

4. Peace negotiations in Asia and the Pacific

- In Asia and the Pacific there were 10 negotiation processes, 23% of the total cases in the world.
- After a six-year hiatus, the Philippine government and the NDF signed a joint statement in November pledging to try to resolve the armed conflict through dialogue.
- The Philippine government entered into negotiations with the two main factions of the MNLF regarding the full implementation of the 1996 Peace Agreement, the participation of the MNLF in the government of the Bangsamoro region and the reintegration of MNLF fighters.
- In southern Thailand, the government and the BRN signed a road map, the BRN accepted that other armed groups may participate in the negotiations, Malaysia appointed a new facilitator and the government appointed a new negotiating team.
- The government of Myanmar and the armed group MNDA reached a ceasefire agreement in December that failed to end the most serious escalation of violence in the country since the 2021 coup.
- North Korea and South Korea closed the door to any dialogue on the reunification of both countries.

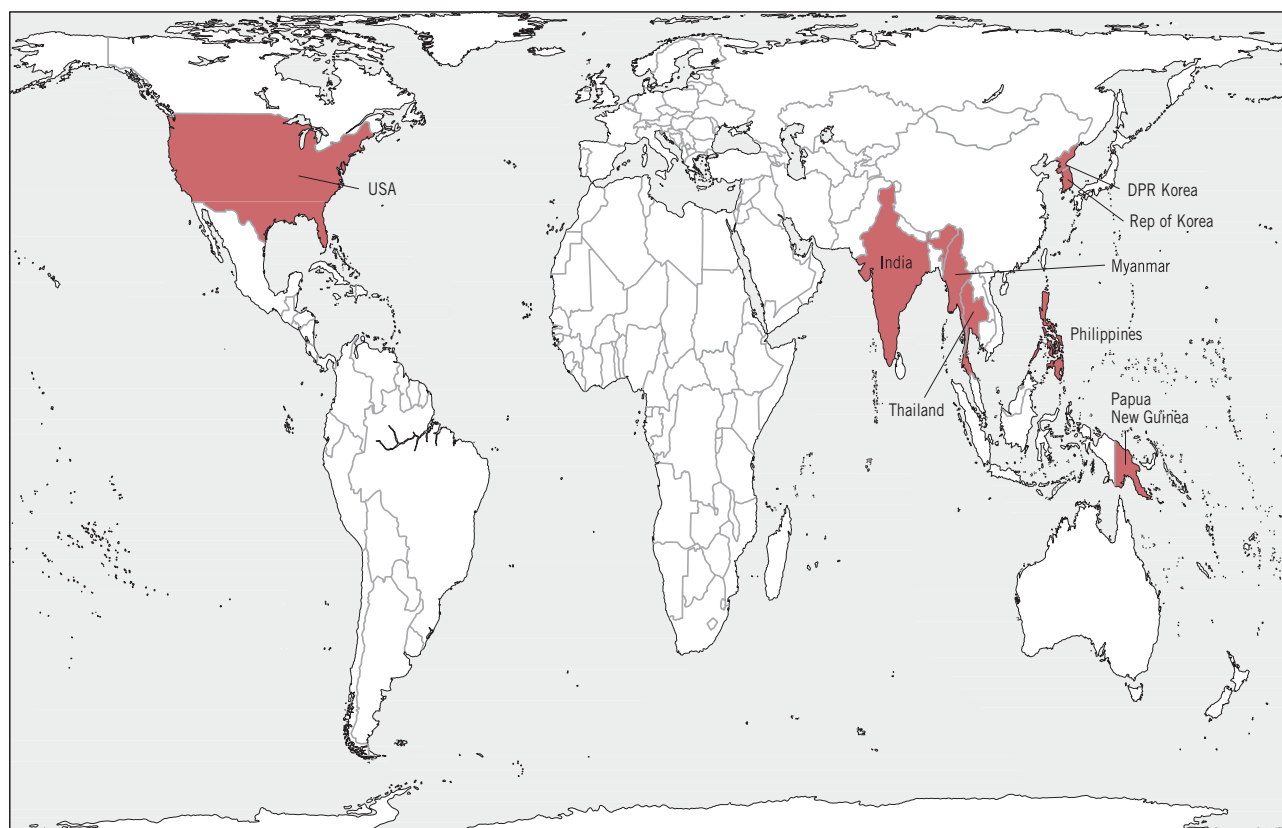
This chapter provides an analysis of the main peace processes and negotiations in Asia and the Pacific in 2023, both the general characteristics and trends of the negotiations and the development of each case on the continent throughout the year, including references to the gender, peace and security agenda. In addition, at the beginning of the chapter there is a map identifying the countries in Asia and the Pacific that hosted peace negotiations during 2023.

Table 4.1. Summary of peace processes and negotiations in Asia and the Pacific in 2023

Peace processes and negotiations	Negotiating actors	Third parties
North Korea – South Korea	North Korea, South Korea	--
North Korea – USA	North Korea, USA	--
Philippines (MILF)	Government, MILF, Interim Government of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao	Malaysia, Third Party Monitoring Team, Independent Decommissioning Body
Philippines (MNLF)	Government, MNLF (factions led by Nur Misuari and Muslimin Sema)	--
Philippines (NDF)	Government, NDF (umbrella organisation of various communist organisations, including the Communist Party of the Philippines, which is the political arm of the NPA)	Norway
India (Assam)	Government, ULFA-PTF, ULFA-I; AANLA, AANLA (FG), BCF, BCF (BT), STF, ACMA, ACMA (FG) and APA	--
India (Nagaland)	Indian government, NSCN-IM, NNPG: GPRN/NSCN (Kitovi Zhimomi), NNC, FGN, NSCN(R), NPGN (Non-Accord) and NNC/GDRN/NA, ZUF	--
Myanmar	Government; armed groups that have signed the ceasefire agreement (NCA): DKBA, RCSS/SSA-South, CNF, KNU, KNLAPC, ALP, PNLO, ABSDF, NMSP and LDU; armed groups that have not signed the NCA: UWSP, NDAA, SSPP/SSA-N, KNPP, NSCN-K, KIA, AA, TNLA and MNDA	China, ASEAN
Papua New Guinea (Bougainville)	Government, Autonomous Bougainville Government	United Nations
Thailand (south)	Government, BRN	Malaysia

The peace negotiations in bold type are described in the chapter.
 -- There are no third parties or no public proof of their existence.

Map 4.1. Peace negotiations in Asia and the Pacific in 2023



■ Countries with peace processes and negotiations in Asia and the Pacific in 2023

4.1 Negotiations in 2023: regional trends

There were **10 negotiating processes in Asia and the Pacific** in 2023, the same number as in recent years. Compared to the previous year, one case was no longer considered a negotiating process (Pakistan) and another was added to the list (the Philippines, in relation to the MNLF). The peace process between the Pakistani government and the armed Taliban group TTP broke down in November after the latter ended the ceasefire agreement that had been reached in the previous months. After the ceasefire broke down, there was a rise in violence and the armed conflict intensified. The Philippine government resumed talks with the two main factions of the MNLF regarding full implementation of the 1996 peace agreement, the group's participation in the government of the Bangsamoro region and the reintegration of former combatants. Half the negotiations in Asia and the Pacific took place in Southeast Asia: the Philippines (MILF, MNLF and NDF), Myanmar and Thailand (South). Two were in South Asia, specifically in India (Assam and Nagaland). Two took place in East Asia: North Korea – South Korea and North Korea – USA. One was active in the Pacific region, in Papua New Guinea (Bougainville). Around one third of the negotiations were linked to resolving active armed

conflicts, though with different degrees of violence and confrontation between the parties. This was true in the Philippines (NDF), Myanmar and Thailand (south). The rest of the cases were socio-political crises, whether internal (India (Assam and Nagaland), Papua New Guinea (Bougainville)) or between states (North Korea – South Korea and North Korea – USA), and there was one armed conflict in which a peace agreement was signed (the Philippines (MILF, MNLF)).

The **actors that participated in all the different negotiating processes** included their respective governments. In some cases, the negotiations were directly linked to armed groups, such as the NSCN-IM in Nagaland and the ULFA-PTF in Assam (both cases in India), the BRN in Thailand and the MNDAA and other groups in Myanmar, or to political groups representing insurgent groups, such as in the Philippines, where Manila is negotiating with the National Democratic Front (NDF) in representation of the Communist Party of the Philippines and its armed wing, the NPA. Along the same lines, the Burmese government also held talks with formal and informal groups of armed organisations, such as the Three Brothers Alliance (made up of the MNDAA, the TNLA and the AA) and the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement of 2015. In other cases, the negotiations were between governments and armed groups that were not fully disarmed or demobilised, yet no longer maintained regular and

sustained armed activity. This was the case of the MILF and the MNLF in the Philippines, the ULFA-PTF in the Indian state of Assam and the Naga armed groups in Nagaland, also in India.

In other contexts, only governments led the negotiations, whether the conflict was between states or internal or domestic in nature. The former included the interstate negotiations between the governments of North and South Korea and between North Korea and the United States. In other contexts, negotiations took place between central and regional governments, such as the process between the government of the Philippines and the regional government of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao and the negotiations between the government of Papua New Guinea and the Autonomous Bougainville Government. Though the central Indian government led the negotiations with various armed groups in the states of Nagaland and Assam, their governments were also involved to some extent in the search for a negotiated solution to the conflict. Therefore, compared to other regions, sub-state authorities played a significant role in several of the negotiating processes in Asia.

The **main issues** behind the negotiations in Asia and the Pacific were related to autonomy, self-determination, independence, territorial accommodation and recognition of the identity of different national minorities, such as in India (Assam and Nagaland), the Philippines (MILF, MNLF), Myanmar, Papua New Guinea (Bougainville) and Thailand (south). Another issue in several negotiating processes was the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of former combatants. In the Philippines, the MILF and the government oversaw the third phase of the disarmament and demobilisation of former MILF combatants, which began in 2015 and has so far included 26,145 of the 40,000 former combatants included in the 2014 peace agreement. As part of the commitments made by the Philippine government in the 1996 peace agreement with the MNLF, Manila also promoted reintegration programmes for MNLF combatants in several regions of Mindanao. In Assam, as a result of the agreement signed in September 2022 between the Indian government and eight Adivasi armed groups, 1,182 members of five of these groups (AANLA, ACMA, APA, BCF and STF) handed over their weapons in July and received money in exchange. Finally, certain procedural issues gained importance in several of the negotiating processes in Asia and the Pacific in 2023 and were more linked to the design of the process than to any substantive issues of the negotiations. In the Philippines, for example, the government and the NDF reaffirmed their

The main issues on which the negotiations in Asia pivoted were related to autonomy, self-determination, independence, territorial accommodation and recognition of the identity of different national minorities

commitment to resolving the armed conflict active since the 1960s through dialogue, but it was not clear whether this was a resumption of the talks that were interrupted in 2017, which would imply resuming the road map and agreements signed thus far, or the beginning of a new negotiating process, detached from the frameworks and commitments of the last three decades. There were also significant developments in procedural aspects in southern Thailand. The new government that succeeded the military junta that had ruled the country in recent years appointed a new negotiating panel, while the government of Malaysia, which mediates the talks, designated a new facilitator. The BRN showed its willingness to include new armed actors in the process. The central government of Papua New Guinea and the autonomous government of the Bougainville region focused their discussions on the procedure for deciding on the political status and possible independence of Bougainville, debating whether a simple or qualified majority would suffice.

The Philippine government publicly declared its intention to work so that the development of a new autonomous regime in Mindanao (the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao) could merge the negotiating processes and peace agreements between the MNLF and the MILF, which signed peace agreements with Manila in 1996 and 2014, respectively.

Fifty per cent of the peace processes in Asia and the Pacific were not facilitated by **third parties**, a higher proportion than in most regions in the world. Specifically, the cases in which the dialogue between the parties was direct and without external facilitation were North Korea – South Korea, North Korea – USA, the Indian states of Assam and Nagaland and the Philippines (MNLF). The negotiations that did enjoy outside support were characterised by a lesser third-party presence in different roles, since most only had one or two actors facilitating the dialogue. This was the case in the negotiations between the Philippines and the NDF, which were supported by Norway; in the negotiations between the government of Papua New Guinea and the Autonomous Bougainville Government, supported by the United Nations; in the negotiations between the Thai government and the armed opposition group BRN, facilitated by Malaysia; and in Myanmar, where China tried to promote negotiations between the Burmese government and different armed ethnic groups and ASEAN maintained contacts with the military junta to resolve the political crisis that the country has been undergoing since the 2021 coup d'état. The sole case in which third-party support was more complex and plural was the implementation of the peace agreement signed by the Philippine government and the MILF in 2014. In addition to the Malaysian-facilitated

talks between the government panel and the MILF, the peace agreement implementation process was supported by the Third Party Monitoring Team, which was in charge of supervising the implementation of the agreements signed between the MILF and the government, and the International Decommissioning Body, made up of Türkiye, Norway, Brunei and local staff from the Philippines, to oversee the mobilisation of 40,000 former MILF combatants. In line with the limited participation of third parties in facilitating and supporting negotiating processes in Asia and the Pacific, the role of **international and regional organisations** was symbolic and much less significant than in other regions of the world. Notable examples included the UN-facilitated talks between the government of Papua New Guinea and the Autonomous Bougainville Government to determine the political status of Bougainville and the role played by ASEAN to promote a solution to the political crisis in Myanmar after the coup d'état in 2021.

Fifty per cent of the peace processes in Asia and the Pacific were not facilitated by third parties, a higher proportion than in most regions in the world

With regard to the **trend**, important **progress** was made in some peace negotiations in Asia and the Pacific. For example, the Philippine government expedited the granting of amnesty to different insurgent organisations, certified the completion of the third phase of the demobilisation process of former MILF combatants (which included 26,000 of the 40,000 ex-combatants expected across all phases), resumed talks with the two main MNLF factions regarding the full implementation of the 1996 peace agreement, the group's participation in the government of the Bangsamoro region and the reintegration of its combatants and publicly declared its intention to merge the negotiating processes with the MILF and the MNLF. However, the event with the greatest political impact in the country was the joint statement between Manila and the NDF that announced their commitment to trying to resolve the armed conflict through dialogue after a six-year hiatus in the negotiating process. Some important progress was made in the negotiating process in southern Thailand, such as the appointment of a new facilitator by Malaysia, the appointment of a new negotiating panel by the new Thai government that won the elections held in May, the BRN's acceptance of other armed groups' participation in the negotiating process and especially the signing of a shared road map between both parties that must be implemented in 2023 and 2024. In Myanmar, a ceasefire agreement was reached between the Burmese Armed Forces and the armed group MNDAA in December. Facilitated by China, the agreement was made after an unprecedented escalation of the armed conflict in northern Shan State. However, the agreement failed to end the escalation. In the Indian state of Assam, important progress was made in the talks between the government and the pro-

negotiations faction of the armed group ULFA (ULFA-PTF). Indeed, various media outlets indicated that a peace agreement was expected to be signed before the next elections to the lower house of India's bicameral Parliament that would take place between April and May 2024. The Indian government also announced an initiative to approach relatives of members of the ULFA faction opposed to the negotiations and headed by Paresh Baruah.

However, some processes suffered from **impasse**, paralysis and even setbacks. In the Indian state of Nagaland, for example, the peace negotiations between the Indian government and the Naga armed group NSCN-IM remained at a standstill, mainly due to disagreement about the issue of a flag and Constitution for Nagaland. There were major disagreements several times during the year in the negotiating process between the government of Papua New Guinea and the Autonomous Bougainville Government about procedural and substantive issues of the process, especially regarding the format and the necessary majority in the national Parliament for the vote on Bougainville's independence. The Bougainville authorities said they had no confidence in the central government and accused it of hampering the process. Despite the joint statement released by the Philippine government and the NDF about resuming the talks after a six-year hiatus, in late December Manila expressed its deep displeasure with a statement issued by the Communist Party of the Philippines that announced the start of the Third Rectification Movement, declared the primacy of armed struggle to achieve change and argued that peace talks were one more battlefield for advancing its objectives. There was no progress in the negotiations between the US and North Korea over Pyongyang's nuclear arsenal and relations between South Korea and North Korea deteriorated significantly during the year, to the point that both countries suspended the 2018 agreement in which both countries had committed to improving their bilateral relations and actively negotiating in favour of reunification.

Little significant progress was made in implementing the **gender, peace and security agenda** and women's participation in peace processes. The Philippines approved the national action plan on women, peace and security for the period between 2023 and 2033 and two women were elected as representatives to the legislative assembly of the state of Nagaland for the first time. Although women were still excluded from most negotiations, in the peace process between the Philippine government and the NDF, the group's negotiating panel was headed by a woman (Juliet de Lima) and the Norwegian government's facilitation work was led by Kristina Lie Revheim.

4.2 Case study analysis

4.2.1 Asia

East Asia

DPR Korea – Republic of Korea			
Negotiating actors	North Korea, South Korea		
Third parties	--		
Relevant agreements	Relevant agreements	Panmunjom Declaration (April 2018)	

Summary:

Alongside rising tensions between the governments of North Korea and South Korea, not only did they fail to hold any meetings or negotiations, but their diplomatic relations and dialogue on possible reunification and other issues were suspended in 2023. In fact, in his end-of-year speech, North Korean leader Kim Jong-un declared that the relationship between the two Koreas had become one of two hostile and belligerent countries, so his government would no longer seek any kind of dialogue about reunification and reconciliation. Along the same lines, Kim Jong-un said that it made no sense to pursue talks with a country (referring to South Korea) that treated its neighbour as its main enemy and only seeks its collapse and what he called “unification by reabsorption”. In the same speech, Kim Jong-un said that the North Korean Armed Forces would totally annihilate the US and South Korea if Pyongyang were provoked. A few days after his speech, Kim Jong-un also asked the legislative assembly to rewrite North Korea’s Constitution to eliminate the idea of a shared state between two countries divided by war, to define South Korea as North Korea’s “main enemy” and to specify that North Korea will seek to “occupy, subjugate and claim” South Korea as part of North Korean territory if another war breaks out in the Korean Peninsula. Kim Jong-un also ordered the elimination of symbols of inter-Korean reconciliation. For example, he demanded the removal of a monument in honour of the quest for reunification in Pyongyang and the abolition of concepts such as “reunification”, “reconciliation” and “compatriots” from the nation’s history. Along the same lines, North Korea also cut off cross-border railways and abolished government agencies managing relations and dialogue with South Korea, such as the Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Fatherland, the main body for inter-Korean affairs since its creation in 1961, and the National Economic Cooperation Bureau and the Kumgangsán International Tourism Administration, which were responsible for managing joint economic and tourism projects, such as a joint industrial park in the North Korean border city of Kaesong. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres expressed concern about the reduction in contacts and relations between both countries and said that dialogue and diplomatic engagement remained the only possible path to sustainable peace and complete and verifiable denuclearisation on the Korean Peninsula.

Prior to these words and actions, in late November, **North Korea had backed out of an agreement between both countries signed in 2018** by Kim Jong-un and South Korean President Moo Jae-in at a time of rapprochement between North and South Korea, which coincided with several summits held between Kim Jong-un and US President Donald Trump. The day before Kim Jong-un decided to end the agreement, the

South Korean government had also partially suspended it and had resumed aerial surveillance along the Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) in response to North Korea’s launch of its first military spy satellite into orbit. The 2018 agreement, officially known as the Panmunjom Declaration for Peace, Prosperity and Reunification of the Korean Peninsula, was considered the maximum expression of the rapprochement between both countries and the prospects of achieving the reunification and denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula through dialogue. The agreement urged both countries to boost cooperation and dialogue to achieve these ends and advocated the immediate implementation of concrete measures such as the establishment of a joint liaison office with resident representatives of both sides in the Gaeseong region to facilitate dialogue between the authorities, the joint management of humanitarian issues and the programme for reuniting families separated by war (facilitated by the Red Cross), joint participation in international sporting events such as the 2018 Asian Games and the connection and modernisation of railways and border roads. South Korea and North Korea also agreed to transform the Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) into a zone of peace, completely ceasing all hostile acts on land, air and sea as of 2 May 2018, design a plan to turn the areas around the Northern Limit Line in the West Sea (the de facto and disputed border between both countries) into a maritime zone of peace to avoid accidental military confrontations and guarantee safe fishing activities and periodically hold military meetings at the highest level, including with the defence ministers of both countries. Finally, the 2018 agreement that both countries suspended in November also reaffirmed the Non-Aggression Agreement, which excludes the use of any form of force against each other. It called for disarmament to be carried out gradually, as military tension eased and substantial progress was made in building military confidence. Furthermore, to mark the 65th anniversary of the armistice, South Korea and North Korea agreed to actively hold trilateral meetings with the United States, or quadrilateral meetings with China, aimed at declaring an end to the war and establishing a permanent system of peace on the Korean Peninsula. In this regard, South and North Korea confirmed their common goal of achieving complete denuclearisation and a nuclear-weapon-free Korean Peninsula and Seoul explicitly recognised and valued the steps towards denuclearisation being taken by North Korea.

South Asia

India (Assam)	
Negotiating actors	Government, ULFA-PTF, ULFA-I; AANLA, AANLA (FG), BCF, BCF (BT), STF, ACMA, ACMA (FG) and APA
Third parties	--
Relevant agreements	--

Summary:

The Indian state of Assam has been the focal point of several conflicts and socio-political crises between the Indian government and different armed groups that have demanded Assamese independence or greater recognition for the political and cultural rights of different ethnic minorities. The demographic transformations in the state after the partition of the Indian subcontinent, with the arrival of two million people from Bangladesh, are at the origin of the demands of the population of Assamese ethnic origin for recognition of their cultural, civil and social rights and the creation of an independent state. Violence escalated several times during the 1980s and 1990s and there were failed attempts at negotiations. In 2005, a peace process began with the armed group United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), which was interrupted in 2006, giving rise to a new escalation of the conflict. Since 2011, there has been a significant decrease in violence in the state and many armed groups have handed over their weapons or started talks with the government, including the main insurgent organisation in the state, ULFA, which split as a result of the negotiations since one faction was against them.

Negotiations between the Indian government, the Assam state government and the pro-negotiations faction of the ULFA armed group (ULFA-PTF) progressed during the year, led by its President Arabinda Rajkhowa and its Secretary General Anup Chetia, who has been in charge of the talks. Contacts between this faction and the governments began in 2011. Throughout 2023, discussions were held on a draft agreement that the armed group claimed included various requests that it had presented. The talks were held with government negotiator A K Mishra. In January, he presented a draft agreement that was discussed by a working committee and the Central Committee of the ULFA-PTF. Although details of the content of the agreement under discussion were not revealed, one of the issues addressed in the negotiations was security guarantees for demobilised combatants. In August, a two-day meeting was held between representatives of the Indian government (specifically the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Indian intelligence agency) and a delegation from the ULFA-PTF, made up of Rajkhowa, Anup Chetia and two other leaders of the armed group, Raju Baruah and Sasha Choudhury. The agenda of the negotiations consisted of a 12-point document prepared by the armed group, which contained issues such as safeguarding the political rights of the indigenous population of Assam and issues related to controlling financial resources. It also included the demand for recognition of six communities as “scheduled tribes”: the Moran, Mutock, Tai-Ahom, Koch-rajbongshi, Sootea and Tea tribes, which would grant them a specific protected status. This recognition would mean that half the population of Assam would have tribal recognition. Finally, on December 29, a tripartite agreement was reached between the Indian Government, the Government of the state of Assam and the ULFA-PTF by which the armed group definitively abandoned violence, in exchange for measures relating to the rights of indigenous communities, land reservation

measures, and a financial package for the armed group. Meanwhile, the Indian government announced an initiative to reach out to relatives of members of the ULFA faction opposed to the negotiations, which is headed by Paresch Baruah. This approach, called “From conflict to collaboration: a trust-building initiative for a peaceful future”, included visits to police and military facilities. The Baruah faction refused to start talks, citing the Indian government’s refusal to include the group’s main demand, the sovereignty of Assam, on the negotiating agenda. This ULFA faction is the only armed insurgent group in Assam that is not involved in any negotiating process. **As a result of the agreement signed on September 2022 between the Indian government and eight Adivasi armed groups, 1,182 members of five of these groups (AANLA, ACMA, APA, BCF and STF) surrendered their weapons in July.** The former combatants received a financial benefit in exchange for disarming. In addition, the Adivasi Welfare and Development Council was formed. Also included in the agreement, it was made up of 16 members with a mandate to work to preserve Adivasi identity and culture and the well-being of the indigenous population. The handover of weapons was attended by Chief Minister of Assam Himanta Biswa Sarma. Negotiations between these groups and the government had begun in 2012, with an agreement to suspend operations in 2016 and several rounds of negotiations until the 2022 agreement yielded results.

India (Nagaland)	
Negotiating actors	Government, NSCN-IM, NNPG: GPRN/ NSCN (Kitovi Zhimomi), NNC, FGN, NSCN(R), NPGN (Non-Accord) and NNC/ GDRN/NA, ZUF
Third parties	--
Relevant agreements	Framework agreement (2015)

Summary:

The Indian state of Nagaland has suffered armed conflict and a socio-political crisis since the 1950s as a result of much of the Naga population’s unfulfilled aspiration to win independence and create a sovereign state. There have been different attempts at negotiation since the 1960s, but it was not until 1997 that a ceasefire agreement was reached with the NSCN-IM group, one of the main actors in the conflict. Although the agreement has remained in force to date, the negotiations have not made significant progress on the central issues. In 2012, however, the peace process received a boost from greater involvement from the Naga government and state MPs. Alongside the negotiations with the NSCN-IM, in 2001 the government reached another ceasefire agreement with the NSCN-K insurgent organisation. However, these negotiations have also failed to make significant progress. In 2015, the Government and the NSCN-IM reached a framework pre-agreement, considered a preamble to the final resolution of the conflict. However, that same year, the ceasefire agreement with the NSCN-K was broken, and violent clashes began again.

The peace negotiations between the Indian government and the Naga armed group NSCN-IM remained at an impasse. As in previous years, the deadlock was caused by disagreement on the issues of a flag and a Constitution for Nagaland. No progress has been made on either issue, despite the fact that dialogue has remained open between both parties. There were several rounds of talks and informal meetings between the armed group and representatives of the Indian government in Delhi during the year (specifically, in April, August and November), which focused on the flag and the Constitution, but no headway was made that could overcome the impasse. After the last round of negotiations between both parties, which took place in Delhi in November, the armed group declared that the Indian government's refusal to accept these demands was a breach of the framework agreement reached in 2015. Different Naga civil society organisations voiced their discontent about the deadlock in the negotiating process.

Gender, peace and security

For the first time in Nagaland, two women were elected as representatives in the state legislative assembly, after the 33% quota for female candidates was implemented. In the past, opposition to this quota had led to violent protests. The Naga legislative assembly plays an important role in the peace negotiations and its representatives have been actively involved in the process.

South-east Asia

Philippines (MILF)	
Negotiating actors	Government, MILF, Interim Government of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao
Third parties	Malaysia, Third Party Monitoring Team, Independent Decommissioning Body
Relevant agreements	Agreement for General Cessation of Hostilities (1997), Agreement on Peace between the Government and the MILF (2001), Mutual Cessation of Hostilities (2003), Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro (2012), Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (2014), Organic Law for the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (2018)

Summary:

Peace negotiations between the Government and the MILF, an MNLF splinter group, started in 1997, just months after Fidel Ramos's Administration had signed a peace agreement with the MNLF. Since then, the negotiating process has been interrupted three times (in 2000, 2003 and 2008) by outbreaks of high intensity violence. Despite this, in the over 30 rounds of talks that have taken place since the late 1990s some agreements on security and development have been reached, as well as a ceasefire agreement that has been upheld, for the most part. In October 2012 both parties signed the Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro

and in March 2014 the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro, which plans to replace the current Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao with a new public body (called Bangsamoro) with a larger territorial scope and broader self-government competences. Since 2014, the peace process has been focused on the drafting and congressional approval of the Organic Law for the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, which incorporates the main contents of the two aforementioned peace agreements and was approved by Congress in 2018. Following its ratification in a plebiscite in early 2019, the peace process has hinged on the implementation of the peace agreements, the institutional development of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (governed temporarily by the leader of the MILF) and the disarmament of the MILF.

During the year the Philippine government, the MILF and the Interim Government of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, headed by the leader of the MILF, maintained regular contact to continue the implementation of the 2014 peace agreement. **Of particular note is the early July meeting between the Peace Implementation Panels of both sides, the first since Ferdinand Marcos took office as president of the Philippines in June 2022.** During the meeting, both parties repeated their commitment to implementing the agreement and discussed the current status and next steps in various aspects of the agreement, such as the redeployment of the Philippine Armed Forces in Mindanao, the transformation of MILF camps into productive areas, the socio-economic packages for former MILF combatants and the collection of domestic and international funds to accelerate the implementation of the agreement. Furthermore, the Philippine government and the MILF discussed the death of seven MILF members in Maguindanao del Sur in mid-June as part of an operation by state security forces. Both parties welcomed the diligence with which Manila had launched an investigation in this regard, though the MILF denounced that it was an operation not previously communicated or coordinated and was therefore a serious violation of the cessation of hostilities agreement and of the Ad Hoc Joint Action Group.

In mid-August, **the third phase of the disarmament and demobilisation of former MILF combatants was completed, which began in 2015 and has affected 26,145 people so far.** The final phase is expected to involve another 14,000 MILF members. The Philippine government, the MILF and the Independent Decommissioning Body, led by Turkish Ambassador Mehmet Suat Akgün, praised the completion of the third phase, though a few days before the MILF had warned that the continuation of the disarmament of combatants largely depended on the progress made in other aspects of the agreement, such as the dismantling of private armed groups, the economic and productive transformation of the six MILF camps, transitional justice and amnesty. Regarding this last issue, in late November a presidential decree was made public granting an amnesty to all MILF combatants who had

committed crimes related to their political beliefs. The MILF, which hailed the order, must channel the requests through the National Amnesty Commission, the body in charge of deciding whether to grant amnesty benefits.

Gender, peace and security

In mid-December, the Office of the Presidential Advisor on Peace, Reconciliation and Unity (OPAPRU), the Philippine Commission on Women, UN Women and various national and international women's rights organisations publicly announced the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security for the period between 2023 and 2033. This is the fourth plan since the first was approved in 2010, in compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, which, among other issues, calls for promoting greater female participation in areas such as peace negotiations, conflict prevention and resolution, peacebuilding and peacekeeping. Several of the authorities who participated in the event to launch the plan highlighted that the Philippines had been one of the pioneer countries in Asia to have an instrument of this type and to address the women, peace and security agenda. The OPAPRU highlighted that the National Plan also addressed emerging realities such as climate action, cybersecurity and maritime security, calling on civil society organisations to support its implementation.

Philippines (MNLF)	
Negotiating actors	Government, MNLF (factions led by Nur Misuari and Muslimin Sema)
Third parties	--
Relevant agreements	1996 Final Peace Agreement

Summary:

After five years of high intensity armed hostilities between the Government and the MNLF, both parties signed a peace agreement in 1976 in Tripoli under the auspices of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, which, shortly before, had recognized the MNLF as the legitimate representative of the Moro people. However, the unilateral implementation of this agreement by the dictatorial regime of Ferdinand Marco caused the armed conflict to re-ignite. After the fall of Marcos and the recovery of democracy in 1986, peace negotiations resumed and in 1996 a new peace agreement was reached for the full implementation of the 1976 Tripoli agreement. Nevertheless, both the MNLF and the OIC considered there were substantial elements of the new peace agreement that had not been implemented, so since the year 2007 a tripartite process to revise the peace agreement started. Despite the advances achieved with that process (the so-called '42 points of consensus'), the attack launched by the MNLF on the town of Zamboanga in September 2013, the search and arrest warrant against the founder of the MNLF, Nur Misuari, the criticism by the MNLF of the peace agreement signed by the Government and the MILF in March 2014 and the differing interpretations between the Government and the MNLF on the conclusion or not of the revision of the agreement led the peace negotiations to a standstill at the end of 2013.

With Rodrigo Duterte arriving in power in mid 2016, the conversations resumed with Nur Misuari, who was granted a temporary judicial permit for this purpose. Nevertheless, the majority faction of the MNLF decided to include the main demands of the MNLF in the peace process with the MILF, which led to three of its representatives being included into the Bangsamoro Transition Commission, in charge of drafting the Bangsamoro Basic Law (a new political entity foreseen in the 2014 peace agreement with the MILF and which should replace the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao).

During the year, **the Philippine government entered into negotiations with the two main MNLF factions, mainly in relation to the implementation of the outstanding commitments of the 1996 Peace Agreement, the participation of the MNLF in the government structures of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao and the reintegration of MNLF fighters.** As for the faction led by the group's founder, Nur Misuari, in September the Office of the Presidential Advisor on Peace, Reconciliation and Unity (OPAPRU) met with the group's vice president, Abdulkarim Tan Misuari, the son of Nur Misuari, and agreed to change the main forum for discussion that existed thus far –the Peace Coordination Committee– into a Peace Implementation Committee. According to the agreement, each panel will have seven members, to which subcommittees will report that deal with socioeconomic issues, transitional justice, security and confidence-building measures. Presidential Advisor on Peace, Reconciliation and Unity Carlito Galvez said the Marcos government will do everything possible to honour and fulfil the outstanding commitments of the 1996 agreement with the MNLF, identified during a Tripartite Review Process between Manila, the MNLF and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (the OIC, which also facilitated the negotiations that led to the agreement), which culminated in 2016. Historically, the MNLF and Nur Misuari in particular had reproached Manila for not having completed the implementation of the 1996 agreement. This had caused many political disagreements and some major episodes of violence that even led to Nur Misuari's arrest on several occasions. Given this situation, in 2006 the OIC asked the aforementioned Tripartite Review Process to begin to evaluate the implementation of the 1996 agreement and resolve disputes between the Philippine government and the MNLF. During the process, which began in November 2007 and ended in January 2016, the MNLF raised 43 issues of Law 9054, which reorganised the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao based on the provisions of the 1996 agreement that it considered incompatible with the 1996 agreement. Except for one issue on strategic minerals, agreements were reached on the remaining 42 issues. Many of the so-called "42 consensus issues" were included in the Bangsamoro Basic Law (the law that, among other things, created the BARMM), but there were two aspects that the MNLF does not view as properly resolved: the Bangsamoro Development Assistance Fund (BDAF) and the Tripartite Implementation and Monitoring Committee (TIMC).

The day after the agreement with the MNLF faction led by Misuari, the OPAPRU met with the majority faction of the MNLF (the one led by Muslimin Sema, the former mayor of Cotabato and the Minister of Labour and Employment of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), and it was agreed that **the OPAPRU would facilitate talks to achieve greater convergence between the different factions of the MNLF**. In this sense, it was agreed to create a Joint Executive Committee of the MNLF that will provide guidelines for the aforementioned convergence process. Along the same lines, **the OPAPRU pledged to doing everything possible to get the OIC involved again in implementing the pending commitments of the 1996 peace agreement**. Finally, the MNLF and the Philippine government agreed to transform the current mechanism for dialogue between the parties into a Government-MNLF Coordination and Implementation Committee. On the occasion of this agreement, Presidential Advisor on Peace, Reconciliation and Unity Carlito Galvez said that the implementation of the Bangsamoro peace agreements is only one of the five points of the Marcos government's Agenda for Peace, Reconciliation and Unity, noting that one of its priorities will be greater unity between the different factions of the MNLF and greater convergence between the peace agreements signed with the MNLF (1996) and the MILF (2014), using the integration of representatives of both organisations in the BARMM Parliament as an example.

Despite their differences, the two main factions of the MNLF agreed with two decisions of the Marcos government. The first was the granting of an amnesty to former MNLF combatants who had committed crimes included in the country's penal code as a consequence of their political convictions on 22 November. The former combatants have two years from the date of the amnesty to submit the corresponding applications and documentation to the National Amnesty Commission. The second was **the launch of the MNLF Transformation Programme on 30 September**, a commitment included in the 1996 agreement. The programme, which began in Basilan, has four major components: security, the socio-economic sphere, transitional justice and confidence-building measures. Around 60 former MNLF combatants passed the case selection process and another 407 did the same by early October.

Philippines (NDF)	
Negotiating actors	Government, NDF (umbrella organisation of various communist organisations, including the Communist Party of the Philippines, which is the political wing of the NPA)
Third parties	Norway
Relevant agreements	The Hague Joint Declaration (1992), Joint Agreement on Safety and Immunity Guarantees (1995), Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (1998)

Summary:

Negotiations between the Government and the NDF began in 1986, after the fall of Ferdinand Marcos' dictatorship. Since then, many rounds of negotiations have taken place, but agreement has only been reached on one of the four items listed in the substantive negotiation agenda of The Hague Joint Declaration of 1992, namely human rights and international humanitarian law (an agreement was signed in 1998). No agreement has been reached on the other three items: socio-economic reforms; political and constitutional reforms; and cessation of hostilities and disposition of armed forces. Since 2004, the Government of Norway has been acting as a facilitator between the Government and the NDF, the political organisation that represents the Communist Party of the Philippines and its armed wing (the NPA) in the peace talks. In addition to the significant differences that exist between the Government and the NDF with regard to which socio-economic and political model is best for the Philippines, one of the issues that has generated the greatest controversy between the parties in recent years is that of the security and immunity guarantees for the NDF members involved in the peace negotiations.

Following a six-year hiatus, in November the Philippine government and the NDF signed a joint statement in Oslo promising to resume negotiations to try to put an end to an armed conflict that began in the late 1990s through dialogue and peaceful means. The armed conflict began in the 1960s and is one of the oldest in Asia. The joint statement was signed on 23 November and released on 28 November. Between both dates, **the government announced four presidential proclamations that granted amnesty to the members of four revolutionary organisations**, including the NDF, the NPA and the Communist Party of the Philippines, in addition to the MILF, the MNLF and the Rebolusyonaryong Partido Manggagawa ng Pilipinas/Revolutionary Proletarian Army/Alex Boncayao Brigade (RPMP-RPA-ABB). The amnesty covers crimes punishable according to the Penal Code and the special criminal laws prosecuting them for their political convictions. On the same day, an executive order was also made public that expands the functions of the National Amnesty Commission, the body in charge of deciding which cases fall under the amnesty laws. In his second State of the Nation address in July 2023, President Marcos had promised to grant amnesty to combatants who surrendered or turned themselves in.

In the joint statement, both the government and the NDF pledged to seek a peaceful and principled solution to the armed conflict, which they acknowledge has deep political and socio-economic roots. Among other issues, the statement also indicates the need to unite as a nation to urgently confront social and economic problems and external threats to security, an allusion that some analysts attribute to the dispute between the Philippines and China in the South China Sea. Both parties recognised that the framework, times, agenda and priorities of the negotiations are still being discussed and that both the negotiating teams and the more technical task forces have yet to be formed. In a press conference, the Philippine government said that it is not really a

resumption of peace talks, but rather the beginning of a new negotiating process, and that the aforementioned statement did not take effect immediately. Manila did not want to specify deadlines, though it announced that the formal talks would surely begin in the first quarter of 2024. The government also declared that the state security forces and bodies' operations against the NPA would continue. At the end of the year, the Philippine Armed Forces said that the NPA had 20 fronts, some of them very weakened. The main state bodies related somehow with managing the conflict –the Ministry of Defence, the Philippine Armed Forces, the Office of the Presidential Advisor on Peace, Reconciliation and Unity, the National Task Force to end the Local Communist Armed Conflict, National Security Commission (NTC-ELCAC)– approved both the granting of amnesty and the resumption of peace negotiations, though with nuance and reservations. However, **Philippine Vice President Sara Duterte expressed her categorical opposition to the joint statement with the NDF**, which she described as “a deal with the devil”, arguing that the NDF has never been sincere in the different negotiating processes that have taken place in recent decades and pointing out that peace and reconciliation can be negotiated and significant development in the country can be achieved without having to capitulate to the enemies of the state. Duterte also opposed the granting of amnesty to groups she called terrorists, alleging a lack of justice for the victims and their families. In addition to being the highly-popular vice president and the daughter of former President Rodrigo Duterte, some analysts described Duterte's opposition to the negotiating process as significant because she is also the co-vice president of the NTF-ELCAC, an inter-agency body that was primarily responsible for counterinsurgency policy during Rodrigo Duterte's presidency and was repeatedly accused of labelling people critical of the government as insurgents or members of the revolutionary movement.

Meanwhile, the NDF praised the resumption of the talks and recalled that **this scenario was set up during a series of informal and confidential meetings facilitated by the government of Norway since 2022, mainly in Norway and the Netherlands**, which is where the NDF's negotiating team has been located for decades. According to some media outlets, one of the meetings that began the process of rebuilding trust between both parties was held between the founder of the Communist Party of the Philippines and the NPA, Jose Maria Sison, who died in December 2022, and the former chief of the Philippine Armed Forces, Emmanuel Bautista. The interim head of the NDF's negotiating panel, Juliet de Lima (Sison's widow) stressed the importance of addressing one of the country's main problems and one of the factors that caused the armed conflict: the high concentration of land ownership and the lack of land for the peasant population. In response to the government's idea of starting new talks, Juliet de Lima warned that **the negotiating framework agreed upon by both parties**

must be built on the basis of agreements signed in recent decades, mainly the Hague Joint Declaration of 1992, which defines the framework, the principles and the agenda of the negotiations, the agreements on security guarantees and immunity for the NDF's negotiators (1997) and the agreement on human rights and international humanitarian law (1998). The NDF also stressed the importance of resolving some issues before the start of formal negotiations: the general and unconditional release of all political prisoners in the country; the release of the NDF's political consultants so they can participate in the peace negotiations; security guarantees for the NDF's negotiating team; and the removal of the terrorist label from the NDF and some of its prominent leaders and members of the negotiating team. Although Juliet de Lima said that these demands were not preconditions for dialogue, Presidential Advisor on Peace, Reconciliation and Unity Carlito Gálvez warned that previous negotiating processes made it clear that setting conditions for talks even before they had formally begun posed a threat to building trust and had could derail them. At the end of the year, the NDF also declared that it had yet to discuss the composition of its negotiating team and decide whether or not to announce a ceasefire or a cessation of hostilities for the resumption of the talks.

At the end of the year, the government expressed its displeasure and disappointment about the statement released by the Communist Party of the Philippines to mark the 55th anniversary of its founding that declared the primacy of armed struggle to achieve transformation and said that the peace talks were an additional battlefield for achieving its objectives. The statement also ordered the NPA to strengthen itself and increase its fight against the Philippine state and against US imperialism and the Marcos government. However, the most controversial part of the statement was the Communist Party of the Philippines' announcement of the Third Rectification Movement on the basis of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism and its basic principles as laid out by Sison, with the aim of overcoming the ideological, political and organisational errors, weaknesses and shortcomings that it had identified in recent years (especially since 2016) and that hindered its growth and the advancement of the revolution. The First Rectification Movement took place in the second half of the 1960s and culminated in the refoundation of the Communist Party of the Philippines in 1968, while the Second Rectification Movement took place in the early 1990s.

Gender, peace and security

The current interim president of the NDF negotiating panel is Juliet de Lima, while Coni Ledesma is also involved. Kristina Lie Revheim is the Norwegian government's special envoy to the peace process, who has been facilitating dialogue for years.

Myanmar	
Negotiating actors	Government, armed signatory groups of the cease fire agreement (NCA): DKBA, RCSS/ SSA-South, CNF, KNU,KNLAPC, ALP, PNLO, ABSDF, NMSP and LDU; armed groups not part of the: UWSP, NDAA, SSPP/SSA-N, KNPP, NSCN-K, KIA, AA, TNLA, MNDAA
Third parties	China, ASEAN
Relevant agreements	Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (October 2015)

Summary:

Since the armed conflict between the Armed Forces of Myanmar and ethnic-based insurgent groups began in 1948, several negotiations have take place in an attempt to end the violence. Beginning in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, many armed groups have reached ceasefire agreements with the Burmese Government. Although definitive peace agreements were never reached, violence did decrease significantly as a result of these pacts. In 2011 there was a change in the Administration as a result of the 2010 elections and the new Government made several overtures to the armed insurgency that brought about the start of peace negotiations and the signing of agreements with most of the armed groups operating in different parts of the country. By mid-2012 the Government had signed a ceasefire agreement with 12 insurgent organizations. In 2013, talks began with different insurgent groups aimed at reaching a nationwide ceasefire agreement and promoting political talks. In 2015, the government and eight armed opposition groups signed a ceasefire agreement (NCA), taking the first steps towards political dialogue. In 2016, State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi convened the Union Peace Conference – 21st Century Panglong, which brought the government together with the armed opposition groups, beginning a new phase in the peace process. The conference has been convened several times in subsequent years.

There were different forums for dialogue with several of the active insurgent groups in the country during the year and ASEAN's unsuccessful diplomatic attempts at dialogue with the Burmese military regime continued. In December, a ceasefire agreement was reached between the Burmese Armed Forces and the armed group MNDAA, a member of the Three Brothers Alliance—made up of the MNDAA (Kokang armed group), the TNLA (Ta'ang armed group) and the AA (Rakhine armed group). Facilitated by China, the ceasefire took place after an unprecedented escalation of armed conflict in northern Shan State, which had put Myanmar's military regime in its most fragile position since the 2021 coup. The violence escalated after the start of Operation 1027 (in reference to the start date of 27 October), after which the armed groups seized important positions, inflicting serious military defeats on the regime and promoting military actions by other insurgent groups in different parts of the country. On 11 December, the MNDAA and the Burmese government agreed to a temporary ceasefire at a meeting in China, which planned the establishment of a safe corridor for civilians and government officials. However, the clashes persisted and escalated, leading to a breakdown in talks between the parties on 23

December. The talks had taken place in the Chinese city of Kunming and followed a visit by Myanmar's foreign minister to Beijing.

Furthermore, Chinese-facilitated meetings between the Myanmar government and other ethnic armed insurgent groups continued on several occasions. There were some meetings with groups that signed the 2015 ceasefire agreement, though these were groups with less operational capacity and no significant agreements were reached with them. During the eighth anniversary of the signing of the nationwide ceasefire agreement, a ceremony was attended by representatives of some of the groups that signed it.

Finally, there was no progress in meetings between ASEAN and the Burmese government following the political crisis resulting from the 2021 military coup d'état. In fact, some disagreements arose between ASEAN members on how to conduct the relationship with Myanmar. Although the members of the Asian organisation reaffirmed their commitment to the Five-Point Consensus established after the coup d'état, the governments held different positions. Thailand promoted greater rapprochement with the Burmese military junta, though this position was criticised for breaking the consensus among the Asian countries that make up the organisation. In fact, Thailand's foreign minister visited former State Councillor Aung San Suu Kyi in prison. In September, ASEAN countries agreed on a new mechanism to address the situation in Myanmar through a troika made up of the current, former and future presidents of the organisation. It was also decided that Myanmar would not be able to hold the regional presidency in 2026 and calls were repeated to end the violence in the country and find a lasting and sustainable solution to its situation. ASEAN also called for an end to attacks against civilians, homes and civilian infrastructure, such as educational, health and religious centres. In November, the government of Indonesia, which held the ASEAN presidency at the time, said it had held meetings with different important actors in Myanmar to promote the Five-Point Consensus, including representatives of the National Unity Government (NUG), the government-in-exile formed after the coup d'état and ethnic resistance forces. The government of Myanmar was represented by "interlocutors", as stated in the subsequent statement, without specifying their identity. In fact, the NUG indicated that it was not involved in talks with the military government.

Thailand (south)	
Negotiating actors	Government, BRN
Third parties	Malaysia
Relevant agreements	--

Summary:

Since 2004, the year when the armed conflict in the south of Thailand reignited, several discreet and exploratory informal conversations have taken place between the Thai government and the insurgent group. Some of these dialogue initiatives have been led by non-government organizations, by the Indonesian government or by former senior officials of the Thai State. After around one year of exploratory contacts between the Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and some insurgent groups, at the start of 2013, formal and public conversations started between the Government and the armed group BRN, facilitated by the Government of Malaysia. These negotiations were interrupted by the coup d'état in March 2014, but the military government in power since then resumed its contacts with several insurgent groups towards the second half of the year. In 2015 negotiations between the Government and MARA Patani –an organization grouping the main insurgent groups in the south of the country– were made public. Although the insurgency wanted to discuss measures that might resolve the central points of the conflict (such as recognizing the distinct identity of the Patani people or granting some level of self-government to the provinces of Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat), the main point discussed during the initial stages of the process was the establishment of several security areas to reduce the level of violence and thus determine the level of representativeness of MARA Patani and the commitment of insurgent groups (especially the BRN) with the process of dialogue.

Though high levels of violence continued to be reported in the south of the country and the peace negotiations between the government and the BRN remained inactive for much of the year, **significant headway was made in the negotiations between both parties, such as the appointment of a new facilitator by Malaysia, the appointment of a new negotiating panel by the new government of Thailand, the signing of a shared road map between both parties and the BRN's acceptance that other armed groups may participate in the negotiating process.** On 10 January, the government of Malaysia announced the appointment of General Zulfiki Zainal Abidin, the former head of the Malaysian Armed Forces, to replace Abdul Rahim Noor, effective 1 January. In early February, Zulfiki Zainal Abidin met with the government's negotiating panel led by General Wanlop Rugsanaoh in Bangkok. A few days later, on 20 February, the sixth round of negotiations of the Peace Dialogue Process on Southern Thailand began in Malaysia. In this meeting, which lasted two days, **both parties agreed on the Joint Comprehensive Plan toward Peace, a kind of shared road map that should be implemented in 2023 and 2024.** In a joint press conference with both negotiating teams, Zulfiki Zainal Abidin announced that the details of the agreement would continue to be worked on over the course of several technical meetings between the parties from March to May. The facilitator of the negotiating process also revealed that **the BRN would accept the participation of other armed groups operating in the south of the country** in the peace talks, though without offering names or dates in this regard. A few days before the sixth round of negotiations, Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim had visited Thailand and declared that he would do

everything in his power to achieve a solution to the armed conflict and that Malaysia would not accept the use of violence to resolve it. Some media outlets interpreted his statement as a warning to both the government of Thailand and the BRN. Though many analysts said that the Joint Comprehensive Plan towards Peace could be an important turning point in the process, no meetings took place or were made public in the months after it was signed, nor was any substantial progress made in the negotiations. In fact, in March the BRN publicly announced that it was temporarily suspending its participation in the negotiations until a new government emerged from the elections in May.

The leader of the party that won the elections (Move Forward) had declared that if he managed to form a government, the negotiating process would be led by civilians (the last three heads of the government's negotiating team have been military men), who would take human rights in the region more into account, thereby promoting a more inclusive and participatory peace process that would prioritise the principle of coexistence in a multicultural society. However, even though Move Forward obtained the support of eight parties to achieve a parliamentary majority, their total number of seats did not add up to a sufficient majority to form a government. Finally, after an impasse of more than three months, the leader of the opposition party Pheu Thai (which finished second in the May elections) was sworn in as prime minister after managing to forge a coalition of 11 parties. On the same day that Srettha Thavisin was sworn in as prime minister, the former prime minister and founder and de facto leader of Pheu Thai, Thaksin Shinawatra, returned to Thailand after spending 15 years in exile to evade several pending criminal charges. Thaksin was deposed in a coup d'état in 2006, and it was under his administration that the conflict in the Muslim-majority southern provinces escalated to unprecedented levels in previous decades. Some civil society organisations in southern Thailand lamented Srettha and his government's apparent lack of interest in moving forward in the peace negotiations, criticising the new authorities in Bangkok for their fear of internationalising the resolution of the conflict. Finally, **after months of uncertainty about the future of the peace negotiations, in late November the Thai government appointed Chatchai Bangchud as head of the new government negotiating team,** which would also be made up of the Thai Army Commander for the Southern Region, the General Director of Civil Affairs of the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre and officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Justice. Chatchai, who is the first civilian to serve in the role, was previously the Undersecretary-General of the National Security Council. He has been involved in the negotiating process since before Malaysia took over dialogue facilitation efforts in 2013 and has recently been the main collaborator of the government's main negotiator until then, General Wanlop Rugsanaoh. In December, Chatchai Bangchud travelled to Malaysia to meet with the dialogue facilitation team. According to

several media reports, some of the team's new priorities will include reducing violence (and especially an end of hostilities during Ramadan, which happened in 2022) and greater inclusivity and participation in the process. According to some, in January 2024 a working committee of the negotiating team will begin consultations with various actors in the south of the country. Also in December, Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim met in a Thai town near the border with the Thai Prime Minister and asserted that the Thai Prime Minister had the political will to resolve the conflict in southern Thailand.

Gender, peace and security

In late May, as part of a project funded by the Peacemakers Network's Asia Working Group, 25 Muslim and Buddhist women met in Pattani to participate in a workshop on inclusive dialogue and to study the challenges and difficulties of the peace process between the Thai government and the BRN.

4.2.2 The Pacific

Papua New Guinea (Bougainville)	
Negotiating actors	Government of Papua New Guinea, government of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville
Third parties	United Nations
Relevant agreements	Bougainville Peace Agreement (2001)

Summary:

The armed conflict between the government of Papua New Guinea and the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (1988-1998), which some sources consider to have been the deadliest in Oceania since the Second World War, ended with a cessation of hostilities in 1998 and the signing of a peace agreement in 2001 in Arawa (the largest city in Bougainville). Among other matters, the agreement provided for the establishment of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville (ARB), the disarmament and demobilisation of combatants and the holding of a non-binding independence referendum within a maximum period of 15 years after the election of the first ARB government, which finally took place in 2005. After several years of negotiations between the national and regional governments, in 2018 the Agreement's Joint Supervisory Body created the Post-Referendum Planning Working Group and former Irish President Bertie Ahern was elected chair of the Bougainville Referendum Commission, making him responsible for preparing the census and other logistical preparations for the referendum. After several delays, the referendum was finally held between 23 November and 7 December 2019, with a binary question in which voters could choose between greater autonomy or independence for the region.

Not only were there no significant agreements or progress in the talks between the government of Papua New Guinea and the Autonomous Bougainville Government on the political status of Bougainville in 2023, but there were major disagreements between

both parties regarding procedural and substantive issues in the process at various times during the year. One of the main conflicts between the parties occurred in June, after Minister for Bougainville Affairs Manasseh Makiba declared before the national Parliament that the vote on the independence of Bougainville would require a two-thirds majority (and not a simple majority), with the understanding that an issue of such impact that affects the sovereignty of the country would require amendment of the Constitution. Makiba also said that both the Constitution and the 2001 Bougainville Peace Agreement provide for the national Parliament to decide on how to interpret the results of the 2019 Bougainville independence referendum (97.7% voted in favour of independence) and, ultimately, on the political status of Bougainville. In this sense, Makiba said that if certain leaders did not agree with the ratification process proposed to the national Parliament, they could raise the issue before the Supreme Court so it could hand down its verdict on the matter. The Autonomous Bougainville Government, and particularly its Minister for Independence Mission Implementation, Ezekiel Massat, protested angrily, arguing that the government was trying to unilaterally change an issue (that of the necessary majority in Parliament) that had already been previously agreed upon by both governments. As such, Massat said that **the national government was placing as many obstacles as possible in Bougainville's path to independence and warned that the Autonomous Bougainville Government no longer had any confidence in being able to achieve independence under the government of James Marape.**

Faced with such a crisis, the sole meeting all year of the Joint Supervisory Body, led by Prime Minister James Marape and the Autonomous Bougainville Government's President Ishmael Toroama, was held in Port Moresby in late July. Some important agreements were made during the meeting: the motion to be submitted to Parliament would have to be approved by a simple majority (and not a qualified majority, as Massat had suggested), Toroama and other members of the Autonomous Bougainville Government would be invited to do awareness-raising and political advocacy work before members of the national Parliament and a third party could possibly be designated to facilitate the talks between both governments and to help to resolve disputes that may arise during them.

Despite the importance of such a meeting, protests by the Autonomous Bougainville Government continued during the second half of the year. In September, for example, the Autonomous Bougainville Government voiced its firm opposition to making the vote in the national Parliament on the independence of Bougainville secret, or to having such a decision taken in two or more parliamentary sessions, arguing that such a format could delay the timing agreed upon by both parties. In April 2022, the governments of Papua New Guinea and Bougainville had reached an agreement (called the Era

Kone Covenant on the Finalisation of the Bougainville Referendum) according to which the results of the 2019 referendum and the conclusions and agreements of the consultations and negotiations that the two parties have maintained since then should be presented to the Parliament of Papua New Guinea before the end of 2023. This commitment was ratified by the national government several times during 2023, but by the end of December it had not been fulfilled. In December, tension between both governments rose again after Minister for Bougainville Affairs Manasseh Makiba said that the results of the 2019 referendum were not binding, that the Parliament of Papua New Guinea was the only authority with the capacity to decide on the political status of Bougainville and that the 2019 independence referendum was unique because its implementation was contained in a peace agreement (from 2001) and was not related to a decolonisation process, separating it completely from other geographically close cases, such

as New Caledonia and West Papua. **The Autonomous Bougainville Government noted that nowhere in the 2001 peace agreement or in Papua New Guinea's legal system does it stipulate that the referendum is not binding** and regretted that, at the end of the year, there had still been no response to a letter from Toroama to Marape requesting the appointment of an independent mediator who could facilitate the talks and resolution of the disputes between both governments.

Gender, peace and security

Francesca Riana Semoso became the third woman to win a seat in the Parliament of Papua New Guinea (and the first woman originally from Bougainville) when she won a seat for North Bougainville in the legislative by-elections held in late October. Semoso had already held a seat in the Bougainville Parliament on two previous occasions.