

FEDERALISM FROM THE GROUND UP

The Karenni Model of Nation-State Building



This paper is co-authored by five local civil society organizations, including Karenni Civil Society Network, Karenni National Women's Organization, Progressive Voice and Union of Karenni State Youth.



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Contact information:

Progressive Voice

 <https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/>

 <https://www.facebook.com/progressivevoice>

 <https://x.com/PVamplify>

 info@progressive-voice.org

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Acronyms

ART	Accountability, Responsibility, and Transparency
CDM	Civil Disobedience Movement
CEC	Central Executive Committee
CSO	Civil society organization
DDR	Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration
ERO	Ethnic Resistance Organization
HAD	Home Affairs Department
ID	Identification
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IEC	Interim Executive Council of Karenni State
JAC	Joint Administration Committee
KNDF	Karenni Nationalities Defence Force
KNLP	Kayan New Land Party
KNP	Kayan National Party
KNPDP	Karenni National Peace and Development Party
KNPLF	Karenni Nationalities Peoples' Liberation Front
KNPP	Karenni National Progressive Party
KNSO	Karenni National Solidarity Organization
KSCC	Karenni State Consultative Council
KSDP	Karenni State Democratic Party
KSIA	Karenni State Interim Arrangement
KSIJ	Karenni State Interim Judiciary
KSIP	Karenni State Interim Parliament
KSP	Karenni State Police
KySDP/KSDP	Kayah State Democratic Party
MIGS	Multi-level inclusive governance system
MP	Member of Parliament
MTB-MLE	Mother-Tongue-Based Multilingual Education
NLD	National League for Democracy
NUCC	National Unity Consultative Council
NUG	National Unity Government
PDF	People's Defense Force
SSR	Security sector reform
TAC	Township Administrative Council
TITC	Trade, Investment, Transportation and Communication
ToR	Terms of Reference

Introduction

In the aftermath of the Myanmar military junta's failed coup,¹ the Myanmar people have endured the junta's nationwide campaign of terror. They have also suffered economic catastrophe and worsening human rights and humanitarian crises caused and exacerbated by the junta.² Despite these, a multidimensional revolution, which has emerged across the country's territory, is building a new and inclusive Myanmar. In the liberated areas, bottom-up people's representative bodies, together with the pre-existing administrations of ethnic resistance organizations (EROs), are governing civilians, protecting them from the junta's atrocities, and delivering much-needed public services. Moreover, following the two initial phases of Operation 1027,³ the country is undergoing a rapid change, characterized by significant changes and fluid dynamics on the ground. One of these changes is heightened collaboration between multiple revolutionary forces, which advances the objective of dismantling the military junta.

While often framed as a civil war, what's happening in Myanmar is a nationwide revolution based on a multidimensional and multi-sectoral movement. Rather than being reduced to a violent process aimed at destroying the current system, this phenomenal people's movement is building a new society with inclusive and democratic institutions. The armed struggle is deeply connected to the goal of establishing a federal democratic government architecture that would finally liberate the country's political and socio-economic systems

from decades of military tyranny. EROs, together with the people's nationwide democratic resistance movement, have successfully reclaimed the majority of their territory and launched a federal state-building process that aims to institutionalize and restore the people's governance structures. Crucial contributions provided by EROs have advanced the progress of the resistance movement. These stakeholders have offered significant support to the newly established People's Defense Forces (PDFs) and people's administrative bodies, locally known as *Pa-Ah-Hpa*. These administrative bodies are under the authority of the National Unity Government (NUG) and are primarily based in ethnic Bamar majority areas, especially in central Myanmar. Furthermore, EROs' longstanding political visions have helped unify Myanmar's diverse society since they are supported by ethnic communities and civil society organizations (CSOs), all of which agree that federalism is a viable solution to social injustice, military-imposed conflict, ethnic oppression, and institutionalized state terror.

Since the attempted coup, the democratic resistance movement—both armed and unarmed—has spread throughout the country, including in territories that have historically been strictly controlled by the military. In most of the borderlands, where ethnic minorities have been fighting for decades against the oppression of the Bamar central state, EROs have been reclaiming their territory and strengthening pre-existing governance structures.

1 “Coup attempt” and “attempted coup” refer herein to the military junta's illegal attempt to seize power on 1 February 2021, which has failed due to the people's democratic resistance movement.

2 “Military junta” and “junta” refer herein to the Myanmar military—and its administrative body, the State Administration Council—following its attempted coup, to underscore that the junta is an illegal, illegitimate entity and that Myanmar's people have categorically resisted the attempted coup and rejected the junta as their government.

3 Two days before the Thadingyut Festival (Myanmar's Buddhist Festival of Lights), the Three Brotherhood Alliance, one of the most powerful armed alliances among EROs, launched Operation 1027, a series of coordinated and well-planned attacks targeting the junta's military bases and outposts across northern Shan State. While the Kachin Independence Army launched its own offensive against the junta in March 2024, the Bamar People's Liberation Army and multiple People's Defense Forces, among others, have directly joined Operation 1027.

In this context, the Karenni revolutionary forces— together with CSOs, especially women’s and youth groups; political parties; and Members of Parliament (MPs) elected in Myanmar’s 2020 general election—have set Karenni State apart as a progressive example by establishing the first ethnic state interim government after the failed coup in 2021.

Eqbal Ahmad, a member of the National Liberation Front in Algeria, has suggested that to win a revolution, resistance forces must out-administer, not out-fight the enemy.⁴ In the post-failed coup landscape, Karenni State has adapted Eqbal Ahmad’s philosophy by establishing the Karenni State Consultative Council (KSCC) on 9 April 2021. In its first statement, the KSCC laid out its objective and the historical trajectory in which the current events are set, “To coexist with all nationalities in a federal union [of Myanmar] that fully guarantees the Karenni people’s political aspiration for equality, justice, democracy, and self-determination and to materialize the Karenni people’s original right to self-determination from this interim period until a federal union is established.”⁵

Following the establishment of the KSCC, a series of successful negotiations and remarkable political processes have led to the elaboration of the Karenni State Interim Arrangement (KSIA), also known as the Interim Arrangements of Karenni State, the political contract that regulates the revolutionary period and lays down a step-by-step roadmap for the formation of a federal Karenni State

within a federal democratic union of Myanmar. Furthermore, based on the KSIA’s principles and values, the interim state-level legislative, executive, and judicial branches were formed.

This paper is informed by desk research and qualitative field research, including findings from 14 semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions in Karenni State and along the Thai-Karenni border. The interviews were conducted in-person and online with local administrators, CSOs, and members of the Karenni Interim Government⁶ between March and early May 2024. Furthermore, to respect the history and culture of local communities and to better reflect the reality on the ground, this paper uses the geographical nomenclature of the State and Townships laid out in the KSIA.

This research paper analyzes Karenni State’s governance architecture as it evolves through ongoing innovations that impact and reshape the local socio-political landscape and offer a blueprint for political and administrative reform in other areas of Myanmar.

In the first section, the paper analyzes the structure, practices, and mechanisms of the Karenni Interim Government, including the work of its executive, legislative, and judiciary branches, and its unique model of governance, conceptualized by this paper as the multi-level inclusive governance system (MIGS). This paper initially examines the relevance of the KSIA in the current evolving landscape and the capacity of the Karenni Interim

4 Kim Jolliffe, “Contested political authority in post-coup Myanmar,” Myanmar in Crisis, edited by Dunford, Michael R., Canberra, page 132.

5 Karenni State Consultative Council: Statement No. 1/2021, Progressive Voice, April 18, 2021, <https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/2021/04/18/karenni-state-consultative-council-statement-no-1-2021/>.

6 Karenni State Consultative Council (KSCC), “Statement regarding the use of the term ‘Karenni State,’” Facebook, November 24, 2023, <https://web.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=666557605668986&set=pb.100069442572761.-2207520000&type=3>.

Government to follow the democratic principles of Accountability, Responsibility, and Transparency (ART).⁷ It further underlines how the Interim Government has actualized the ART principles while simultaneously coordinating a bottom-up, people-led mobilization to resist the junta's brutal campaign of terror. This paper then focuses on the fundamental characteristics and local practices of Karenni governance institutions and their ongoing efforts to rebuild public administration at the village, village tract,⁸ and township levels.⁹ These institutions include EROs' pre-existing structures, newly established bottom-up units, and the Joint Administration Committee (JAC).

In the section thereafter, the paper elaborates a specific analytical framework to encapsulate the emerging Karenni governance model through four lenses: legitimacy, inclusivity, hybridity, and sustainability. Although developing an in-depth model is beyond the scope of the research paper, the suggested framework attempts to shift the international conversation from a hypothetical

future idea of federalism in Myanmar to a more practical and practicing dimension, in line with the people's historic and pioneering work on the ground to build a genuine federal democratic union.¹⁰

In doing so, the paper seeks to compel the international community to formally recognize and support Myanmar's ethnic governance systems and their vital impact on millions of people currently living in the country's liberated areas. At the same time, by describing the Karenni interim governance architecture, the paper outlines a feasible and domestically driven governance model shaped by the unique socio-political and historical characteristics of diverse Myanmar communities that could be replicated in other areas of Myanmar. Together with other emerging locally led models of governance, the Karenni model can contribute to the formation of the first-ever domestically driven nationwide federal system of Myanmar. This paper serves to amplify these urgent calls for action.

7 The ART principles have been predominantly employed within the artificial intelligence industry. Instead, in this paper, the ART principles refer to the capacity of the three interim branches to incorporate some of the most fundamental concepts of a democratic society into their work: accountability, responsibility, and transparency. It has been inspired by Khu Oo Reh, the IEC chairperson speech on the IEC's one-year anniversary, when he used "transparency, responsibility and accountability," among other principles and values, to describe the Karenni governance institutions.

8 The village tract, under the Karenni's administration system, is a sub-township level administrative structure that is composed of multiple villages.

9 Village, village tract, and township-level administrations refer herein to the areas under the control of Karenni resistance forces, where the military junta's administration systems have been dismantled.

10 This paper refers to "the federal democratic union" as "the federal level government," typically referred to also as a national or central government. Therein, states represent the constituent units, or subnational units, such as Karenni State, Kachin State, and Chin State.

Establishment of the Interim Government of Karenni State

In the aftermath of the attempted coup, the Myanmar military has expanded its operations to include the infamous, decades-old Four Cuts Strategy, known as *Phyet-Lay-Phyet*, as part of the junta's countrywide terror campaign against the people. For generations, the military has been employing this strategy to inflict brutal collective punishment on non-Bamar ethnic communities in the country's border regions and remote areas. Currently, the junta's artillery shelling and airstrikes, in parallel with ground raids and arson attacks intentionally targeting civilian areas, have destroyed entire villages and towns, schools, hospitals and other medical facilities, religious buildings, and other local infrastructure. According to the UN, there are around 3 million internally displaced persons in Myanmar.¹¹ This number is likely a gross underestimation compared to the numbers reported by local organizations on the ground.

Rana Khalaf, a Syrian researcher, has argued, "Locals living under conflict, as suggested from examples ranging from Afghanistan to Somalia and Bosnia, do not remain passive; they create systems of governance to make their situation more predictable and liveable."¹² In Myanmar, the contemporary landscape moves beyond the oversimplified narrative of static and binary so-called "civil war," defined exclusively by two monolithic fronts. Instead, it features multiple cross-cutting socio-political struggles. Prolonged and well-established ethnic revolutions, characterized by long-standing governance systems and social

service departments deeply interconnected with and legitimized by local communities and grassroots civil society, have intertwined with a nationwide democratic resistance movement that emerged after the Myanmar military junta's attempted coup in 2021.

After three years, EROs, PDFs, and other resistance forces have gained control over most of the country's rural and peri-urban areas. In Karenni State, for instance, following Operation 1111, the coalition of resistance forces liberated and recovered 90 percent of the territory previously occupied for decades by the tyrannical Myanmar military.¹³ In Myanmar's liberated areas, the junta does not hold any type of authority, and its institutions have ceased to exist. Instead, EROs' pre-existing governments have expanded their territories, and newly formed ethnic councils—such as the Kachin Political Interim Coordination Team, the Chinland Council, and the Karenni State Consultative Council (KSCC)—have strengthened mechanisms of governance in cooperation with local democratic actors to deliver public services, coordinate livelihood support programs, and develop conflict resolution mechanisms.

In Karenni State, the KSCC, as the consultative coordination body, has made remarkable efforts to foster reconciliation between historically divided local armed forces and political actors. These efforts have led to the formation of the Karenni Interim Government, an inclusive and multi-ethnic representative government structure that aims to

11 OCHA, Myanmar Humanitarian Update No. 40, 16 August 2024, <https://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/myanmar-humanitarian-update-no-40-16-august-2024>.

12 Rana Khalaf, "Governance without Government in Syria: Civil Society and State Building during Conflict," *Syria Studies* 7 (2015): 41, <https://library.alnap.org/help-library/governance-without-government-in-syria-civil-society-and-state-building-during-conflict>.

13 Kantarawaddy Times, "KNDF: Karenni resistance groups control 90% of territory in Karenni State," *Kantarawaddy Times*, March 26, 2024, <https://ktnews.org/kndf-karenni-resistance-groups-control-90-of-territory-in-karenni-state/>.

bridge the current revolutionary phase with the post-interim transition and establish a genuine federal democratic system.

This section provides insight into the emerging and evolving architecture of the Karenni Interim Government, hereafter referred to as the Interim Government, outlining the establishment and functioning of the state’s legislative, executive, and judicial branches. It then maps out the structure, responsibilities, and main objectives of each branch. Furthermore, it describes the fundamental role of the Karenni State Interim Arrangement—the existing institutional framework among most of the Karenni forces and political parties—and how it guides and coordinates the work of the Interim Government and the KSCC while it articulates the transition process for the post-interim period.

The Interim Government comprises three independent branches: the Interim Executive Council of Karenni State (IEC), which holds the executive power; the Karenni State Interim Parliament (KSIP), which holds the legislative power; and the Karenni State Interim Judiciary (KSIJ), which holds the judicial power. Together

with the KSCC and all the stakeholders that have joined it, the Interim Government is committed to the liberation of the Karenni peoples¹⁴ from the Myanmar military’s tyranny, the establishment of transitional institutions, the reconstruction of the public administration system, and the formulation of the Karenni State Constitution with the objective to build a federal democratic union of Myanmar.

Although frequently regarded as an integral component of the Interim Government, the KSCC is not one of the Interim Government’s branches. Instead, it oversees the Interim Government and its branches’ activities and serves as a check and balance mechanism for the Interim Government’s institutions. Moreover, during the post-failed coup revolutionary period,¹⁵ the KSCC serves as the policy-making body and is responsible for advancing the collaboration among all Karenni stakeholders. The Karenni State Interim Arrangement Institutional Structure—the comprehensive configuration of the Karenni Interim’s political anatomy—clarifies the hierarchy, composition, and connections in and between the KSCC and the Interim Government.

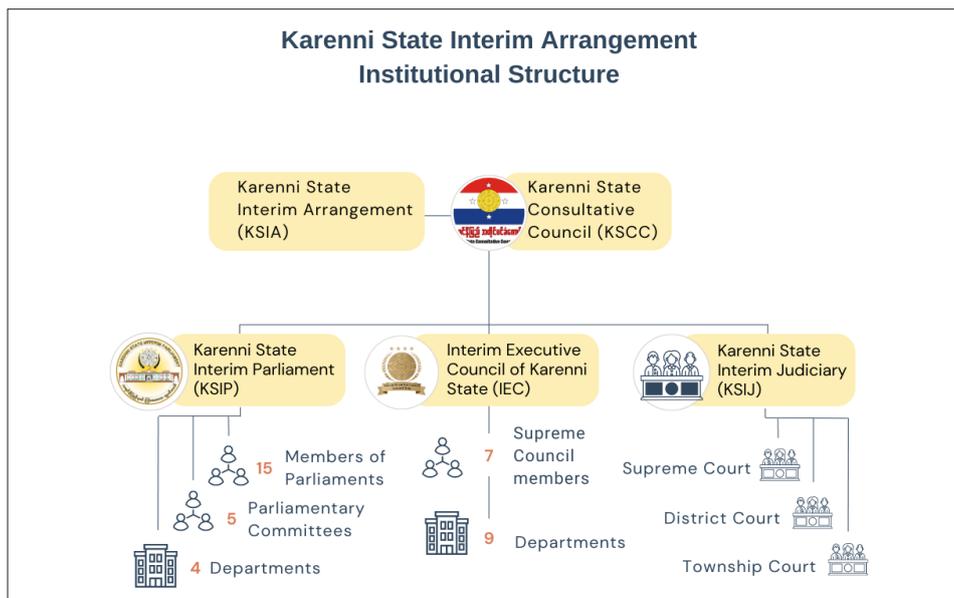


Figure 1: The Karenni State Interim Arrangement Institutional Structure

14 “Peoples” in plural is used throughout this paper to refer to and include the many ethnic communities in Karenni State.

15 In common with many other ethnic groups in Myanmar, the Karenni Revolution began decades ago, precisely 75 years ago.

Later, the paper will apply the ART principles to assess the groundbreaking work of the Interim Government. The Interim Government’s incorporation of the ART principles into the day-to-day work of its branches demonstrates the ability of Karenni political stakeholders to construct robust, enduring, and democratic institutions. These institutions are not only legitimized by their constituents but also serve as an example for Myanmar’s interim governments in other liberated areas and as a model that has the criteria to be recognized and legitimized by the international community.

Karenni State Interim Arrangement

The Karenni State Interim Arrangement (hereinafter, KSIA or the Arrangement) is the most important political contract among the relevant stakeholders in Karenni State, as it guides civilian and armed anti-junta alliances through the revolutionary period. In general, interim arrangements are institutional frameworks “established to create a ‘bridge’ from political or violent crisis often situated in an authoritarian past, towards a more peaceful, inclusive, and democratic government.”¹⁶ In this spirit, in Karenni State, members of the civil society, youth and women’s groups, political parties, and EROs were involved to varying degrees in drafting the KSIA. The complex, sensitive, and collective discussions among the different actors resulted in elaborating a commonly shared contract as the foundation for

actualizing the interim governing bodies and the reconciliation process among multiple EROs.

As described by a current member of the IEC, “We started drafting the Interim Arrangement in June 2021, together with different stakeholders, such as ethnic armed organizations, youth, and women’s groups. Then, at the end of 2021, we finished the first draft.”¹⁷ In November 2022, the KSCC finalized the arrangement after a full year of negotiations, feedback, and recommendations from Karenni stakeholders. From 17 to 20 January 2023, the KSCC held its first conference, which officially approved the KSIA.

In its 52 pages, the KSIA defines the objectives, structures, and responsibilities of Karenni State’s executive, legislative, and judicial branches—as well as the requisite qualifications and nomination and appointment procedures for their members. It lays out a step-by-step political road map for Karenni State, including building unity and cooperation among stakeholders cooperating with the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC),¹⁸ the National Unity Government (NUG),¹⁹ and EROs. It also provides a framework for conducting public consultations regarding the KSIA, establishing preparation procedures for the transitional period, and the final step: preparing to develop the Karenni State Constitution as the foundation of the federal state of Karenni within the federal democratic union of Myanmar.

16 Robert Forster, *Interim Governance Arrangements in Post-Conflict and Fragile Settings*, Sixth Edinburgh Dialogue on Post-Conflict Constitution-Building, 2019, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, <https://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/interim-governance-arrangements-post-conflict-and-fragile-settings>.

17 Interview with a member of IEC, Karenni State, March 2024.

18 The National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) is an inclusive and overarching entity that directs the policy and strategic direction of the NUG. It includes representation from EROs, political parties, general strike committees, and civil society organizations, including youth organizations and women’s organizations, among other groups.

19 The National Unity Government is the only legitimate government of Myanmar. It is functioning as an interim government that is working with ethnic councils and Ethnic Resistance Organizations to establish a genuine federal democracy in Myanmar. It was formed after the military coup attempt in 2021 by the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) “with the authority bestowed by the People’s mandate of all parties’ democratic election held in 2020 in discussion with National Unity Consultative Council.” For more information, see <https://nugmyanmar.org/about/>.

Furthermore, the KSIA addresses some of the most complex challenges, such as Karenni State’s geographic “boundaries and composition.”²⁰ While acknowledging the possibility of amendments, the KSIA reorganizes the geography of the State according to the four historically designated regions—namely Kantarawadi, Kyebogyi, Bawlake, and Moebye, which are located in, according to the current Myanmar State demarcations, both Karenni State and southern Shan State—where the Karenni nationalities and peoples have traditionally resided.²¹

The KSIA dedicates substantial sections to protecting the Karenni peoples’ individual and collective rights. Sections 16(a) and 16(b), for instance, require that women have equal opportunities to participate and make decisions in the three governance branches while also calling for the implementation of specific mechanisms to “ensure women’s participation in decision-making in the political, social, educational, economic and development sectors without discrimination.”²² In this regard, Section 4(e) of the KSIA requires at least 30 percent women’s participation in each branch.²³ Furthermore, Section 22 encourages the political participation of ethnic minorities and urges the KSCC to elaborate specific policy guidelines to promote and protect the rights of ethnic minorities, including the freedom to preserve their ethnic and national identities, historical heritage, language, literature, and cultural traditions.²⁴

Further measures promoting and protecting human rights emphasize the necessity of providing mental and physical support for internally displaced

persons (IDPs) and refugees across the Thai-Karenni border. Other policies include guaranteeing Mother Tongue Based-Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) in the current interim system and ensuring transitional justice and reparations for the victims and survivors of human rights violations.

In Chapters 5 and 6, the KSIA focuses on implementing and regulating public administration governance and the intra-state defense forces. Section 27 requires that 19 townships be designated within the four historical regions of Karenni State and administered in collaboration with the EROs’ pre-existing governance bodies. Finally, Chapter 6 addresses post-revolutionary challenges by introducing crucial elements related to security sector reform (SSR) and disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR). The latter is mainly related to weapons maintenance and the disarmament, consolidation, and restructuring of the Karenni State Security and Defence Forces. The SSR and DDR articles also address the individuals who joined the armed struggle. Section 40 acknowledges that rehabilitation and livelihood programmes are necessary to support amputees, revolutionary members with disabilities, and the families of fallen revolutionary soldiers, as well as to “bring justice for the victims of sexual violence within the resistance forces.”²⁵

Given the extent of the themes covered by the KSIA, as well as the complexity and sensitivity of each individual matter, the intricate elaboration process of the Arrangement in coordination with Karenni political and civilian stakeholders has been a historic achievement contributing to a

20 Interim Arrangements of Karenni State, Chapter 3, Section 14, page 13.

21 Interim Arrangements of Karenni State, Chapter 3, Characteristics of the State, Boundaries and composition of the state, section 14, page 13.

22 Interim Arrangements of Karenni State, Chapter 4, Section 16, page 15.

23 Interim Arrangements of Karenni State, Chapter 1, Section 4, page 4.

24 Interim Arrangements of Karenni State, Chapter 4, Section 22, page 18.

25 Interim Arrangements of Karenni State, Chapter 6, Section 40, page 27.

unified Karenni revolutionary front in a relatively short period. Another remarkable and pivotal characteristic of the KSIA is its inclusivity, marked by the diversity and numerosity of the civilian, political, and armed groups that actively joined its elaboration. Even though two of the five Karenni EROs²⁶ that participated in the process are no longer part of the KSCC, the KSIA is still an all-party representative contract. As clarified by a Karenni politician directly involved in the process, “Although some organizations withdrew from the KSCC, they agreed to be our allies. We can say that the Interim Arrangement was approved by all the different stakeholders in Karenni State.”²⁷

The collective approach to developing the KSIA, including the equal participation of EROs outside the KSCC in its writing process, created a credible and legitimate political contract. With the guidelines laid out in the KSIA, the KSCC is effectively facilitating the institutionalization of the Interim Government and fostering dialogue and cohesion among political and armed actors, as well as different local communities. A tangible demonstration of the effectiveness of this approach occurred in April 2024, when the Karenni National Solidarity Organization (KNSO) and the Karenni National Peace and Development Party (KNPDP)—both ceasefire groups²⁸ that

transformed themselves into military-controlled militias, called *Pyi Thu Sit*,²⁹ in 2009³⁰—decided to officially join the KSCC.³¹ Both parties were directly involved in the KSIA drafting process.

Karenni State Consultative Council

Established on 9 April 2021, the KSCC, hereafter referred to also as the Council, serves as Karenni State’s highest political leadership and policy-making body during the interim period. The Council is poised to draft and ratify the first-ever Karenni State constitution and to support the development of a long-lasting federal democratic union of Myanmar. The KSCC’s primary roles are to provide policy guidance to the Interim Government, to ensure checks and balances among the Interim Government’s branches, and to guarantee that the executive, legislative, and judicial branches operate in line with the KSIA.

As declared by the KSIA, which represents the Karenni peoples, the KSCC is founded on the principles of equality, justice, self-determination, and non-discrimination. The Council is also committed to respecting “diverse political views, races, religions, gender identities, and other aspects of inclusivity.”³² One of its members explained, “[The] KSCC is a symbol, a meeting

26 The two EROs that have not joined the KSCC are the KNPLF and KNLP.

27 Interview with a member of IEC, Karenni State, March 2024.

28 KNPDP and KNSO agreed to a ceasefire with the military in 1999 and 2002, respectively, and were both forced to accept *Pyi Thu Sit* status in 2009.

29 As described by John Buchanan in “Militias in Myanmar,” *Pyi Thu Sit* is a term for militias introduced in conjunction with the Myanmar military’s doctrine of people’s war in the 1960s. The term *pyi thu sit* literally means “people’s war.” It is often used in English in reference to Myanmar military-supported local militia units: <https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Militias-in-Myanmar.pdf>.

30 Tom Kramer, Oliver Russel, and Martin Smith, “From War to Peace in Kayah (Karenni) State: A Land at the Crossroads in Myanmar,” Transitional Institute (2018), https://www.tni.org/files/publication-downloads/tni-2018_karenni_eng_web_def.pdf.

31 Karenni State Consultative Council-KSCC, “ကရင်နီပြည်အတိုင်ဝင်ခံကောင်စီ ပြင်ဆင်တိုးချဲ့ဖွဲ့စည်းခြင်းဆိုင်ရာ ထုတ်ပြန်ကြေညာချက်,” Facebook, April 21, 2024, <https://web.facebook.com/KSCC.Karennistate/posts/pfbid02CHkJX3aWQbH2vwGCPx-JeMCsXNS2DAmQyvJLPW9trQHZP1ESaDWwoeTz1M8uiNe5cl>.

32 Interim Arrangement, Chapter 1, Section 5, article (b), page 5.

point of the collective leadership, and it focuses on negotiation and reconciliation across all Karenni stakeholders.”³³

One clear example of the KSCC’s responsibility under the KSIA can be observed in the formation process of the IEC’s Home Affairs Department (HAD). The KSCC rejected the initial composition of the HAD on the grounds that it did not adhere to the KSIA’s gender representation provisions requiring 30 percent women across all positions. When the IEC presented the HAD to the KSCC for approval, it was led exclusively by four men. Given that the KSCC is responsible for approving each IEC department, it requested the IEC to present a revised HAD formation with at least 30 percent women’s representation, in line with KSIA requirements. The KSCC only consented to establish the new department once the IEC presented a revised HAD that respects the gender representation policy.³⁴

While focusing on liberating Karenni State from the military junta’s ground presence and building cohesion and unity among the groups within the State, the KSCC is also committed to dismantling military tyranny across Myanmar. Section 3(d) of the KSIA, which governs the KSCC, recalls the broader goal of the people’s Spring Revolution,³⁵ placing the Karenni armed and socio-political

struggle within the nationwide liberation movement.³⁶ Furthermore, about the establishment of Karenni State’s interim governance and the non-separatist stance of the current Karenni revolutionary front, KSCC’s Chairperson Aung San Myint stated, “This is the practical exercise of the right to self-determination that we have wanted for more than 70 years. So, the practical exercise of the right to self-determination does not mean that we have separated from the Union. I would like to say that we have started to exercise the right of the state, our right to exercise within the Union.”³⁷

The KSCC initially comprised 37 members, collectively responsible for addressing the dire multidimensional needs of Karenni State and its population, including education, humanitarian aid, defense, and diplomatic relations. The KSCC was overwhelmed by challenging tasks. As described by a former KSCC, now IEC member, “KSCC’s workload was very confusing and very heavy.”³⁸ In January 2023, the first KSCC conference approved the reformation of the KSCC to address shortcomings in its structure. The much-needed reformation of the KSCC represented the fifth of nine points in the KSIA’s political roadmap for establishing the Karenni federal state.

Although the KSCC shall comprise 17 members in accordance with the KSIA, following the

33 Interview with a member of KSCC, Karenni State, March 2024.

34 Interview with a member of IEC, Karenni State, March 2024.

35 In the wake of the military’s illegal coup attempt on February 1, 2021, the Spring Revolution emerged as the Myanmar people’s nationwide, bottom-up democratic resistance movement against the Myanmar military and its illegal attempt to seize power. This revolution is unparalleled in Myanmar’s history, drawing its strength from the intersectional and inter-generational collaboration and coordination among diverse groups nationwide, including longstanding ethnic resistance organizations. The goals of the Spring Revolution transcend the mere dismantling of the military junta. This revolution has united Myanmar’s people—across ethnicities, religions, social classes, genders, and sectors—behind the common goal of ending the military’s atrocity crimes, societal divisions, misogyny, discriminatory ideologies, and decades-long impunity to pave the way for the establishment of a peaceful, federal democratic Myanmar that guarantees equal rights for all.

36 Interim Arrangements of Karenni State, Chapter 1, Section 3, article (b), page 4.

37 “KSCC works to finalize the Karenni State Administrative Council,” Burma News International, February 27, 2023, <https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/kssc-works-finalize-karenni-state-administrative-council>.

38 Interview with a member of IEC, Karenni State, March 2024.

reformation, it is currently composed of 13 members, including four women. The KSCC's 17 seats encompass all the political, armed, and civilian stakeholders of Karenni State. For this reason, the four currently vacant seats cannot be assigned to anyone else, as this would distort the representation of the diverse local communities. Those seats are reserved for the stakeholders who are not members of the KSCC yet. Each stakeholder voluntarily joined the KSCC, which serves as a collaborative platform not only for opposing the junta but also for developing a shared vision of the Karenni peoples' system of governance and a harmonious society.

KSCC members represent stakeholders from five different social and political sectors: EROs, political parties, Members of Parliament (MPs) elected in Myanmar's 2020 general election, women, and youth, CSOs, and strike committees. While some stakeholders are not currently part of the KSCC, the Council is engaged in ongoing negotiations to reach and include all relevant Karenni civil and political actors in its structure. The diversity of KSCC members reflects the successful trajectory of the negotiations and reconciliation process, as well as the high degree of unity within the State.

One central unit of the KSCC is the EROs. In Karenni State, there are a total of five EROs: the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), three splinter groups of the KNPP—the KNSO, KNPDP, and the Karenni Nationalities Peoples' Liberation Front (KNPLF)—and the Kayan New Land Party (KNLP). When the KSCC was founded, all five EROs joined the Council. However, by 2023, KNPP was the only ERO remaining in the KSCC. This is because the KSIA explicitly states that to become a KSCC member, the armed organizations

must actively fight to end military tyranny in all its forms. They must not collaborate with or be affiliated with the Myanmar military in any political, economic, or military capacity.³⁹

Some EROs withdrew from the KSCC soon after its formation to maintain a low profile regarding their involvement in the revolution. Yet, several groups kept cooperating behind closed doors with resistance forces. Despite being officially outside the unified front against the junta, some EROs, such as the KNPLF and KNSO, have already been working on the ground with resistance forces. For instance, as stated by the IEC Vice Chairperson, Khun Bedu, "KNPLF has involved in the revolution from the beginning. They trained many young people, including some of the battalions of the KNDF. They were also involved in the fight on the frontlines, without using their badges and uniforms."⁴⁰ Nevertheless, the KNSO and the KNPDP were not yet ready to publicly disclose their true stances until April 2024, when they officially joined the KSCC. After the 2023 approval of the KSIA and the subsequent reformation of the KSCC, all groups in the KSCC have been required to announce to the public their involvement in the Council and their commitment to the people's revolution.

The second KSCC section includes elected MPs. There are a total of 15 Karenni MPs that were elected during the 2020 general election, and they are all currently involved in the Karenni State Interim Parliament (KSIP). Within the KSCC, three seats are occupied by three of those MPs. The political parties of the three MPs are the Kayah State Democratic Party (KySDP), now called the Karenni State Democratic Party (KSDP),⁴¹ the Kayan National Party (KNP), and the National

39 Interim Arrangements of Karenni State, Chapter 1, Section 6 (d) and (e), page 5-6.

40 Q&A: Karenni leader Khun Bedu is "determined to restore the people's government," Frontier Myanmar, September 7, 2023, <https://www.frontiermyanmar.net/en/qa-karenni-leader-khun-bedu-is-determined-to-restore-the-peoples-government/>.

41 KSDP Karenni, "Karenni State Democratic Party's First Congress Statement," Facebook, June 2, 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/kysdp.kayah.9/posts/pfbid02Rj7oWPNRSaZKa43Tz4a2cUzAi8tLT4WJyrP8urJe8xdEu-Baxb9pmwUYvNfhTUUGpl>.

League for Democracy (NLD). It is relevant to note that these three MPs do not represent their respective political parties but rather act as representatives of the KSIP within the KSCC. The political parties in Karenni State represent a separate section in the KSCC's structure.

Within the Council's structure, political parties are entitled to two seats. As of June 2024, the KSCC has representatives only from the KSDP. From 2021 to 2023, the NLD was directly involved in the KSCC's work, including the drafting of the KSIA. However, when the NLD stepped back from the NUCC at the national level, they also withdrew from the KSCC.

Youth groups, strike committees, and CSOs are also an integral part of the KSCC. In this context, the Karenni Nationalities Defence Force (KNDF) and PDFs⁴² are also counted as strike committees because they were initially formed as such and were transformed into armed revolutionary forces only in a later stage. Currently, there are

four representatives from youth groups, strike committees, and CSOs in the KSCC. There is still a need to fill the two other seats at the time of writing this paper. Finally, the last actor that forms the inclusive and representative platform of the KSCC is women's groups, which are entitled to two seats.

In terms of structure, the KSCC has a leading body represented by a seven-member Central Executive Committee (CEC) to guide the KSCC's day-to-day work and long-term vision. The CEC consists of the Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, Secretary, Joint Secretary, and three Committee members. To implement its actions and carry out its duties, the KSCC formed multiple working committees: the Political Dialogue Committee, the International Relations Committee, the Policy Drafting Committee, and Karenni State Constitution Drafting Committee (KnSCDC). In addition to the four main committees, the KSCC has specialized committees, also called sub-committees. For instance, the KSCC Policy Drafting Committee also has specific sub-committees for the Civil

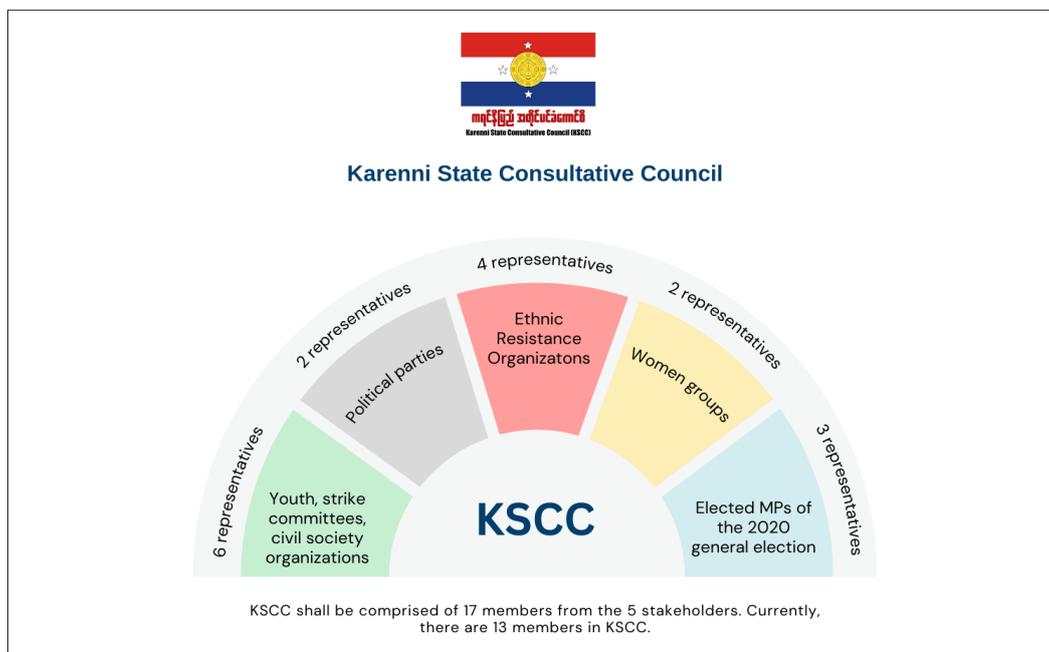


Figure 2: The formation of Karenni State Consultative Council (KSCC)

42 In contrast to the other EROs previously mentioned in this paper, which were established decades ago, the KNDF and PDF are two of the revolutionary armed groups that emerged following the 2021 coup attempt. They were initially formed as strike groups in the early stage of the coup attempt.

Disobedience Movement (CDM)⁴³ and another for youth-related policies. At the time of this writing, the Political Dialogue Committee and the International Relations Committee do not have any sub-committees.

Overall, the KSCC follows a collective leadership approach. As stated in the KSIA, “The member must have the relevant organizational representation mandate and actively participate in their organization’s decision-making process.”⁴⁴ It means that the KSCC members do not represent themselves as individuals but rather the organization for which they work. Given the sensitivity of the KSCC’s work, the system in place aims to guarantee broader representation of the interests of Karenni society within the KSCC’s decision-making process.

Because the junta’s brutal campaign against civilians prevents Karenni peoples from holding state-wide elections, the KSCC members cannot be directly elected by the people; they are, instead, nominated because of their potential to lead Karenni State affairs during the complicated revolutionary period. Despite the lack of direct elections, this system does not imply a substantial detachment between the Council and the public. Since 2021, the KSCC has held hundreds of public consultations and people mobilization activities inside the State. As stated by a former IEC member, who was a member of the pre-reformed KSCC, “[All interim institutions] are quite strong in

public consultation. The targeted groups of public consultations are different based on the subject and purpose of the consultation. Sometimes it [is] based on townships or CSOs or youth and targeted to armed groups or political parties.”⁴⁵

Since establishing the IEC, KSIP, and KSIJ, the KSCC’s public consultations have evolved into multi-actor public consultations involving other interim branches to develop a genuine dialogue among local communities, stakeholders, and the Interim Government. In addition to consultations, the KSCC and the three branches have a widespread on-the-ground presence to coordinate the implementation of their activities and to build the local governance administration system.

Ultimately, the main objective of the KSCC is to facilitate “peaceful coexistence among all the Karenni people.”⁴⁶ The historical fight for Karenni self-determination has suffered from divisions among different ethnic resistance forces and political actors due to the Myanmar military’s decades-long divide-and-rule strategy. This has led to the formation of splinter groups, mainly from the KNPP; the establishment of junta-controlled people’s militias; and the emergence of an unregulated ceasefire economy, enabling the exploitation of natural resources across multiple sectors, including logging and mining. Since its inception in 2021, the KSCC has been dedicated to fostering constructive and inclusive dialogues and negotiations among the various Karenni

43 The Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) is one of the key pillars of Myanmar’s Spring Revolution. It is an ongoing civil resistance movement that has evolved from the early days of the Spring Revolution when the Myanmar military attempted a coup d’état on 1 February 2021 and is one of the key reasons why the coup has failed. In its very initial form it could be defined as a mass strike, where public sector workers from the lower rungs of the civil service through to the very top, including health, education, banking employees, railway workers, oil and gas workers, engineers, lawyers and judges, civil servants and members of the security services refused to work for the junta and refused any other order from them. It quickly morphed into a nationwide movement in which private sector workers withdrew their labor, private businesses refused to cooperate with the junta, and consumers boycotted military-linked products and services. It is a classic civil resistance movement in the Ghandian tradition of non-violence.

44 Interim Arrangements of Karenni State, Chapter 1, Section 6, (B), page 5.

45 Interview with a member of IEC, Karenni State, March 2024.

46 Interim Arrangements of Karenni State, Chapter 1, Section 1, page 3.

stakeholders. Top-leader dialogue is supported by a multi-layer system of cooperation, from official reconciliation meetings to ground coordination mechanisms between the Interim Government, IEC, and EROs, such as KNPP and KNPLF, focusing on security and administrative issues.

Despite the successful trajectory of the KSCC's reconciliation process, the historical divisions and the sensitive intra-group dynamics, together with the current unstable security landscape, continue to present significant barriers to negotiations with some EROs. These require considerable time, effort, and mutual understanding to overcome political impasses and disagreements. One illustrative example of the challenges inherent in navigating the socio-political complexities of building unity is the position of the KNPLF. Despite the KNPLF's lack of formal affiliation with the KSCC, several KNPLF representatives are currently employed as the Heads and Deputy Heads of IEC departments. Furthermore, in July 2023, the KNPLF's Battalions 1004 and 1005—based in Mese and Bawlake Townships, respectively, and comprising roughly 600 troops—joined the Karenni revolutionary forces.⁴⁷

In only three years, the KSCC has established the most inclusive armed and political ethnic resistance front in modern Karenni history. This has involved the KNPP, the KNSO, and the KNPDJ joining forces under the KSCC's collective leadership, leaving only two Karenni EROs partially out of the unified paradigm and still in the negotiation process. The involvement of the KNPLF in the IEC, the establishment of multi-actor ground coordination mechanisms, and the deployment of some of KNPLF battalions in revolutionary lines

suggest the potential for an even more unified revolutionary front in the near future. As expressed by the KNPLF Associate Secretary, Lawrence Soe, "Our goal is the same as the people's. It is to overthrow the military dictatorship and to eliminate all the pillars supporting it. It is the people's liberation."⁴⁸

Interim Executive Council of Karenni State

The Interim Executive Council of Karenni State (IEC) holds the Interim Government's executive power throughout the current revolutionary period. It is responsible for developing a fair, decentralized, and multi-actor⁴⁹ public administration mechanism; strengthening community participation and accountability systems; and, together with other State branches, contributing to the institutionalization of federal democratic practices and the bottom-up state-building process. Furthermore, it coordinates and facilitates the delivery of much-needed humanitarian aid and programs related to education, healthcare, livelihood, and more.

Currently, the IEC is overseen by six Supreme Council members, which exemplifies the collective leadership approach. According to the KSIA, the Supreme Council members are the Chair, Vice Chair 1, Vice Chair 2, General Secretary, Secretary 1, Secretary 2, and Treasurer. Despite the KSIA indicating that the Supreme Council members shall be seven, the Supreme Council members currently consists of six individuals. The Vice Chair 2 position designated for the KNPLF's representative is still vacant since the KNPLF is currently not a member of the KSCC.⁵⁰

47 Esther J, "Karenni ceasefire group announces defection to anti-junta resistance," Myanmar Now, July 3, 2023, <https://myanmar-now.org/en/news/karenni-ceasefire-group-announces-defection-to-anti-junta-resistance/>.

48 Ibid.

49 The multi-actor administration mechanism refers to a system in which the armed and political groups that joined the KSCC are actively involved and represented.

50 Interview with a member of IEC, undisclosed location, March 2024.

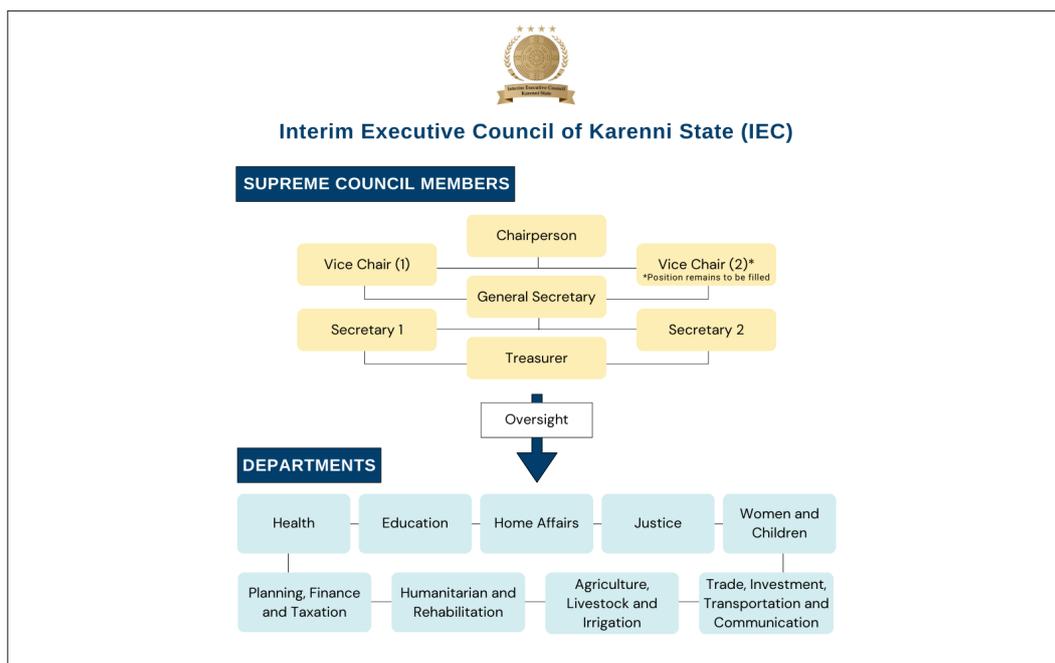


Figure 3: The structure of Interim Executive Council of Karenni State (IEC)

The Supreme Council members will continue working with six individuals, and the KNPLF position will not be assigned to anyone else. The people do not directly elect the IEC members; they are appointed following the KSIA’s provisions: The KSCC nominates the Chair and Vice Chairs, and the Chair selects the General Secretary, the two Secretaries, and the Treasurer, among other figures, with the approval of the KSCC. The IEC Supreme Council members also comply with the KSIA’s policy on gender inclusion, as two of the six members are women.

In addition to the Supreme Council members, the IEC structure currently consists of nine departments: 1) Home Affairs (HAD); 2) Education; 3) Health; 4) Humanitarian and Rehabilitation; 5) Planning, Finance, and Taxation; 6) Women and Children; 7) Justice; 8) Trade, Investment, Transportation and Communication (TITC); and 9) Agriculture, Livestock, and Irrigation. Each department has three sub-departments dealing with specific issues, except for HAD and TITC, which have four sub-departments. Furthermore, the IEC has a Central Office, which provides technical assistance to the

Supreme Council members and the Chairperson. Within the IEC, the Supreme Council members, as well as the Heads and Deputy Heads of the IEC’s departments, are the members who can vote during IEC meetings. Currently, there are 38 voting members of the IEC, and this number will grow as more departments are established.

To establish a representative and legitimate government, it is essential to build efficient and manageable departments while remaining committed to including all stakeholders. This process, which involves negotiations, understanding, and compromise, embodies the essential components of a democratic institution. As mentioned by an IEC member, “[Being] inclusive is sometimes challenging, [but] we can’t leave anyone behind.”⁵¹ For instance, given its sensitive role, the HAD has one Head of Department and four Deputy Heads to include representatives of the main stakeholders, including EROs and the CDM, while respecting the gender representation policy.

The HAD has four sub-departments, each overseen by a HAD Deputy Head: 1) Emergency and Rescue,

51 Interview with a member of IEC, Karenni State, March 2024.

2) Karenni State Police, 3) Public Administration, and 4) Immigration. The Emergency and Rescue sub-department is designed to assess, allocate, and manage safe zones across the State. The Karenni State Police (KSP), established in August 2021 and composed of members of the CDM and newly recruited officers, is in charge of public security and law enforcement in the current areas of the Interim Government's jurisdiction. KSP is a community-based police force that provides essential services through its 585 members across 15 police stations and 10 police guard outposts.⁵² The HAD oversees the KSP as part of the IEC's broader objective to formulate a new democratic framework for Karenni State's rule of law mechanism and its implementation.

Furthermore, the HAD's Public Administration sub-department supervises two additional offices: the Administration Office in 19 townships and the villages/wards and village tracts office. Those offices aim to develop hybrid local governance mechanisms to lay the foundation for the Interim Government's work.

Lastly, the Immigration sub-department is responsible for documenting and assisting IDPs within the State's territory. Karenni State is still heavily affected by the junta's terror campaign against the people, with civilians targeted by airstrikes and artillery shelling, resulting in widespread forced displacement. In response, the IEC has been taking immigration-related actions and developing pilot projects and procedures to monitor and assist the Karenni population. Although the immigration policy has not been approved yet by

the KSCC, the IEC started counting Karenni State's population for the sake of a new identification (ID) card system to facilitate movement within the Interim Government's territory. An IEC Supreme Council member remarked that the imminent immigration practices, including the distribution of new ID cards, aim to assess "the ground situation of IDP[s] and to develop both a short-term and a long-term strategy for Karenni [State's] population. Right now, we are also running transportation for people and monitoring the [Thailand]-Karenni trans-border [mobility]."⁵³ From February to May 2025 and from September to December 2025, possibly to avoid the limitations caused by the rainy season, the IEC intends to carry out the public census to have the exact number of ID cards needed and more detailed information on its population.⁵⁴

Karenni State Interim Parliament

The Karenni State Interim Parliament (KSIP), established on 24 August 2023,⁵⁵ is composed of 15 elected MPs from the 2020 general election from three political parties: the NLD, the KSDP, and the KNP. Directly elected by the Karenni peoples, the KSIP holds the legislative power of the Karenni State Interim Government.

The KSIP, headed by the Chairperson and two Vice Chairpersons, is organized into four departments: the Management and Finance Department; the Affairs Department; the Meetings, Information and Technical Department; and the Legal and Research Department. To represent the peoples' interests, pass laws, and monitor the IEC's activities, the

52 Interim Executive Council of Karenni State, "The Chairman of the Interim Executive Council of Karenni State addresses the Karenni people on the first anniversary of the Inception of Karenni Interim Executive Council," Facebook, June 7, 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=368293349600437&set=pcb.368293456267093>.

53 Interview with a member of IEC, undisclosed location, April 2024.

54 Ibid.

55 KSIP - Karenni State Interim Parliament, "Statement on the Formation of Karenni State Interim Parliament (KSIP)," Facebook, November 17, 2023, <https://web.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=649782877327108&set=pb.100068862054333.-2207520000&type=3>.

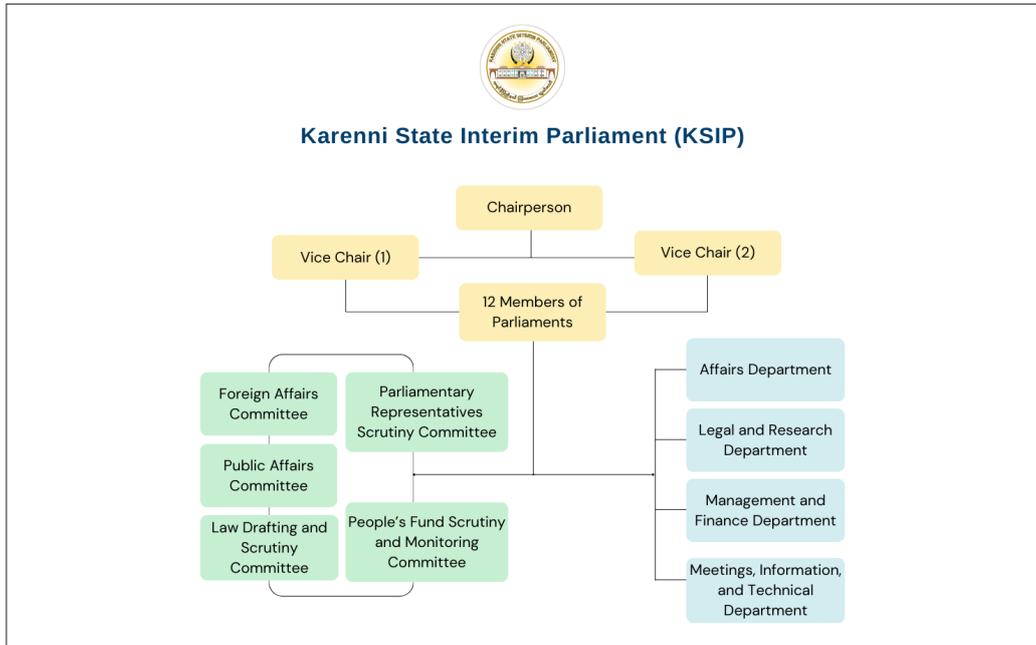


Figure 4: The structure of Karenni State Interim Parliament (KSIP)

KSIP has formed five working committees: the Parliamentary Representatives Scrutiny Committee, the Foreign Affairs Committee, the Law Drafting and Scrutiny Committee, the People’s Fund Scrutiny and Monitoring Committee, and the Public Affairs Committee.⁵⁶

Karenni State’s interim bodies are strongly interconnected without overlapping. One clear example is the relation between, and different roles of, the KSCC and the KSIP. The KSCC, among other aspects of its work, is a policy-making body, while the KSIP is a law-making body. Both interim institutions shall implement their activities in line with the KSIA. Not only is the work of the two bodies interconnected—as exemplified by the process of enacting a law, which is described below—but so are the representative members in specific committees. For instance, the KSIP Chairperson is a member of the KSCC’s Political Dialogue Committee. The presence of one of the highest authorities of the Interim Government enhances the credibility of the Political Dialogue Committee as one of the

key reconciliation mechanisms implemented by the KSCC to negotiate and build unity among Karenni stakeholders.

Regarding the legal framework under which the KSIP develops its activities, it is relevant to underline a shortcoming. The KSIP is not able to meet the KSIA’s 30 percent women’s representation requirement because, to represent the Karenni peoples legitimately, the members are exclusively selected from the MPs elected in the 2020 general election. Because of this unique makeup, the KSCC, in charge of monitoring the respect of the KSIA, approved the composition of the KSIP despite the shortcoming in gender representation. Currently, the KSIP has only three women out of 15 members, or 20 percent women’s representation, and for its nature it cannot accept any new member to meet the KSIA’s policy. But, as mentioned by one female KSIP member, “In both the Bill Committee and Working Committees, the majority [of the] seats are occupied by women.”⁵⁷

56 Karenni State Consultative Council-KSCC, “ကရင်နီပြည်အတိုင်ပင်ခံကောင်စီ (KSCC) ဖွဲ့စည်းခြင်း (၃) နှစ်ပြည့် လူထုအစီရင်ခံစာတင်ပြခြင်းနှင့် ဝက်ဘ်ဆိုဒ် လွှင့်တင်ခြင်း” Facebook, April 9, 2024, <https://web.facebook.com/100069442572761/posts/744194841238595/?mibextid=xfxF2i&rdid=OGbPsvZR8UEkUK4w>

57 Interview with a member of KSIP, undisclosed location, March 2024.

As the state legislative body, the KSIP is primarily responsible for making laws. Throughout the post-failed coup revolutionary period, the enactment of a law in Karenni State is based on standardized and multi-stakeholder procedures. According to the KSIA, the KSIP, the IEC, and the Head of Supreme Court⁵⁸ are the actors who can propose bills. The KSIP Speaker can then form a specific Bill Drafting Committee, usually composed of MPs and representatives of EROs, CSOs, women's and youth groups, and tribes. Under Section 50 of the KSIA, "Laws, orders and notifications necessary for implementation of the [KSIA] shall be drafted in close coordination with the pre-existing laws, administration and judiciary system of the ethnic revolutionary organizations."⁵⁹

It is relevant to note that each law is initially drafted by a team of technical experts before it reaches the Bill Drafting Committee. At this stage, all the actors eligible to propose bills can assign the initial draft of the law to a team of experts. For instance, the Karenni State Police Law was first drafted by a group of experts both inside and outside the country. Once the draft bill is proposed and the Bill Drafting Committee is formed, the Committee begins reviewing the proposed law before sending it to the KSIP. Following the review of the KSIP, a back-and-forth dialogue ensues with the KSCC. The KSIP is obliged to consult with the KSCC on the proposed bill before moving forward to ensure that it is in line with the KSIA. The KSIP can approve the proposed law only after receiving the final approval from the KSCC. The final stage in enacting a Karenni law requires the IEC Chairperson to sign the KSIP-approved draft bill within 14 days, thereby enacting the law.

The laws passed by the KSIP and signed by the

IEC Chairperson take immediate effect in the administrative areas of Karenni's four historic regions of Kantarawadi, Kyebogyi, Bawlake, and Moebye. In defining the step-by-step law-making process, the KSIA expands the legislative activities of the Karenni interim bodies by framing them within the nationwide movement for federal democracy: "While laws can be freely enacted during the interim period in line with the Karenni State Interim Arrangement, they shall not contradict the provisions of the Federal Democratic Charter."⁶⁰

While systematic and democratic mechanisms, based on collectively agreed principles and international standards, are fundamental for the establishment of a legitimate Interim Government, as well as the future federal state of Karenni, it is often the case that the current emergency conditions on the ground require urgent responses and immediate implementation before policies can be formalized. As elucidated by an IEC Supreme Council members member, "Given the nature of policy, which necessitates a long period of formulation and implementation, it is inevitable that policy will always lag behind implementation."⁶¹

In this context, the Interim Government developed a series of formal and informal procedures anticipating future policies to avoid any vacuum in the administration of liberated areas. The Terms of Reference (ToR), as well as EROs' policies and long-standing and commonly shared local practices, contribute to the foundation and the first stage of the future laws. These procedures provide guidance where the KSIP has not yet legislated. Following an assessment of the results of informal implementation, the branches of the Interim Government may propose policy recommendations

58 In the KSIA, this Head of Supreme Court refers to the Chief Justice of the State.

59 Interim Arrangements of Karenni State, Chapter 7, Section 50, page 31.

60 Interim Arrangements of Karenni State, Chapter 7, Section 55, page 34.

61 Interview with a member of IEC, Karenni State, March 2024.

to institutionalize these procedures. For example, although the Interim Government has not yet elaborated a law on taxation, EROs have their own policies that can be temporarily applied as guidance. As explained by an IEC member, “Each armed group, such as the KNPP, KNPLF, and KNDF, has its own tax policy or practices. In order to respond to the current situation in a practical manner, we have combined the policies of these armed groups. In this manner, we are able to advance.”⁶²

Karenni State Interim Judiciary

The Karenni State Interim Judiciary (KSIJ) is the independent judicial authority of the Interim Government. It comprises the Supreme Court, the District Courts—which include local and regional courts of the EROs—and Township Courts.

The interim judiciary system of Karenni State is interwoven with pre-existing local judicial structures. It acknowledges the legitimacy of the EROs’ judicial systems and courts, and it permits local traditional laws and judicial practices to be incorporated into the current system in instances where they do not contravene human rights. At the time of this writing, there are two district courts and five township courts operating across the Interim Government’s territory, which spans Karenni State and southern Shan State. Among the five township courts, two of them are under the authority of the Interim Government, while three others are under the KNPP. Additionally, one district court is under the authority of the Interim Government, while the other is under the KNPP. A total of nine judges preside over the five township courts, and they have recruited staff members to assist them in their duties.⁶³

As the Interim Government, together with the KSCC, is in the process of developing new legislation, the current interim judicial system continues to apply pre-attempted-coup laws only when they are in line with the principles and provisions of the KSIA. On the rule of law, a Karenni legal expert clarified, “Right now we are still applying the existing law at [all] court [levels]. If those laws are in contrast with the Interim Arrangement, we make amendments to apply it.”⁶⁴

The EROs are responsible for the administration of their respective courts. However, in instances where a case exceeds the jurisdiction of the district or township levels, the KSIJ’s Supreme Court assumes jurisdiction of the case. The civilian and military courts of all armed forces under the KSCC, including the KNPP, KNSO, KNPDP, and KNDF, are subject to the guidance and authority of the Supreme Court. Under the interim judiciary system, both military and civilian judicial systems are to be maintained as distinct entities. Furthermore, crimes committed by military personnel against civilians are to be heard and prosecuted exclusively in civilian courts.

The Supreme Court is the highest court of Karenni State. According to the KSIA, the Supreme Court can be formed by three to five judges. At the time of this writing, the Supreme Court is led by the Chief Judge, appointed by the IEC Chairperson, and two judges. The Supreme Court comprises three departments: the Investigation and Prosecution Department, which is responsible for preparing the courtroom, working on the court process, and maintaining case files and trial documents; the Management and Financial Department; and the Law and Research Department.

62 Interview with a member of IEC, Karenni State, March 2024.

63 Karenni State Consultative Council-KSCC, “ကရင်နီပြည်အတိုင်ပင်ခံကောင်စီ (KSCC) ဖွဲ့စည်းခြင်း (၃) နှစ်ပြည့် လူထုအစီရင်ခံစာတင်ပြခြင်း နှင့် ဝက်ဘ်ဆိုဒ် လွှင့်တင်ခြင်း,” Facebook, April 9, 2024, <https://web.facebook.com/100069442572761/posts/744194841238595/?mibextid=xfF2i&rdid=OGbPsvZR8UEkUK4w>.

64 Interview with a Karenni technical expert and KSCC member, Karenni State, March 2024.

According to the KSIA, the Supreme Court has jurisdiction over criminal cases involving disputes between “tribal groups or different ethnicities,”⁶⁵ as well as appeals of criminal convictions and cases transferred between courts. Furthermore, the Court shall have the authority to hear disputes regarding the KSIA, matters involving writs, and cases of treason against the revolution.

Between June 2023 and March 2024, the District and Township Courts collectively received 93 case files, with 79 cases having been processed, and 14 cases remains under consideration as of this writing. The cases that have been received include murder, drug offences, anti-terrorism, rape, unlawful association, fugitive warrants, fraud, and vandalism.⁶⁶

The decades-long legacy of military regimes in the country has had a profound impact on the public’s perception of the judicial system. As explained by a Karenni legal expert supporting the development of the KSIJ, “When we collaborate with the public to promote the rule of law, it is evident that the general perception of the court is that it is an institution that should not be trusted. [...] There is still a lack of awareness among the general public regarding the availability of assistance and justice from the court.”⁶⁷

In a time of rebuilding and reforming public institutions and a society based on the rule of law, the KSIJ faces the challenge of establishing a just court system with public cooperation. According to the same Karenni legal expert, “It is necessary to implement further measures to encourage greater participation and collaboration from the general public.”⁶⁸ For this reason, the KSIJ engages in the dissemination of information and the provision of public education with the objectives of keeping

the public apprised of current developments and introducing them to the existing courts and their operational procedures.

Accountability, Responsibility, and Transparency

The Interim Government has demonstrated a consistent and unwavering dedication to integrating the principles of Accountability, Responsibility, and Transparency (ART) into its operational framework. This commitment is particularly remarkable given the ever-growing humanitarian, economic, and human rights crisis created and exacerbated by the junta’s terror campaign against civilians and the complexity of organizing and coordinating an armed liberation front.

The principle of accountability is central to the Karenni interim institutions. The KSCC plays a critical role in maintaining checks and balances among the different branches of the Interim Government, ensuring their correct functioning in accordance with the KSIA. The KSCC’s collective leadership requires its members to fulfill their duties not as individuals but as representatives of their respective organizations, fostering a sense of collective accountability. The KSIP is composed exclusively of MPs who were directly elected by the Karenni peoples in the 2020 general election. Their elected status reinforces the people’s trust in the Interim Parliament. The KSIP further embodies accountability through its systematic and democratic legislative procedures, which ensure that all laws undergo multiple pre-defined legal processes, adhering to people-centric principles.

Ultimately, the KSIA delineates the mechanisms and procedures to be implemented in the event that members of the Interim Government contravene

65 Interim Arrangements of Karenni State, Chapter 8, Section 67, page 40.

66 Ibid.

67 Interview with a Karenni technical expert and KSCC member, Karenni State, March 2024.

68 Ibid.

the rules and regulations set forth by the KSIA. These KSIA articles aim to ensure institutional accountability to the Karenni peoples by outlining specific actions, such as creating commissions for emergency investigations to adjudicate alleged misconduct. The Karenni State Supreme Court is the only judicial authority competent to address cases of suspected misconduct.⁶⁹

The Interim Government's approach to responsibility reflects its long-term political vision. This vision is built on bureaucratic procedures, legal frameworks, and detailed rules and regulations. Its goal is to establish federal democratic institutions that support a pluralistic and representative system. In doing so, the Interim Government recognizes the spiraling humanitarian catastrophe as part of the current socio-political context, which demands a flexible, immediate, and responsive approach to be implemented through grassroots emergency actors and multi-sectoral coordination with EROs, CSOs, local administrators, and international partners. A significant example of responsibility has been implemented by the IEC. Given the decades-long inter-ethnic political division imposed by the military, the IEC has renounced a potentially divisive formula for governance, i.e., "a single-person Prime Minister model." Instead, it has formed a Supreme Council members based on a collective leadership approach that ensures a multi-stakeholder representative model in which different ethnic-based political actors can equally participate. This approach also serves as a political safeguard against potential authoritarian threats.

Lastly, transparency is another cornerstone of

the Interim Government's approach. The Interim Government engages in regular in-person and online communication with the public to share updates on its current situation, achievements, challenges, and financial status. Furthermore, through the IEC's HAD, the Interim Government is in the process of establishing the first-ever village, village tract, and township administration system in which Karenni peoples are not only represented but directly involved in the multi-level governance mechanisms. This contrasts with the military regimes, as well as the NLD-led government, in which public administrators were mainly selected by the General Administration Department, which was under the military-controlled Ministry of Home Affairs.⁷⁰ A further principle of transparency is set forth in the KSIA's Chapter 1, Section 6(b). It requires all stakeholders seeking to join the KSCC, and thus the common revolutionary front, to publicly declare their stance against the junta. In this way, the KSIA aims to preclude the use of double-dealing tactics and to prevent any undisclosed participation that would further obscure the work of the KSCC.

The Interim Government's dedication to the ART principles enables it to address the immediate needs of the Karenni peoples while simultaneously establishing a sustainable and democratic foundation for the future federal Karenni State. The integration of these principles into the Interim Government's *modus operandi* exemplifies its commitment to adhering to international standards and to developing a legitimate, inclusive, and trusted political system. Such a system could serve as a model for other territories in Myanmar.

⁶⁹ Interim Arrangements of Karenni State, Chapter 5, Section 35, page 24.

⁷⁰ "Grassroots Democracy: Analysis of the Ward or Village Tract Administration Law," Action Committee for Democracy Development and Progressive Voice, May 13, 2018, <https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/2018/05/13/grassroots-democracy-analysis-of-the-ward-or-village-tract-administration-law/>.

Karenni Model of Governance

This final section explains the analytical framework developed to clarify the Karenni interim governance model. This emerging governance system in Karenni State, conceptualized in this paper as the multi-level inclusive governance system (MIGS), is examined here through four specific lenses: legitimacy, inclusivity, hybridity, and sustainability. Each lens is explored through two specific indicators.

- **Legitimacy:** How are people represented at village, village tract, and township levels? How do people participate in the current bottom-up governance?
- **Inclusivity:** How are women and ethnic minority communities represented at each level of governance? To what extent are there policies to facilitate the participation of women, youth, and ethnic minority communities in the emerging system?
- **Hybridity:** How does emerging bottom-up governance function in a territory with multiple

ethnic-based pre-existing administrative structures? How do newly established local governance systems, based in areas historically outside the EROs’ direct influence and control, interact with pre-existing administrations?

- **Sustainability:** How does emerging bottom-up governance facilitate the political reconciliation process of Karenni society from decades-long military-imposed divisions? To what extent does the Karenni governance facilitate a more horizontal—rather than top-down—relationship among different social and political actors?

As the unique Karenni governance model, the MIGS encompasses a comprehensive and intricate process that has emerged over the past three years. This ongoing process involves two key aspects: integrating the newly established bottom-up governance units, formed after the 2021 coup attempt, with the EROs’ existing administrations, and transforming these structures into more representative and standardized systems grounded

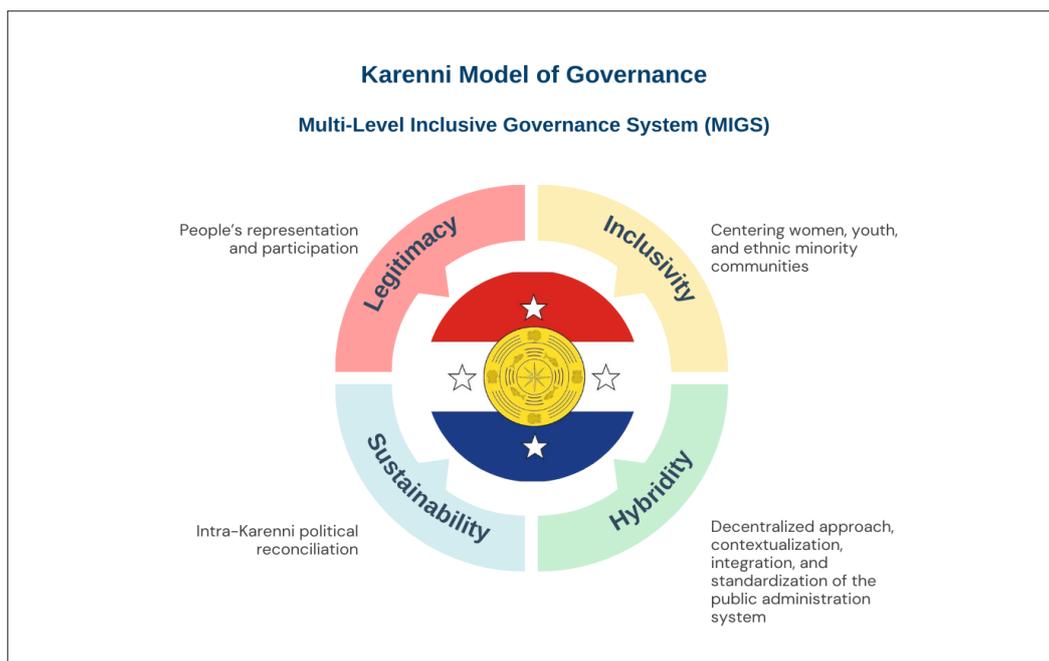


Figure 5: The Karenni Model of Governance

in the rule of law. The MIGS navigates the historical and contemporary challenges of developing a legitimate and trusted governance system in Karenni State through its inclusive, multi-actor, and decentralized approach. As summarized by the IEC Vice Chairperson, Khun Bedu, “We are not only including armed groups; we are also trying to involve Members of Parliament [and all other stakeholders] at every level [...]. All stakeholders come together at every [governance] level to create a multi-level inclusive governance system.”⁷¹

Legitimacy: People’s representation and participation

Legitimacy in the MIGS is based on the direct representation and participation of all Karenni peoples in the local administration mechanisms. This community-centric approach ensures the people’s active engagement in the Karenni governance system, fosters collective trust, and reinforces the perceived authority and legitimacy of the interim governing bodies as they are rooted in the people’s involvement and consent.

As noted by Rana Khalaf, “Legitimacy refers to ‘a complex set of beliefs, values and institutions [...] about the social compact governing state–society relations.’”⁷² Legitimacy itself entails two intertwined dimensions. One arises from complex dynamics of power, responsibility, and obligation. The other is rooted in local principles centered on historical community-based practices and customary laws. The process of building, claiming, and owning legitimacy from the population cannot be separated from people’s representation and participation, which are fundamental to the establishment of any legal and democratic space.

The compositions of the public administrative mechanisms outlined below demonstrate an

emerging participatory governance model in Karenni State based on a grassroots community-centric approach. In the MIGS, people’s participation, and so their representation, is not only accepted or encouraged; it is vital for the functioning of the Karenni governance system.

In the MIGS, the people’s representation is characterized by its participatory and people-oriented approach. At the village and village tract levels, representatives are typically elected by community consensus during public meetings, whereas in EROs’ strongholds, representatives may be indirectly elected among ERO-nominated candidates. Township-level governance is overseen by Township Administrative Councils (TACs), including ERO-nominated and public-elected representatives, with the latter comprising the majority.

Furthermore, people participate in this bottom-up governance through inclusive and community-driven approaches. The formation of the Interim Government and its administrative structures enable local communities to manage their own territories directly. Participation is facilitated through public consultations, community mobilization, and regular meetings with diverse groups such as youth, women, religious leaders, and local political parties. This engagement ensures that people’s voices are integral to the decision-making processes of the public administration system, which will strengthen the Interim Government’s accountability to the people.

The current hybrid system for public administration, which combines bottom-up approaches and collaboration between civilians and resistance forces, allows local communities to participate in and be represented within the administration. A key element of community trust towards the newly

71 Interview with a member of IEC, undisclosed location, April 2024.

72 Rana Khalaf, “Governance without Government in Syria: Civil Society and State Building during Conflict,” June 16, 2015. <http://ojs.st-andrews.ac.uk/index.php/syria/article/view/1176>.

formed Interim Government is the reappropriation of administrative agency by local communities within their territories, as described below. This process, which was already in place in the ERO-controlled areas, drastically expanded its reach following the liberation of the majority of the Karenni State in the aftermath of the military junta's failed coup.

As elucidated by a recently appointed local administrator, "Before the coup, people did not have chances to participate in the administration. Outsiders came to our state to manage our issues. They did not know what we wanted or what we needed. They did not even know the situation on the ground. After the coup, we set up our own administration. People have the opportunity to participate in managing their own issues, in their own territory."⁷³

Local communities are reappropriating administrative agency first by being directly involved in the emerging structure of local governance at the village, village tract, and township levels. Only when those local structures are truly inclusive and representative can communities feel genuinely empowered and engaged in the governance process.

The formation process of Karenni grassroots administration at the village and village tract levels varies based on the context. In most cases, the local representatives have been directly elected by community consensus. For instance, a local administrator in West Pruso observed, "In regard to the electoral process, we requested that the villagers attend and cast their votes for the community representatives. Consequently, a public meeting was convened at which the list of representatives was announced, and the villagers were then able to vote for them."⁷⁴ In contrast, if

the territory has a historical presence of EROs, the local administrators are selected by an indirect election among representatives nominated by EROs instead of the public-elected representative composition.

Commenting on the process of establishing the village-level administration, a member of the IEC's HAD stated, "At the village level, the administration structures were not entirely destroyed by the junta, allowing us to maintain and support the elected administrators in the villages. We didn't need to put a lot of effort, nor did we need to make drastic changes at the village level. Furthermore, we wanted to recognize pre-existing institutions. We will not impose new administrations if people are already satisfied with the existing one. We will not enforce our agenda as we like. The majority of villages have retained their own administrative structures."⁷⁵ At the village tract level, the situation is relatively more complicated. Ineffective administrative mechanisms have been documented in various areas. To comply with the relevant guidelines, multiple village-tract administrations were required by the IEC to hold new elections for administrators, deputy administrators, and secretaries.

Furthermore, the IEC's ongoing process of establishing a township-level administration system requires the formation of TACs. TACs generally comprise seven to nine members, including one representative from each ERO active in the specific township. The remaining seats are reserved for representatives elected by the people. In most townships, TACs are formed by three ERO representatives and six elected representatives. TACs are led by a Chair, Vice-Chair, General Secretary, Secretary 1, and Secretary 2, and they work through a series of multisectoral sub-committees focused mainly on

73 Interview with a local administrator, Karenni State, March 2024.

74 Ibid.

75 Interview with a member of IEC, Karenni State, March 2024.

education, humanitarian assistance, healthcare, and public safety.⁷⁶

People's participation and representation in public affairs are also evident in the inclusion of their voices within the local- and state-level decision-making processes. In this context, the Interim Government's and KSCC's community outreach has been a fundamental aspect of the operations of the recently established public administration. Since its formation, the Interim Government has conducted public consultations and community mobilization efforts involving multiple groups, including youth, women, religious leaders, local political parties, community elders, and other respected community members. Furthermore, ownership in the MIGS model is embodied by the community's active role in electing representatives and participating in local governance structures. This ensures that the governance system is not only accepted but also actively shaped by the people. Across Karenni State, "Hundreds of public meetings have been held."⁷⁷

Furthermore, TACs' multisectoral sub-committees, as well as village and village tract administrators, work closely with CSOs to deliver much-needed public services to local communities and IDPs. The active involvement of CSOs in public administration is crucial for responding to the overwhelming needs of conflict-affected communities and filling the temporary gaps of these newly established governance mechanisms, including limited funding, resources, and human capacity. As explained by a local administrator in East Demawso, "We have monthly meetings with representatives of [community-based organizations], CSOs, and NGOs to discuss and analyze the situation and to formulate our action

plan. If we determine that the villages in question require support, the local organizations are informed and proceed with the implementation of the agreed project."⁷⁸

Inclusivity: Centering women, youth, and ethnic minority communities

In the context of Myanmar's ongoing crisis, the inclusivity demonstrated by the Karenni governance system could serve as a national blueprint. In a bottom-up, multidimensional revolution that takes an inter-class, cross-sectoral, and intersectional approach, the commitment of newly formed and long-established governance structures to include marginalized populations in decision-making is a key indicator of their legitimacy and ability to meet the needs of all social groups. The Karenni revolutionary front has moved beyond informal practices to officially transform specific inclusive approaches into mandatory policies within the KSIA.

On 6 June 2024, the IEC's first anniversary, IEC Chairperson Khu Oo Reh stated, "The Interim Executive Council is putting together and building a governance system that is all-inclusive and in accordance with fundamental values such as 'unity, collective leadership and collective decision-making, transparency, responsibility and accountability, recognition of diversity and minority rights, and ensuring and strengthening women's participation.'"⁷⁹

The Karenni process-based model of inclusion finds its most important pillar for inclusive federalism in Section 4(e) and 4(f) of the KSIA, which ensures "[A]t least 30 percent women's participation in the state interim legislative,

76 Interview with a member of IEC, Karenni State, March 2024.

77 Interview with a member of IEC, Karenni State, March 2024.

78 Interview with a local administrator, Karenni State, March 2024.

79 Interim Executive Council of Karenni State, "The Chairman of the Interim Executive Council of Karenni State addresses the Karenni people on the first anniversary of the Inception of Karenni Interim Executive Council," Facebook, June 7, 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=368293312933774&set=pcb.368293456267093>.

executive, and judicial branches,” to create “equality without discrimination based on race, religion, sexuality, diversity, and vulnerability status during the interim period.”⁸⁰ It is relevant to mention that the KSIA’s quota for women’s participation is a remarkable and unprecedented policy in Myanmar’s governance history.

Furthermore, according to a local administrator from East Demawso, in addition to adhering to the KSIA, there is a systematic practice of verifying and affirming the geographical representation of members within the governance structures: “With the term ‘inclusion,’ we refer to the process of including women, minorities, and individuals from diverse geographical locations.”⁸¹

The multidimensional Karenni Revolution is strongly aligned with the nationwide Spring Revolution, including its long-term gender equality goal to “fight against the mindset of patriarchy and excuses that prolong the military junta.”⁸² The Karenni process-based model of inclusion has challenged the “stereotypical gender norms that undermined the skills and capabilities of women,”⁸³ according to Karenni Human Rights Group. However, structural barriers rooted in traditional gender norms still exist, hindering women’s participation. In this regard, a local administrator in West Pruso stated, “It is very difficult for me as a woman to join meetings; we have to drive ourselves. I don’t know how to drive. It is difficult for me. I have to look after my children, and sometimes I have family emergencies at home. But I always try my best.”⁸⁴

A KSIP member remarked, “[genuine inclusion of women] is still challenging; participation and decision-making [agency] are not the same.”⁸⁵ They further explained, “It is of the utmost importance that women are equally recognized and appreciated. Without women’s participation and empowerment, there is a risk of another authoritarian male domination emerging in the future. This is because power is established by the possession of guns and money. The majority of men possess guns, while women are leading the administration. However, people tend to focus on the gun holders rather than the administrators.”⁸⁶ This highlights a broader systemic issue: Women in Karenni State are marginalized by their male counterparts who dominate decision-making processes. Women holding comparable positions to their male counterparts are systematically excluded from gaining more influential roles, perpetuating gender inequality and hindering genuine progress toward inclusive governance.

Despite commendable efforts to ensure inclusion and representation of the entire population, more steps need to be taken to actively establish an inclusive society where marginalized groups, such as the LGBTQIA+ community, people with disabilities, and ethnic and religious minorities, are represented and included in all social, economic, and political levels. While policies and legal frameworks are essential to shift from the military’s decades-long misogynistic, patriarchal vision of Myanmar society, equally crucial is the commitment to implement and enforce those

80 Interim Arrangements of Karenni State, Section 4, articles (e) and (f).

81 Interview with a local administrator, Karenni State, March 2024.

82 Women’s League of Burma (WLB), “On this International Women’s Day, we would like to salute women’s heroes who have sacrificed their lives for the revolution to establish the federal democratic union of Burma,” Facebook, March 8, 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=210716115466677>.

83 Karenni Human Rights Group, “On International Women’s Day, the Karenni Human Rights Group calls for Recognition and Support of Women’s Leadership,” Facebook, March 8, 2024, <https://shorturl.at/dGZKC>.

84 Interview with a local administrator, Karenni State, March 2024.

85 Interview with a member of KSIP, undisclosed location, March 2024.

86 Ibid.

policies and frameworks, as well as to address social, cultural, and religious barriers to genuine inclusion of all peoples.

Hybridity: Decentralized approach, contextualization, integration, and standardization of the public administration system

The Karenni governance model is a hybrid system, combining bottom-up and top-down approaches, characterized by four leading features: a decentralized approach, contextualization, integration, and standardization.

The emerging governance architecture in Karenni State aims to coordinate the EROs' existing administrations through decentralized political and administrative authority. It also supports new bottom-up administrative mechanisms in areas that have historically been outside the direct influence and control of the EROs.

The effectiveness of power sharing in the current context has been highlighted by the IEC Secretary 2. During the IEC's first anniversary celebration, he stated, "We want to have a strong administration in our Karenni State, so we want to establish smaller townships to streamline this process. These will be our interim administration townships. When we enter the transition period, we will reform Karenni State with the relevant townships again. We are attempting to implement a bottom-up federalism and governance approach."⁸⁷

This decentralized approach facilitates the development of a more effective and far-reaching Karenni administration, particularly in the provision of lifesaving aid, education, and civilian protection. It also affirms greater legitimacy and support

from different internal actors while establishing a more comprehensive and coordinated system. Furthermore, it helps overcome some practical issues and historical military-imposed divisions among local communities and armed and political actors. Notably, the decentralized approach serves to prevent the imposition of a single ethnic group's influence, perspective, or will, which could lead to oppression and discrimination against ethnic communities, replicating the "Burmanization" process with other groups and sub-groups.

Given the EROs' longstanding history of armed struggle against military tyranny and governance of their territories, most of the EROs in Karenni State have established public administration systems intrinsically connected with community-based actors. The majority of these EROs have adopted state-like structures, with different departments for each specific sector, including education, healthcare, defense, and international relations. For decades, "large populations of the country have been subjected to overlapping forms of localized authority completely independent from the central state."⁸⁸

In this context, the MIGS's contextualization of decentralized approach refers to the process of decentralizing governance to specific actors based on local dynamics and the characteristics of specific territories. These elements include history, culture, political authority, and local EROs, which have already earned consent and legitimacy from local communities.

In particular, the IEC's HAD, which is responsible for implementing the public administration system across the state, recognizes the EROs' pre-existing administrations. In cases where it is necessary to establish a new public administration structure, it

87 IEC Administers Eight Townships in Karenni State," Kantarawaddy Times, June 9, 2024, <https://ktnews.org/iec-administers-eight-townships-in-karenni-state/>.

88 Kim Jolliffe, Contested political authority in post-coup Myanmar, Myanmar in Crisis, edited by Justine Chambers and Micheal R. Dunford, page 126.

coordinates the structure's formation and delegates the governing authority to the local ERO(s). As explained by an IEC member, "We have to meet and discuss carefully with all EROs, regardless of their size, to ensure no one is left behind. It is crucial that we respect and recognize the existing body of ethnic armed groups, as well as the voice of the people."⁸⁹

For instance, in Mese Township, two EROs—the KNPP and KNPLF—have a historical presence, and both claim political authority over the territory. Consequently, these two EROs have established a joint administration committee (JAC), a coordination mechanism to administer and govern not only their respective areas of influence but the entire township. Mawchi Township follows a similar pattern of decentralized multi-actor governance with two different EROs: the KNPP and KNSO, also known as the "White Star." The coordination mechanisms are not limited to township-level structures; they also extend to smaller areas. For example, in Ywar Thit Town, Bawlake Township, the KNPP and KNPLF have been negotiating to form a JAC. All are examples of cooperation among different EROs, proving that a multi-actor-driven approach is essential to assist the population amid the current junta-caused humanitarian disaster. Furthermore, this cooperation has enhanced the trust-building process by fostering collaboration, transparency, and mutual understanding among EROs.

However, as briefly articulated by an IEC member, "Decentralizing is not enough."⁹⁰ In a country with a historically highly fragmented socio-political landscape, unbalanced decentralization has several risks. These include the deterioration of a sense of shared identity, the exacerbation

of inter-community conflicts and divisions, the intensification of differences that could impede equal access to public services, and the proliferation of overlapping authority and responsibilities.⁹¹ To address these risks, the hybrid Karenni governance system encompasses two characteristics that facilitate the de facto establishment of a balanced multi-actor decentralization system: integration and standardization.

In the context of the Karenni governance system, the integration characteristic is employed to describe two distinct processes. The first process is the integration of multiple EROs' pre-existing mechanisms of administration into the newly established Interim administration, which is led by a collective leadership. The second process is the integration of publicly elected representatives into all types of administration, including EROs' structures. All governance mechanisms must be formed with a majority presence of civilian representatives to counterbalance the military representatives appointed within the ERO structures. The standardization of the Karenni governance model is inextricably linked to the double-level integration. It refers to the attempt to standardize the administration structure at village, village tract, and township levels across the entire state.

All the administrations that fall under the umbrella of the IEC—both newly established bottom-up units and pre-existing administration structures of the EROs that joined the KSCC—are compelled to adhere to the standardized guidelines set out by the IEC. This encompasses a set of pre-determined requirements, composition, and structure. For instance, all the township-level administrations are composed of seven to nine members. A common

⁸⁹ Interview with a member of IEC, Karenni State, March 2024.

⁹⁰ Interview with a member of IEC, Karenni State, March 2024.

⁹¹ Bulmer, Elliot. "Federalism, International IDEA Constitution-Building Primer 12," Stockholm: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2017), <https://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/federalism>.

configuration includes three representatives appointed by each of the active EROs in the township and four representatives, who form the majority, elected by the local community.

For instance, as described by a local administrator in Demawso, after the failed coup, a local KNPP-led administration was run by 11 committee members.⁹² However, to align with the ongoing standardization process, it was necessary to transform the committee into a smaller structure of nine members. It was not feasible to maintain the previous composition, as it would have led to inconsistency with the structure of other townships.

In conclusion, the hybridity of the Karenni MIGS system combines this decentralized approach, contextualization, integration, and standardization to form a unique model responsive to the State's history and socio-political landscape. Decentralization empowers local actors and fosters legitimacy by distributing administrative authority across locally led units at the village, village tract, and township levels. Contextualization ensures that governance adapts to the specific needs and dynamics of each territory, including recognizing the EROs' pre-existing structures and local authorities, which strengthens cooperation and trust among all Karenni stakeholders. Double-level integration harmonizes the diverse administrative mechanisms while embedding civilian representation to balance the EROs' influence. Finally, standardization provides a consistent governance framework across all levels, ensuring efficiency and coherence of administrative mechanisms and structures throughout Karenni State to build a unified interim administration.

The ultimate objective of the MIGS's hybrid approach is to facilitate establishing a systematic and institutionalized public administration system

that could provide a framework for the post-revolutionary federal state-building process, not only within Karenni State but also more broadly across Myanmar.

Sustainability: Intra-Karenni political reconciliation

To ensure the long-term sustainability of the emerging Karenni governance, it is crucial to initiate a political reconciliation process that involves multiple sectors and systems. This process should address the divisions imposed by the military over decades and promote unity within Karenni's multicultural society. It must also foster cooperation, trust-building, and transitional justice among Karenni's ethnic groups and sub-groups, political parties, and local communities. This inclusive, decentralized governance model promotes collaboration across various sectors, including administration and security, helping to reduce fragmentation. By promoting equality and collaboration, it aims to dismantle the top-down military hierarchy, creating a more horizontal relationship among social and political actors, thus fostering unity and preventing future intra-ethnic conflict. Furthermore, the sustainability of the Karenni governance model is also ensured through a process-centered approach, which prioritizes collective responsibility and institutional resilience over individual leadership, thereby enhancing stability and adaptability within Myanmar's challenging political landscape.

In the past three years, multiple cooperation mechanisms have been set up among most EROs across various sectors. These include the Joint Administration Committee in Mese, Mawchi, and Ywar Thit Towns; the collective Loikaw Town Emergency Management Committee;⁹³ and the joint border security team responsible

⁹² Interview with a local administrator, Karenni State, March 2024.

⁹³ Interview with a member of IEC, undisclosed location, April 2024.

for protecting the recently liberated Shadaw Township.⁹⁴ Most Karenni EROs and revolutionary forces, including the KNPP, KNPLF, KNSO, and KNDF, have actively engaged in these joint initiatives. These governance and security joint mechanisms are developing a more interconnected society and gradually fostering a sense of unity.

In light of the existing ground presence of various EROs and newly formed revolutionary forces, the process of reconciliation must necessarily pass through joint agreements and alliances that reduce the fragmentation of armed actors to achieve a joint chain of command. This highly complex process requires a strong level of trust among historically divided forces, a shared social and political vision of the future, and the addressing of past intra-communities and intra-group grievances.

A member of the IEC explained, “We are currently engaged in informal discussions with the objective of establishing a joint agreement. It is important to note that the formation of such a coordination network requires a significant investment of time and resources. Once this initial stage is complete, our objective is to establish stable alliances. To this end, we have initiated regular meetings to discuss the political and military dimensions of our coordination activities. Based on the outcomes of these discussions, we have proposed the formation of a collective military chain of command, led by a joint chief committee. This structure would enable us to establish the IEC defense ministry department. Meetings are already happening, and hopefully, we will be able to achieve it soon.”⁹⁵

At the leadership level, a series of successful meetings and negotiation initiatives have led the majority of Karenni-based EROs to participate

in the Interim Government. In addition, negotiations between the KSCC, the KNPLF, KNLP, and NLD—the three main actors that have not yet joined the Interim Government—are still ongoing. Furthermore, the reconciliation process has a bottom-up dimension that aims to foster community-led social cohesion within the multi-ethnic society, especially through vital collaboration between public administrations, local communities, and CSOs. The inclusive and multi-actor governance model has created the necessary space for the development of a multi-level reconciliation process that attempts to dismantle the top-down military-imposed hierarchical vision of the society in order to establish a more horizontal and equal relationship among local actors in Karenni State.

Establishing a horizontal, non-hierarchical relationship between different actors facilitates the development of a more harmonious society and drastically decreases the probability of future conflicts between armed forces. While expressing concern regarding the number of armed forces operating within his territory and the potential for conflict between them, a local administrator stated, “People want [the] IEC to control this [situation] to prevent further oppression. It will be worse if the different armed groups go against each other. Because there are different armed resistance groups in our area, our people will be trapped in the conflict. Therefore, the people demand that all armed forces are united and collaborate together.”⁹⁶

Furthermore, the sustainability of the Karenni governance model is intrinsically linked to its process-centered approach, which stands in contrast to an individual-based framework. This perspective is explained by a member of the IEC,

94 “KA, KNDF Form Security Force for Shadaw Township,” Kantarawaddy Times, May 5, 2024, <https://ktnews.org/ka-kndf-form-security-force-for-shadaw-township/>.

95 Interview with a member of IEC, undisclosed location, April 2024.

96 Interview with a local administrator, Karenni State, March 2024.

who emphasized that the durability of Karenni governance lies fundamentally in the process itself. Key political actors are actively constructing the interim governance system, thereby reducing dependency on individual leaders. According to a member of the IEC, “It’s not about leaders, but about building the process for the state building of Karenni. Whatever happens to the individual now in the leadership position, the process will keep going on and evolving.”⁹⁷

This emphasis on process over individuals is critical for fostering long-term stability and adaptability within the governance system, especially in Myanmar’s fast-changing political and security landscape. By institutionalizing mechanisms and procedures, the Karenni model focuses on collective responsibility and participatory state-building among all stakeholders. The process-centered model promotes continuity, aligning with the principles of democratic governance and rule of law.

Finally, sustainability must be connected to the ability of Karenni society and its multiple armed forces to assume responsibility for their actions

and engage with transitional justice mechanisms. Although it is still a developing concept, the centrality of transitional justice in the country’s future has already been discussed among relevant stakeholders.

A KSCC member tasked with facilitating the advancement of the judicial system explained, “It is imperative that both Min Aung Hlaing and the resistance forces are subjected to transitional justice mechanisms. We are ensuring that the principles of transitional justice are applied in our revolution. The majority of resistance groups have already accepted this. However, some contend that war crimes and crimes against humanity were perpetrated solely by Min Aung Hlaing, thereby absolving other groups from responsibility. Those who have perpetrated crimes during the revolution must assume responsibility for their actions. Therefore, we have formed the judiciary system. In the transitional period, we need to speak louder about transitional justice. For that, we are working on a policy focused on transitional justice that can be implemented before the revolution ends.”⁹⁸

97 Interview with a member of IEC, undisclosed location, April 2024.

98 Interview with a Karenni technical expert and KSCC member, Karenni State, March 2024.

Conclusion

The military junta's ongoing nationwide terror campaign against the people in Myanmar is responsible for the deaths of thousands of civilians; the destruction of entire villages, hospitals, and schools; and a full-blown humanitarian catastrophe in complete violation of international human rights and humanitarian law. Despite the junta's violence, the resistance forces in Karenni have established a multilayer interim governance architecture that aims to protect, assist, and serve all Karenni peoples. The Karenni State Interim Arrangement Institutional Structure, which includes all political bodies guiding the interim period, has developed a unique and innovative governance model. This Karenni-driven approach is tailored to Myanmar's socio-political context. It supports the realization of a long-awaited federal system in Myanmar, referred to in this paper as the MIGS. Equally important, the Interim Government, central to the MIGS's conceptualization and implementation, has incorporated the ART principles in its *modus operandi* while governing the ever-growing Karenni liberated areas and coordinating a bottom-up resistance front.

The KSCC and the Interim Government's legislative, executive, and judicial branches are committed to establishing a future federal, democratic, and peaceful Karenni State. In this context, the KSCC is crucial in promoting a unified vision of governance. This is demonstrated by its diverse membership and successful reconciliation efforts. Additionally, it helps maintain checks and balances among the Interim Government bodies. Under the Interim Government, the IEC is responsible for developing decentralized, multi-actor public administration and enhancing community participation. Meanwhile, the KSIP is in charge of enacting essential laws through democratic, standardized, and systematic procedures. Finally, the KSIJ coordinates and

monitors the work of all civilian and military courts of the Interim Government while also ensuring that local judicial structures and customary laws are integrated into the recently implemented interim judicial system. These concrete efforts underscore the historic and so-far successful trajectory of the Interim Government and KSCC towards a cohesive, federal democratic state for all Karenni peoples.

The Karenni model of governance, the MIGS, addresses both historical and contemporary challenges facing the establishment of a legitimate and trusted governance system in Myanmar's post-failed coup landscape. The MIGS aims to bridge the current revolutionary period with the post-interim, federal state model of governance to finally actualize the long-standing desire of the Karenni peoples for self-determination, long-term stability, democracy, rule of law, and justice. This MIGS can be examined through four key interwoven lenses: legitimacy, inclusivity, hybridity, and sustainability.

Legitimacy is established by ensuring people's active involvement and participatory decision-making mechanisms, particularly through the direct and indirect election of representatives at various administrative levels. Inclusivity is emphasized by mandating significant representation of women and minorities in governance, as well as efforts to dismantle barriers to participation for marginalized groups. However, it is acknowledged that implementing additional policies is necessary to fully realize the objective of an inclusive society. The hybridity of the MIGS combines bottom-up and top-down approaches, decentralizing political and administrative authority to integrate existing ERO structures and bottom-up governance units into the new interim administration system. Finally, sustainability is achieved through cross-sectoral

cooperation and transitional justice initiatives, fostering unity and preventing future conflicts.

The process of establishing democratic and representative institutions, as well as inclusive mechanisms of governance, has been initiated not only in Karenni State but across most of Myanmar's liberated areas. It is an ongoing, complex process involving a variety of actors, including CSOs, CDM members, political parties who joined the people's revolution, EROs, and revolutionary forces.

In this regard, revolutionary forces, including EROs and newly established resistance groups, must not be referred to as "rebels," "insurgents," or mere "non-state armed groups." These terms overlook and dismiss their mandate from the people, as well as their political objectives, structure, and functions, including the provision of services to the population. Myanmar is going through a nationwide transformation process rooted in a cross-sectoral democratic resistance movement.

The revolutionary forces, while fighting one of the most brutal military juntas in the world, are establishing and expanding local mechanisms of governance, electing local representative bodies, and actively shaping what the people have been demanding for too long: a fair, inclusive, and peaceful federal society where everyone is represented and protected.

The world must recognize that the only sustainable solution to Myanmar's current multidimensional crisis, caused by the military's decades-long tyranny, is the people's newly established, already-functioning interim government structures, in addition to EROs' pre-existing administrations. The Karenni governance model, with its domestically driven, bottom-up, and inclusive approach, not only addresses many of Myanmar's contemporary challenges but also offers a replicable framework for establishing a federal democratic architecture in other areas of Myanmar.

Recommendations

To the International Community and Donors

- Cut all ties with the Myanmar military junta, including any direct or indirect engagement with the military junta;
- Recognize and engage with the Karenni Interim Government as the legitimate representative of the Karenni peoples;
- Impose and enforce coordinated and targeted sanctions on arms, aviation fuel and dual-use goods to end the military junta's terror campaign against the people;
- Provide technical and financial support to the Karenni Interim Government—including for infrastructure, demining, administration, communication, and justice mechanisms—to be able to implement effective governance, civilian protection, and humanitarian aid provision;
- Engage, consult, and collaborate with the Karenni Interim Government on public service provision to the people;
- Consult and provide technical and financial support to people's administrative systems established during the revolution to strengthen the vital work of local governance mechanisms, including but not limited to those in Karenni State;
- Increase and direct humanitarian support to local frontline responders, including civil society and community-based organizations, through locally led cross-border channels; and
- Review funding strategies and revise them to include or create flexible requirements that make funding more accessible and less burdensome for local civil society and community-based organizations, frontline humanitarian responders, and other stakeholders.

To the KSCC, the IEC, the KSIP, and the KSIJ

- Ensure the full and meaningful participation of women, youth, ethnic and religious minorities, and other minority communities, including the LGBTQIA+ community and people with disabilities, at every level of decision-making in building a new Karenni State, and ensure all marginalized groups are meaningfully engaged and represented in all societal, economic, and political spheres;
- Ensure the integration of the LGBTQIA+ community, people with disabilities, and ethnic and religious minorities into the Karenni Interim Government's inclusive policies;
- Strengthen the recognition of and respect for cultures and traditional practices of local communities while ensuring the practices do not undermine the rights of women, children, religious and ethnic minorities, and marginalized communities;
- Increase practical efforts to overcome traditional, cultural, and religious barriers in order to eliminate entrenched misogynistic and patriarchal norms and practices;

- Strengthen the standardization process of the people’s administration to ensure the efficient functioning of local governance mechanisms;
- Strengthen communication with local administrations to avoid miscommunication and marginalization, especially for remote communities in Karenni State;
- Disengage with United Nations agencies and international non-governmental organizations that work with or sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the junta in providing humanitarian aid provision;
- Facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid not only to the IDP areas that are directly impacted by the junta’s ongoing terror campaign but also to the rural and remote communities within Karenni State that are indirectly affected by the nationwide crisis; and
- Ensure that humanitarian assistance is delivered in a manner that preserves social harmony and avoids heightening tensions between different communities.

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Contact information:

Progressive Voice



<https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/>



<https://www.facebook.com/progressivevoice>



<https://x.com/PVamplify>



info@progressive-voice.org