

Less-than-Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement Signed in Burma

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Related Author

- [Michael F. Martin](#)

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Michael F. Martin, Specialist in Asian Affairs (mfmartin@crs.loc.gov, 7-2199)

Eight ethnic groups and representatives of Burma's government [signed a ceasefire agreement on October 15](#), possibly moving the country one step closer to ending its six decade long civil war (see text box). However, more than a dozen ethnic groups did not sign the agreement, including most of those actively fighting with the government's army, the Tatmadaw, leaving the agreement well short of the nationwide ceasefire President Thein Sein sought to complete before parliamentary elections scheduled for November 8, 2015.

Each of the eight ethnic groups had agreed to separate ceasefire agreements with the Thein Sein government. Two other ethnic groups, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang (NSCN-K) and the United Wa State Army (UWSA), did not participate in the negotiations and had previously announced that they had no intention of signing the ceasefire agreement.

Under [the terms of the agreement](#), a political dialogue is to begin with 90 days (January 13, 2016) to discuss terms for the formation of a federal government and a peace agreement. In no more than 14 days (October 29), the parties to the agreement are to meet to define a timeline to abide by a mutually binding military code of conduct. Given the limited number of ethnic groups who signed the agreement, however, it is unclear if these discussions will occur.

The ceasefire agreement resolves many issues underlying the nation's long-standing civil war, but does not address some of the more controversial issues, such as the terms of post-ceasefire political dialogue, the status of the ethnic militias, and the ceasefire's code of conduct for the Tatmadaw and the ethnic militias.

Signing the ceasefire on behalf of the government in Naypyitaw were President Thein Sein and the Tatmadaw's Commander-in-Chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, Deputy Commander-in-Chief Senior General Soe Win, and the two Vice Presidents, Nyan Tun and Sai Mauk Kham.

Representatives of the United Nations, the European Union, China, India, Japan, and Thailand were [official witnesses](#) to the signing of the ceasefire agreement. Ambassador Derek Mitchell reportedly attended the event on behalf of the U.S. government, but was not an official witness.

Ethnic Groups and the Ceasefire Agreement

Groups Signing the Agreement:

- All Burma Students Democratic Front (ABSDF)
- Arakan Liberation Party (ALP)
- Chin National Front (CNF)
- Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA)
- Karen National Liberation Party-Peace Council (KNLA-PC)
- Karen National Union (KNU)
- Pa-O National Liberation Party (PNLA)
- Restoration Council of Shan State (RSSS, also commonly known as the Shan State Army-South, or SSA-S)

Groups Not Signing the Agreement:

- Arakan Army (AA)
- Arakan National Council (ANC)
- Kachin Independence Organization (KIO)
- Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP)
- Lahu Democratic Union (LDU)
- Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA)
- National Democratic Alliance Army-Eastern Shan State (NDA-ESS)
- National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang (NSCN-K)
- New Mon State Party (NMSP)
- Shan State Progressive Party (SSPP)
- Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA)
- United Wa State Army (UWSA)
- Wa National Organization (WNO)

Rocky Road to the Ceasefire Agreement

The ceasefire agreement is the latest development in the two-year long negotiations between the Thein Sein government, the Tatmadaw, and the ethnic groups. Talks between the Thein Sein government and the Tatmadaw, both represented by the Union Peacemaking Work Committee (UPWC), and ethnic organizations, collectively known as the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC) and represented by the National Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT), began in November 2013. On March 31, 2015, the NCCT and the UPWC agreed on the text of a draft ceasefire agreement (see CRS Insight IN10256, [Draft Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement Reached in Burma](#), by Michael F. Martin). However, the leaders of the ethnic groups requested that changes be made to the draft ceasefire agreement, and appointed a 14-member Senior Delegation to continue the negotiations.

Although the Senior Delegation and the UPWC were able to resolve their differences on the text of the agreement, they were unable to agree on which ethnic organizations would sign the agreement. The UNFC insisted that all their member organizations be able to sign the ceasefire agreement. The Thein Sein government and the Tatmadaw, however, declared that they would only accept those groups that had previously signed separate ceasefire agreements as signatories, thereby excluding the AA, the MNDAA, and the TNLA. Repeated efforts failed to find a compromise on the issue.

Fighting Continues

While the ceasefire negotiations were underway, fighting continued between the Tatmadaw and several of the ethnic organizations' militias. Among the UNFC members, the Tatmadaw engaged in frequent skirmishes with the AA, the

MNDAA, the SSPP, and the TNLA in Shan State, and with less frequency with the Kachin Independence Army (the KIO's militia) in Kachin State. The Tatmadaw also periodically exchanged fire with the NSCN-K and the UWSA. The [Tatmadaw reportedly attacked SSPP forces on October 7](#), after the group announced it would not sign the ceasefire agreement. The Tatmadaw had previously stated it would not attack groups who did not sign the ceasefire agreement.

Future Prospects

It is uncertain what the signing of the ceasefire agreement will mean for Burma's peace prospects. President Thein Sein has indicated that other ethnic groups may accede to the agreement if they wish, and some observers hope that a lack of fighting between the Tatmadaw and the ethnic groups who signed the agreement may lead other groups to sign. However, other observers see the signing of the agreement and recent outbreaks of fighting with non-signator ethnic groups as a continuation of the Tatmadaw's strategy of "divide and conquer" in the nation's civil war.

In the short run, President Thein Sein and his political party, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), are likely use the ceasefire agreement to bolster support in the run up for the parliamentary elections. In addition, the Union Election Commission (UEC), which is responsible for conducting the election, will probably cancel voting in areas where fighting between the Tatmadaw and the ethnic groups continues to occur. Some observers speculate that this is part of a larger strategy between the Tatmadaw and the Thein Sein government to tilt the election in favor of the USDP.