

# ALTSEAN BURMA

ALTERNATIVE ASEAN NETWORK ON BURMA  
campaigns, advocacy & capacity-building for human rights & democracy

BN 2007/1031: February 23, 2007

## THE KNU 7<sup>TH</sup> BRIGADE DEFECTION: SPDC'S PROPAGANDA OVER SUBSTANCE

- On 11 February, Burma's State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) announces a "peace" deal with the Karen National Union/Karen National Liberation Army Peace Council (KNU/KNLAPC), a splinter group formed by Htain Maung and some followers just 11 days earlier.
- Burma's military regime trumpets the development in state-controlled media in a bid to shore up its own diminishing credibility amongst its rank and file.
- The KNU condemns the "peace" agreement and removes Htain Maung from the KNLA because of his unauthorized discussions with the SPDC.
- The majority of Karen grassroots, community based, and civil society organizations remain aligned with the KNU. 67 representatives from 24 Karen organizations attending a Karen unity seminar condemn Htain Maung's move.
- While exposing the internal tensions and factions that would normally occur in any political movement or organization, the "split" has prompted the majority of Karen political, community-based and civil society organizations to rally in unity behind the KNU.
- Apart from rewarding Htain Maung's faction with TVs, household goods and building materials, the deal is unlikely to actually bring peace to the Karen people; in 2006 alone, military violence displaced 27,000 people in eastern Burma.
- The KNU reached a "gentlemen's agreement" ceasefire with the regime at talks in December 2003 but this rapidly deteriorated as the regime's troops continued to perpetrate military attacks and gross human rights violations against civilian Karens.

### New Karen group achieves "peace" with the SPDC

On 11 February, in a highly orchestrated SPDC public relations event, a ceremony was held in Hto Kaw Koe village, Karen State to recognize a peace agreement between Htain Maung's newly formed group, the Karen National Union/Karen National Liberation Army Peace Council (KNU/KNLAPC) and the SPDC. High-level SPDC officials attending the ceremony included Military Affairs Security Chief, Maj Gen Ye Myint and Southeast SPDC Military Commander, Brig Gen Thet Naing.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> NLM (12 Feb 07) Kayin National Union (KNU)/Kayin National Liberation Army (KNLA) Peace Council's victory of peace welcoming ceremony held

SPDC provided Htain Maung, former leader of the KNLA 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade and his men with five tractors, five 21-inch TVs, a VCD player, 30,000 pieces of corrugated iron sheets, 132 tons of lumber, 100 acres of rubber trees, clothes, household items, food, and kitchen utensils.<sup>2</sup>

### Htain Maung's power grab

The ceremony represented the culmination of Htain Maung's efforts to engage the SPDC in peace talks that had started in early January. It was apparent that Htain Maung anticipated a power vacuum following the death of former KNU leader, General Bo Mya, in late December 2006, and attempted to exploit the situation.

In an attempt to give the new organization credibility in the Karen community, Htain Maung claimed that Lah Poe, Gen Bo Mya's widow and the chair of the Karen Women's Organization (KWO), was the vice-chair of the KNU/KNLAPC.<sup>3</sup> Lah Poe was quick to deny any involvement in the new group. In a statement, Lar Poe said that she will continue to perform her KNU Central Committee duties, in addition to serving as president of the Karen Women's Organization. She asserted that the KNU was the "mother organization" of the Karen People, and she couldn't accept acts that divide it or were tantamount to "surrender" to the enemy.<sup>4</sup>

24-Dec	Gen Bo Mya, longtime leader of the KNU, dies.
5-Jan	Brig Gen Htain Maung, Commander of the KNLA 7th Brigade, leads 10 member delegation to begin discussions with the SPDC regarding a ceasefire agreement. Talks do not have approval of KNU Central Committee.
17-Jan	KNU official says it is considering punitive measures against KNLA 7 <sup>th</sup> Brigade officers who met with SPDC Army officials in ceasefire discussions.
24-Jan	Htain Maung issues a statement that a "peace" agreement was reached with the SPDC on 16 January.
29-Jan	KNLA 7 <sup>th</sup> Brigade spokesperson announces that contingent of KNU/KNLA "peace representatives" toured areas in Karen State along with representatives from SPDC Army and DKBA.
30-Jan	KNU dismisses Htain Maung.
31-Jan	Htain Maung announces the formation of a new Karen organization, the Karen National Union/Karen National Liberation Army Peace Council.
1-Feb	Karen National Union/Karen National Liberation Army Peace Council sends delegation to establish Hto Kaw Koe village tract in Karen State as a 'ceasefire zone'.
3-Feb	Karen National Union/Karen National Liberation Army Peace Council announces leadership positions. Htain Maung, now promoted to the rank of Maj Gen named Chairman, Lah Poe, named vice chairperson. Col Ner Dah Mya, appointed Sec-1 and Pastor Timothy, appointed Joint-Sec-1.
3-Feb	Lah Poe denies any involvement role in Karen National Union/Karen National Liberation Army Peace Council.
8-Feb7	More than 60 soldiers leave Brig Gen Htain Maung's Karen National Union/Karen National Liberation Army Peace Council and return to the KNLA 7th Brigade.
11-Feb	Peace ceremony held in Kawkareik, Karen State for the return of the Karen National Union/Karen National Liberation Army Peace Council to the "legal fold".
11-Feb	SPDC Ministry of Information announces that a ceasefire agreement has been reached with the Karen National Union/Karen National Liberation Army Peace Council.

### Peace agreement: illegitimate and unrepresentative

Htain Maung's "peace" agreement was nothing more than meaningless agreement between the SPDC and a strawman:

- The KNU condemned Htain Maung's discussions with the SPDC<sup>5</sup> and renounced him as a representative of the KNU.<sup>6</sup> On 30 January, the KNU Central Committee expelled Htain Maung from the KNU because of his renegade discussions with the SPDC.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>2</sup> NLM (12 Feb 07) Kayin National Union (KNU)/Kayin National Liberation Army (KNLA) Peace Council's victory of peace welcoming ceremony held

<sup>3</sup> Irrawaddy (03 Feb 07) Karen Split Group Formed a New Group

<sup>4</sup> Irrawaddy (05 Feb 07) Bo Mya's wife rejects role in Karen splinter group

<sup>5</sup> Mizzima News (26 Jan 07) 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade cease-fire talks "against Karen interests" -- KNU CC

- KNU reports indicated that only 60 soldiers remained loyal to Htain Maung.<sup>8</sup>

Htain Maung overestimated his powerbase in the KNU and misread the desire of the Karen people to continue their struggle for democracy. At the Karen Unity Seminar in the beginning of February, Htain Maung's new group was "condemned" by 67 representatives from 24 Karen organizations that attended.

The deal is unlikely to actually bring peace to Karen state. A recent report by the Thailand Burma Border Consortium estimated that in 2006 alone, military violence forced 27,000 people to leave their homes; more than 3,000 villages have been destroyed or abandoned in eastern Myanmar and more than a million people displaced, since 1996.

### **KNU endures**

Disputes and conflict are common in political organizations in Burma. The SPDC has a history of exploiting discord in ethnic organizations to perpetuate its rule through a divide and conquer policy. The SPDC used Htain Maung as a propaganda tool in an attempt to demoralize the Karen people and to discredit the KNU.

Karen people at the grassroots level, Karen community based organizations, and Karen civil society organizations remain aligned with the KNU. KNU chairman, Ba Thin Sein, reinforced the aspirations of the Karen people when he said, "In the 60 years of life of the KNU, we have seen many traitors to the nation and the revolution. At the same time, there have been many thousands of revolutionary heroes."<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Irrawaddy (26 Jan 07) 7th Brigade, Junta Reach Agreement Without KNU's Central Committee

<sup>7</sup> NMG (30 Jan 07) Brig-Gen Htain Maung expelled, regiments remain loyal to KNU

<sup>8</sup> Irrawaddy (08 Feb 07) Break-away Karen soldiers return to KNU fold

<sup>9</sup> Irrawaddy (05 Feb 07) Bo Mya's wife rejects role in Karen splinter group