed in to the peace process. The **dialogue that recently took place in Chin State is a positive example** that should be carried out in other places.
- **Production and trafficking of narcotics are key drivers of the conflicts** in Myanmar; many ethnic areas depend on drug production for their survival.
- **Justice and transitional justice** need to be integrated into the peace process.
- The challenge of getting **former combatants on all sides to buy in to the peace process**, especially because in some cases this would mean a significant lost opportunity for personal enrichment.
- **Security at the community level**. Currently in the peace process, the concept of security is very heavily focused on the armed groups and does not include community security, security at the community level. For example, **in some ceasefire areas, security problems have increased for local communities**. Communities are also no longer sure who they should be relying on for security. It can be very difficult for communities to report these security issues.

## **b. RECOMMENDATIONS**

*To the EU:*

1. The EU should push for the repeal of the Unlawful Associations Act Article 17.1 which restricts civil society's activities, as well as broader legal reform to ensure a conducive and open political environment.
2. The EU should consider supporting measures to ensure that reliable and clear information about the peace process and the national dialogue reaches to the community level, as this is not presently happening.

3. The EU should continue to support ceasefire monitoring even in areas where there is no current active conflict, and should be aware of the dangers and risks to civil society groups doing ceasefire monitoring.
4. The EU should also focus on non-armed conflict issues and areas as these are important as well.
5. The EU should support genuine and deep consultation efforts with local communities on large infrastructure and development projects prior to the onset of these projects, as otherwise this poses a risk to the peace process.

## 5. Session 3: EU and External Actors' Support to Myanmar's Peace Process

This session focused specifically on EU and other external actors' support to Myanmar's peace process. There were brief opening remarks from the EU followed by moderated open discussion. The EU also shared a summary document, "EU Support to the Peace Process" with participants.

### a. Opening Remarks from the EU

*On current EU support to the peace process:*

The EU's work in Myanmar focuses on four priority sectors: rule of law; education; rural development; and peace.

- Contrary to some perceptions, **over 90% of EU funding goes to non-state actors such as civil society, international NGOs, the UN family, and etc.** Although some participants in today's meeting have expressed a belief that most EU funding is going to the Government of Myanmar, this is not the case.

In the peace sector, the EU is working on a range of initiatives that directly involve ethnic armed groups, the government, local authorities, local civil society organisations, and the Myanmar Peace Center. Examples of these initiatives include:

- Supporting independent and conflict sensitive media coverage of the peace process in Myanmar through the training of journalists, working with Internews Europa and the Southeast Asia Press Alliance (SEAPA);
- Supporting the civilian ceasefire monitoring mechanisms (Shalom);
- Looking into how the EU can provide financial and technical support through joint mechanisms such as Multidonor Trust Funds in close collaboration with the government, Tatmadaw, ethnic armed groups, and civil society organisations once a nationwide ceasefire agreement is in place;
- Providing technical and financial assistance to the Myanmar Peace Center;
- Supporting the capacities of ethnic political parties by working with Electoral Reform International Services (ERIS) and the Euro Burma Office (EBO);
- Supporting restorative justice with regard to forced labour cases, and creating mechanisms that will allow for a better protection of labour rights in the future through the International Labour Organization (ILO);
- Providing concrete support to the ceasefire processes through a civilian mine action programme and developing activities such as mine-risk education and Non-Technical Surveys in selected areas, through Norwegian People's Aid (NPA);
- Reform of the police through training on crowd management and community policing;

- Working with non-state actors (NSA) and local authorities (LA) providing small grants in ethnic areas under the NSA-LA thematic budget line;
- Working through the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) on Children Affected by the Armed Conflict (CAAC), some projects on media and preventing media-induced violence, non-discrimination issues, participation of civil society organisations in the reform of the democratic process, and preparing for the 2015 elections.

The EU also **supports specific mechanisms and financial instruments in ethnic states**, including aid to internally displaced people in Mon and Kayin State and Tanintharyi Region through the Norwegian Refugee Council, Malteser and Helpage International; work in Rakhine state through partners such as Care and Action Against Hunger; and work in Kayin, Shan, and Chin States on issues such as health, poverty, education, livelihoods, and rural development with various national and international NGOs.

The EU's engagement can be considered both vertical and horizontal:

- Vertical cooperation: supporting peace as a sector while also supporting civil society as a constituency.
- Horizontal: when the EU launches a new initiative its impact on civil society and peace are always considered as cross-cutting areas.

*On future EU support to the peace process:*

- The EU has approved 25 million euros of additional support to the peace process. There will be a call for proposals soon, with a particular focus on providing aid in conflict affected areas. The approach will be looking at building trust between all relevant stakeholders including local communities, authorities, and ethnic groups. The EU wanted to have this CSDN meeting before launching the future Call.
- The EU is planning to discuss with representatives from civil society and from the Myanmar Peace Center how best to support a future national dialogue.
- The EU is also part of the donor group that has been working to set up a Joint Peacebuilding Needs Assessment (JPNA) in order to gain a better understanding of what is needed in local communities.

*On recent issues of serious concern to the EU where civil society can play an important role:*

The EU raised two specific issues that they were concerned could be detrimental to the peace process and requested civil society to be active on these issues:

- The **rise of hate speech** in Myanmar, which is extremely dangerous and destabilizing.
- The **potential law restricting interfaith marriage**, which goes against religious freedom and will have particularly negatively effects on women.

## **b. Open Discussion**

*On comparative experiences of external actor support to national dialogues:*

- **International actors' support for national dialogues can be very sensitive** because such dialogues are inherently political processes – for example, they often involve constitutional change, as is likely to be the case in Myanmar. There is a spectrum for potential international support that ranges from less sensitive activities, such as capacity building, to highly sensitive activities, such as providing expertise and facilitating discussion.
- International support for national dialogues in other countries has taken the form of:
  - Providing funding for civil society's participation in the national dialogue.

- Providing training and capacity building for participants in and facilitators of the national dialogue and for the logistical and administrative support to the dialogue.
- Providing advisors and experts; however, understanding that this can be sensitive.
- Based on the national dialogue in Yemen, the following recommendations were made for external actors to avoid sensitivities around their support for the process:
  - External actors can channel funding through mechanisms led and controlled by national actors. In Yemen, external actors provided funding for a secretariat for the national dialogue staffed by Yemeni nationals.
  - External actors can channel funding through a joint donor trust fund.

*On international aid and financial support to the peace process more broadly:*

- Many participants had **concerns about the recent census**, which was supported by the international community. They believe that it has had a negative impact on Myanmar by exacerbating ethnic differences (and that additional problems may arise when the results are published).
- Several civil society participants highlighted the problem that the **peace process is creating a negative economy** at the local level, with some organisations reportedly charging fees for “access” to the peace process.
- Several participants also noted the **importance of donors having a clear picture of the situation on the ground before allocating funds**. Funding is positive, but it needs to be based on a clear understanding and analysis of the local context.
- Similarly, participants stressed the importance of consultation of local communities before projects begin and the continued application of conflict sensitivity principles given that development projects are very sensitive and political in a context such as Myanmar.
- One participant commented on the importance of avoiding **overwhelming local organisations with the work of implementing projects**. They also need time to attend trainings, think strategically and be informed about developments in the peace process.
- One participant commented that **donor-funded organisations may be overly concentrated in certain areas**. For example, Kayah State is very small, and there are only a few areas where it is possible to work. The result is that there are too many organisations all working in a very small area.
- Some participants also **expressed civil society’s concerns about how the Myanmar Peace Center is using its funding**. There are rumours reported that the MPC pays excessively high big salaries and that it may be trying to “buy” the media. These stories create a negative perception amongst civil society groups.
- Participants expressed **the perception among civil society that a considerable amount of EU funding is being provided to the MPC** and to the government.

*On the EU’s police reform project:*

- Some civil society participants expressed **their fears that the police reform project could be used to provide undeserved legitimacy to the police force** while actually achieving only superficial results. There are still high levels of mistrust towards the police among the general population.
- The importance of **working with the police at lower levels** and not just higher levels was also noted.
- **Participants supported the idea of greater consultation and involvement of civil society in the police reform project.**

- One participant suggested that the police force could start to win back public trust by apologizing for the wrongs that were committed in the past.

The EU responded to these comments as follows:

#### *Police Reform*

- The police reform project was launched especially because the police are understood to be such a serious problem in Myanmar. Both the government and the political opposition agreed that this was an urgent issue, meaning that there was consensus at the highest political levels for reform. **A deep shift in the mentality of the police at all levels is at the heart of what the EU is trying to do with the police reform project.**
- **The police reform project is working at the grassroots level.** The EU has trained nearly 3,000 police in crowd control techniques that are in line with international standards and human rights. The EU is also supporting improved community policing. There are currently four pilot projects underway in the townships around Yangon. There is more that needs to be done, but this is a start.
- In the coming months the EU will be **working to have civil society and the police to meet together for dialogue**; this is a key component of the project.

#### *Communication and engagement with civil society*

- On the broader issue of communication and consultation, the **EU noted that it engages civil society frequently** and that it is a misperception if people do not believe the EU is spending enough time with civil society. It was also noted that the EU has recently set up a Facebook page to share information more broadly.
- **Civil society should recognise that the EU is a political actor**, however, so it is normal that it engages frequently with the government in power.

#### *Inclusiveness of the peace process*

- There is an **important difference between inclusiveness of the process and inclusiveness of the results**. It is possible that a process can be inclusive but that the results are not, and vice-versa. Each peace process needs to find the right balance and method according to different factors such as culture, history, and specificities of the country.
- Finally, it was reiterated that **civil society can and should participate in the peace process in different ways** – at the table, behind the scenes, and in informal parallel processes. There may be different ways to maximize civil society’s influence, and it is important to use all of them and not only focus on the most visible ones.

#### **c. Recommendations**

*To the EU and the international community:*

1. The EU and the international community should make sure that its support reaches to the grassroots level and to local communities, as right now there is a perception that sufficient funds are not reaching to that level.
2. The EU should participate as a “witness” or “monitor” of the peace process, because there are lessons learned from other countries like the Philippines that international participation in peace monitoring makes it more effective.

3. The EU and the international community should use its funding to support a “level playing field” for all stakeholders involved in Myanmar’s peace process.
4. The EU and the international community should consider providing penalties in addition to incentives. The EU has provided many financial incentives but there are not enough penalties for failures to meet commitments.
5. The EU and the international community should communicate more effectively and provide more information on their activities in Myanmar and make this information more accessible to the public, in local languages.
6. The EU and the international community should consult more with civil society, and at earlier stages in creating programs, especially with regards to projects on very sensitive topics such as police reform.

*To civil society:*

1. Civil society should proactively reach out to the international community and should not wait to be engaged. If civil society has a specific issue or concern they should contact the international community and they will do their best to respond.
2. Civil society can get more information about the EU by following the activities on its website, Facebook page and joining the EU mailing list.
3. Civil society could help the international community to engage in effective support by providing positive examples of projects that have gone well or consultations that have been effective so that international donors could learn from.
4. Civil society should reconsider its perception that the EU is not reaching out enough and is providing support only to the Government of Myanmar. This is not the reality according to the EU - in fact the EU is spending a lot of time consulting with civil society and the majority of its funding is going to non-government actors.

## **6. Conclusion and Next Steps**

Both the EU and civil society participants noted that the CSDN discussions had been useful and were appreciated. It was noted by EPLO that the EU and civil society should determine how best to continue the conversation going forward, and that EPLO would be willing to continue its support if deemed useful by both the EU and civil society.

### **\*Civil Society Dialogue Network**

The Civil Society Dialogue Network (CSDN) is a mechanism for dialogue between civil society and EU policy-makers on issues related to peace and conflict. It is co-financed by the European Union (Instrument for Stability and Peace). It is managed by the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO), a civil society network, in co-operation with the European Commission (EC) and the European External Action Service (EEAS). The second phase of the CSDN will last from 2014 to 2016. For more information, please visit [www.eplo.org](http://www.eplo.org).