

Press release by Federal Ethnic Farmer Network and Ethnic Community Development Forum

Date (27 January 2021)

Ethnic farmers urge newly elected government to halt land law reform process

Two multi-ethnic alliances of farmers and community development organisations today called on Burma's newly elected government to postpone the current national land law reform as the centralised and unitary constitution by nature contradicts customary land management systems and ignores ethnic federal demands.

Prior to the elections, the previous government announced a work plan for the drafting of a new national land law, managed under the National Land Use Council (NLUC), aiming to develop a new law by mid-2022, calling on civil society to collaborate in the process.

Farming communities are still suffering displacement and land confiscation from the most recent amendment of land laws, which took place in 2018 with the enacted Vacant, Fallow and Virgin Land Management Law. The VFV law imposed criminal penalties, fines or imprisonment, on farmers using lands deemed vacant, fallow or virgin, covering approx. 50 million acres or one-third of Burma's lands, mostly in ethnic states.

The VFV law facilitated a fast-track process for the sale of lands to investors from under the feet of communities who in many cases had tilled the lands long before Burma's independence, practicing customary land management systems.

Ethnic farmers and communities have for years provided constructive recommendations for how individual and community land rights, including customary land management systems, could be protected and integrated into a federal national system. This would require a bottom up governance approach and the right of farmers to choose between individual or community/customary land titles that would enable ownership and management rights, administered within states and regions.

“Formalising yet another unitary and centralised land law that contradicts community practices and disregards federal demands of ethnic peoples rubs even more salt in our wounds, and fuels conflict”, said U Aung Latt spoke person of Federal Ethnic Farmer Network “FEFN”

Ethnic Armed Organisations engaging in dialogue with the government and its army have long demanded that ownership, control and management powers over land and natural resources should be devolved down to state and regional levels. However, these demands, including full recognition of customary land management systems, have fallen on deaf ears.

“Since NLD claims to support federalism, the new government now has an opportunity to build trust with ethnic communities by halting investment on customary lands and cooperating with ethnic peoples to devolve powers through a new inclusive peace process” said Nai Sawor Mon spoke person of Federal Ethnic Farmer Network “FEFN”.

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Joint statement of

- (1) Federal Ethnic Farmer Network “FEFN”
- (2) Mungchying. Rawt Jat “MRJ”

- (3) Chin Farmers Network “CFN”
- (4) Karenni State Farmers Union “KSFU”
- (5) Karen Farmers Network “KFN”
- (6) Mon Region Land Policy Committee “MRLPC”
- (7) Kyauk Phyu Rural Development Association “KRDA”
- (8) Shan State Farmers Network “SSFN”
- (9) Ethnic Community Development Forum “ECDF”
- (10) Kachin Development Networking Group “KDNG”
- (11) Karen Office of Relief and Development “KORD”
- (12) Karenni Social Warfare and Development Centre “KSWDC”
- (13) Network for Chin Community Development “NCCD”
- (14) Mon Relief and Development Committee “MRDC”
- (15) All Arakan Students’ and Youths’ Congress “AASYC”
- (16) Shan Sapawa Environmental Organization “Shan Sapawa”