

[CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY]

**DURABLE PEACE PROGRAMME
Launch Event
7 November 2018**

Speech by EU Ambassador Kristian Schmidt

Dear Chief Minister Dr Khat Aung,
Chief Minister/Minister (Shan representative),
Partners and beneficiaries of the Durable Peace Programme,
Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the European Union, I am very pleased to join you at the launch of the Durable Peace Programme's second phase. I am honoured to be here today – on my second visit to Kachin State this year – to meet with officials, local people, and the partners of this programme. We are united here wishing for a more peaceful and prosperous Kachin.

From my last visit in February, I remember the testimonies of internally displaced people. They all wanted to return to their land of origin. But a fear of armed conflict, landmines and lost land rights makes this impossible for most of them. I am back today to express Europe's solidarity and support.

We all strive for peace, democracy and sustainable development. No country in the world has attained any of those objectives easily. Take peace: in Europe, we've now enjoyed more than 70 years' of peace. But we're still at work to protect it, with instability and war at our borders. Knowing how hard it is to attain peace, the European Union has supported Myanmar's peace process and national reconciliation since the beginning of the country's democratic transition.

This Durable Peace Programme is the EU's flagship project to contribute to lasting peace, rehabilitation and development in Kachin State. Over the last 3.5 years, we have reached 85,000 conflict-affected people. This is something to celebrate.

Since 2015, the Programme has helped IDPs improve their livelihoods. Displaced communities received support to make their fields more fertile and sell their produce in the market. They have learned new skills to make handicrafts and generate income for their families. We have tried to decrease the vulnerability of the IDP population and help them regain their dignity amidst the harsh conditions they live in.

However, unfortunately, the needs are deeper and wider. So we will now expand DPP activities to northern Shan State, while continuing work in 18 townships in Kachin.

In both states, DPP will work closely with local civil society: 25 organizations will receive EUR 3 million or MKK 5.4 billion in sub-grants over the next 3.5 years. The programme will promote women's empowerment and bring together people from different backgrounds: different ethnic groups, religions, people from IDP camps and those who could stay in their villages and communities.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I believe that for both peace and development, we have to look into the future and think long-term. Building peace, trust and hope takes both commitment and time. Still, I believe we must recognize that progress is becoming urgent. The needs of the displaced communities are immediate, and political and military leaders must make responsible decisions, accepting the needs of the people as their first priority.

[CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY]

But the people of Kachin and Shan State should not silently wait for others to improve their lives, with humanitarian aid, year after year. For dignity and hope in the future, the European Union firmly believes local communities should be able to support themselves, and have their say on the peace process. DPP will therefore promote increased awareness among the displaced communities about the peace process and their stake in it. Through other EU-funded initiatives, we will continue to support the peace negotiations and consultation for a political solution in Kachin State.

For all these areas, nothing will succeed without the government's support. Currently, restricted access to certain areas prevents both national and international organizations from delivering assistance to those in need. These are violations of International Humanitarian Law. On behalf of the European Union, in the name of solidarity, and as an impartial friend, I appeal to the authorities for these unnecessary and unjustified restrictions on access for humanitarian and development assistance to be removed. Civilians, women and children, cannot become the main victims of this conflict! Nor is this a way to obtain a ceasefire agreement and peace eventually.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Visiting IDP camps in person is the best way to understand the community needs and take concerted action to address them. This is why I'm particularly glad that I will have the chance to visit camps and talk to the communities who live in them over the coming two days. May I take this opportunity to encourage everyone here to follow the recent example of the State Counsellor and to visit and engage with displaced communities to understand their perspective and their wish for peace. I guarantee you that our colleagues in the Durable Peace Programme will be more than pleased to demonstrate to both the civilian and military authorities the work they do to improve the lives of displaced people.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank the Kachin State Government for supporting the programme, and I'm looking forward to deepening our engagement with the Shan State Government in the coming years. I also want to thank the seven consortium organizations of the Durable Peace Programme for their work and dedication to this project – namely, the Kachin Baptist Convention, Karuna Mission Social Solidarity, Metta Development Foundation, Nyein Foundation, Oxfam, Swissaid and Trocaire.

Finally, I extend my warm greetings of friendship and solidarity to the local people, current and future partners of the Durable Peace Programme who have joined us here today.

It is my sincere wish that today — and the coming days, months and years — will give you hope that peace and development will eventually return to these beautiful valleys, hills and mountains.

Thank you for your attention.