

# **UNITED NATIONALITIES LEAGUE FOR DEMOCRACY**

## **(UNLD – LA)**

### **Background History**

The UNLD was established in 1988 as an umbrella political organization for the non-Burman nationalities in Burma. From the very beginning, the UNLD adopted a policy aimed at the establishment of a genuine federal union based on democratic rights for all citizens, political equality for all nationalities and the rights of self-determination for all member states of the Union. It declared that democracy without federalism could not solve the political crisis in Burma, including the civil war, which had already been fought for four decades.

The member parties of the UNLD contested the 1990 general election under the slogan of “democracy and equality” and won 35% of the popular vote and 16% of parliamentary seats (67 seats) in the national parliament of the Union of Burma. The election results established the UNLD as the second largest political party in Burma.

Organized democratic opposition in Burma has been difficult to sustain in the face of the military regime’s tactics of terror, torture, intimidation, and censorship. Like many other opposition political parties, the UNLD has suffered from the regime’s tactics of harassment. After the 1990 general election, the military government targeted the UNLD as a most dangerous opponent, second only to NLD. The UNLD was banned and declared illegal in 1992.

Although the UNLD and seventeen of its member parties had been declared dissolved and illegal, the UNLD is still very much alive. It continues to operate both inside Burma and in liberated areas. Inside Burma, the UNLD and its member parties are operating in close coordination with the NLD under the leadership of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. The cooperation between the UNLD and NLD is especially effective in “the Committee Representing the People Parliament” (CRPP) in which Dr. Saw Mra Aung, one of the most prominent leaders of the UNLD, is serving as a chairperson.

### **UNLD-LA Aims and Objectives**

The UNLD in exile was officially re-established in the liberated areas on the Thai-Burma border in 1998. Its inaugural conference was held in January 2001. At the conference, the UNLD (LA) reconfirmed its original aims and objectives, which read as follows:

- To establish a genuine federal union.
- To guarantee democratic rights, political equality and self-determination for all nationalities of the Union.
- To build a firm unity of all nationalities in the Union based the principles of equality and justice.
- To promote the development of all member states of the Union.
- To abolish all types totalitarianism in Burma.
- To establish internal peace and tranquility through dialogue.

The UNLD Inaugural conference re-confirmed the seven principles of federalism for the future constitution of the Union of Burma, which had been adopted by the UNLD conference held in 1990 at the YMCA Hall in Rangoon.

### **These seven principles are:**

(1)

The constitution of the Federal Union of Burma shall be formed in accordance with the principles of federalism and democratic decentralization;

(2)

The Union Constitution shall guarantee the democratic rights of all citizens of Burma including the principles contain in the United Nation's declaration of universal human rights;

(3)

The Union Constitution shall guarantee political equality among all ethnic national states of the Federal Union of Burma;

(4)

The Federal Union of Burma shall be composed of National States; and all National States of the Union shall be constituted in terms of ethnicity, rather than geographical areas. There must be at least eight National States, namely, Chin State, Kachin State, Karen State, Kaya (Karenni) State, Mon State, Myanmar or Burman State, Rakhine (Arakan) State, and Shan State;

(5)

The Union Assembly shall consist of two legislative chambers: the Chamber of Nationalities (Upper House) and the Chamber of Deputies (Lower House).

(i)

The Chamber of Nationalities (Upper House) shall be composed of equal numbers of elected representatives from the respective National States; and

(ii)

The Chamber of Deputies (Lower House) shall be composed of elected representatives from the respective constituencies of the peoples.

The creation of Chamber of Nationalities based on equal representation of the member states of the Union is intended to safeguard the rights of National States and minorities in the Union government. It is also intended as a symbol of equality among all the nationalities of the Union. All National States of the Union of Burma shall be represented equally in the Chamber of Nationalities at the Union Assembly.

(6)

In addition to the Union Assembly, all member states of the Union shall form Legislative Assemblies for their own respective National States. There must be a clear separation of Union Assembly, or Federal Parliament, from the Legislative Assemblies of the member states of the Union. The residual powers, that is, all powers, except those given by member states to the federal center, or the Union, must be vested in the Legislative Assembly of each National State. In this way, the Union Constitution automatically allocates political authority of legislative, judiciary, and administrative powers to the Legislative Assembly of each National State. Thus, all member states of the Union can freely exercise the right of self-determination through the right of self-government within their respective National States.

(7)

The sovereignty of the Union shall be vested in the people of the Union of Burma, and which shall be exercised by the Union Assembly. Moreover, the federal government shall have authority to decide on action for:

(i)

monetary policy,

(ii)

defense,

(iii)

foreign relation, and

(iv)

Such other authorities as may be temporarily vested in the federal government of the Union by member states of the Union.