

## 4. Peace negotiations in Asia and the Pacific

- In Asia and the Pacific there were 12 negotiation processes, 23% of the total cases in the world
- The head of the Tibetan government in exile said that unofficial talks had been taking place with the Chinese government, facilitated by a third country.
- India and China reached an important agreement to ease tensions in their border dispute.
- In southern Thailand, the Thai government and the BRN resumed negotiations after a 12-month impasse.
- Different armed groups in Myanmar negotiated with the military junta due to pressure from China to keep the armed conflict from escalating.
- Faced with the standstill in the negotiations on the political status of Bougainville, both parties agreed to the appointment of an independent moderator enjoying technical and political support from the United Nations.

This chapter provides an analysis of the main peace processes and negotiations in Asia and the Pacific in 2024, 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 2024.

Table 4.1. Summary of peace processes and negotiations in Asia and the Pacific in 2024

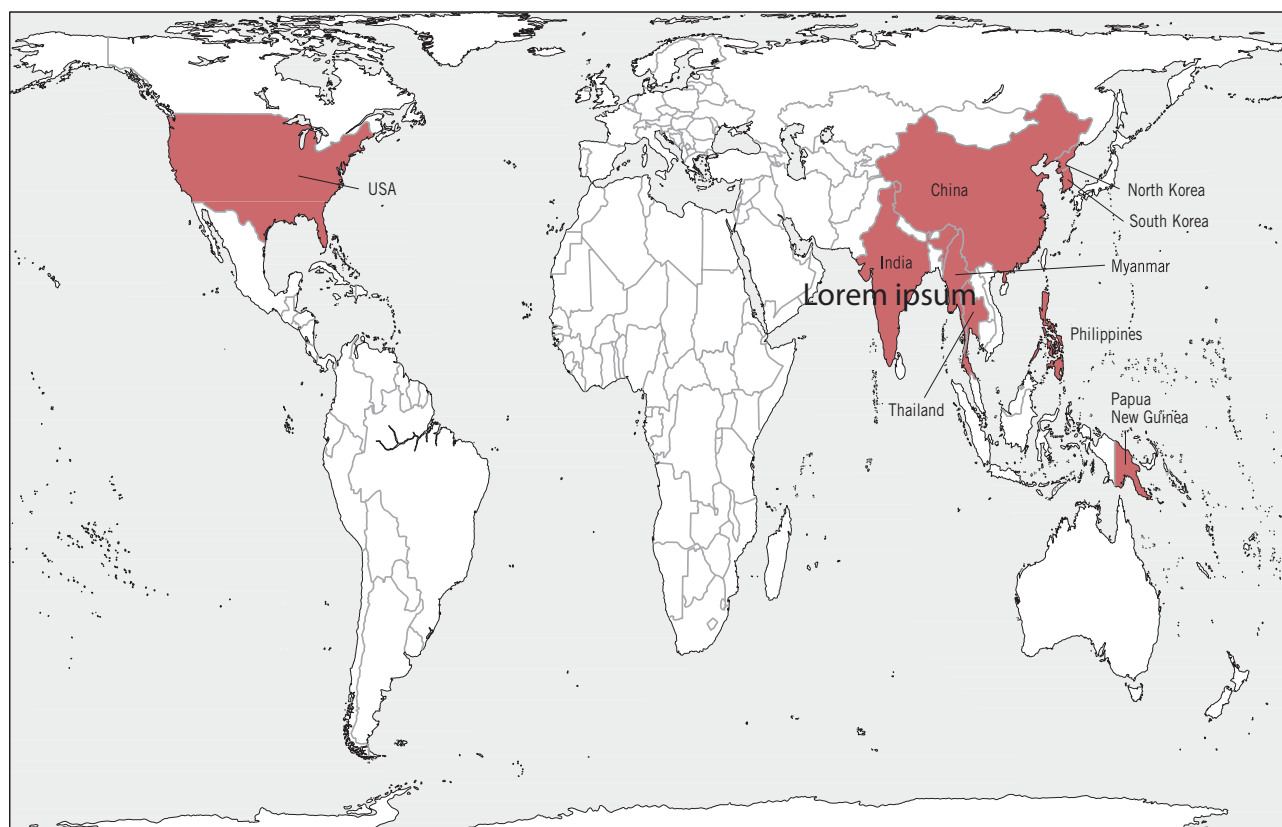
Peace processes and negotiations	Negotiating actors	Third parties
<b>China (Tibet)</b>	China, Tibetan government in exile	-- <sup>1</sup>
<b>North Korea – South Korea</b>	North Korea, South Korea	--
North Korea – USA	North Korea, USA	--
<b>Philippines (MILF)</b>	Government, MILF, Interim Government of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao	Malaysia, Third Party Monitoring Team, Independent Decommissioning Body
<b>Philippines (MNLF)</b>	Government, MNLF (factions led by Nur Misuari and Muslimin Sema)	--
<b>Philippines (NDF)</b>	Government, NDF (umbrella organisation of various communist organisations, including the Communist Party of the Philippines, which is the political arm of the NPA)	Norway
<b>India (Assam)</b>	Government, ULFA-PTF	--
<b>India (Nagaland)</b>	Government, NSCN-IM, NNPG: GPRN/NSCN (Kitovi Zhimomi), NNC, FGN, NSCN(R), NPGN (Non-Accord) and NNC/GDRN/NA, ZUF	--
<b>India – China</b>	India, China	--
<b>Myanmar</b>	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 MNDAA	China, ASEAN
<b>Papua New Guinea (Bougainville)</b>	Government, Autonomous Bougainville Government	United Nations, Jerry Mateparae
<b>Thailand (south)</b>	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.

1 Although there is no public record of any third party facilitating the dialogue between the two governments, the president of the Tibetan Central Administration declared the existence of contacts and dialogue in a third country, thus suggesting that there is some sort of third party facilitation.

Map 4.1. Peace negotiations in Asia and the Pacific in 2024



■ Countries with peace processes and negotiations in Asia and the Pacific in 2024

## 4.1 Negotiations in 2024: regional trends

There were 12 negotiating processes in Asia and the Pacific in 2024, two more than in 2023 and in previous years, due to the inclusion of the cases of China (Tibet) and India-China. In the former case, the president of the Tibetan government in exile said that preliminary talks were taking place in a third country. Meanwhile, India and China negotiated over their historical border dispute, resulting in an agreement lowering tensions between them. Almost half the negotiations in Asia took place in Southeast Asia: the Philippines (MILF, MNLF and NDF), Myanmar and Thailand (South). Three were held in South Asia: India (Assam and Nagaland) and India-China. Three were pursued in East Asia: China (Tibet), North Korea-South Korea and North Korea-USA. Finally, one took place in the Pacific region: Papua New Guinea (Bougainville). A quarter of the negotiations were linked to active armed conflicts—the Philippines (NDF), Myanmar and Thailand (south)—or to long-standing armed conflicts in which peace agreements were signed—the Philippines (MILF, MNLF). The remaining cases were either scenarios of internal socio-political tension—India (Assam and Nagaland), China (Tibet) and Papua New Guinea (Bougainville)—

*In Asia and the Pacific there were 12 negotiation processes, two more than in previous years*

or of inter-state tension—North Korea-South Korea, North Korea-USA and India-China. Although Asia and the Pacific was the part of the world with the second-highest number of active negotiations, a significant percentage of them very clearly revolved around the implementation of previously reached agreements, such as in the Philippines (MILF and MNLF), India (Assam) and Papua New Guinea (Bougainville). Two other cases, China (Tibet) and the Philippines (NDF), were limited to exploratory talks, and two others showed no public record of new contacts or direct meetings between the parties during the year (North Korea-South Korea and North Korea-US). The vast majority of the negotiations were internal, but three (India-China, North Korea-South Korea and North Korea-US) were inter-state.

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 MNDA, 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 and between India and China. 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. There were also exploratory talks between the Chinese government and the Tibetan government in exile, which Beijing did not recognise. Therefore, compared to other regions, sub-state authorities played a significant role in several of the negotiating processes in Asia.

**The substantive agenda of more than half the negotiating processes was related to issues such as autonomy, self-determination, independence, territorial alignment or recognition of the identity of different national minorities, as in the cases of India (Assam and Nagaland), the Philippines (MILF, MNLF), China (Tibet), Myanmar, Papua New Guinea (Bougainville) and Thailand (south). Another issue in several negotiating processes was the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of combatants.** The Philippine government and the MILF negotiated various issues, including the implementation of the final phase of the process to disarm and demobilise 40,000 former MILF combatants provided for in the 2014 peace agreement. Similarly, as part of the commitments that Manila made in the 1996 peace agreement with the MNLF, it promoted reintegration programmes for former MNLF combatants and socio-economic development for their communities of origin in several regions of Mindanao. In Assam, the agreement signed in December 2023 between the ULFA-PTF and the Indian central government and the Assam state government

began to be implemented. This agreement provided for the dissolution and disarmament of the armed group, as well as the abandonment of the cantonment centres where combatants and their families had remained since the peace negotiations began in 2011, among other issues. **Another important aspect of the substantive agenda in the negotiations in Asia and the Pacific during 2024 was the reduction of tension and violence, including the possibility of cessations of hostilities.** Regarding internal tensions, one of the main points of the roadmap agreed between the Thai government and the armed opposition group BRN was the lowering of violence in the three Muslim-majority southern provinces. The Philippine government and the NDF discussed the possibility of declaring a truce for the Christmas holidays, as they had agreed in previous years, but it was ultimately unsuccessful. The Burmese government and the Three Brothers Alliance, which is made up of the Kokang armed group MNDA, the Ta'ang armed group TNLA and the Rakhine armed group AA, agreed to a ceasefire in northern Shan State, facilitated by China. Later, in December, the MNDA announced a unilateral ceasefire with which it intended to start negotiations with the Burmese government, facilitated by China. Two of the three interstate negotiations in Asia and the Pacific (China-India and North Korea-South Korea) focused in part on reducing tensions along their shared border, whilst the key to the negotiations and diplomatic arrangements between North Korea and the US was in reducing North Korea's nuclear arsenal and its number of nuclear bomb and long-range ballistic missile tests.

Finally, in several of the negotiating processes in Asia and the Pacific, **certain procedural aspects gained importance in 2024 that were more closely linked to the design of the processes than to the substantive issues of the negotiations.**

For instance, the government of Papua New Guinea and the Autonomous Bougainville Government (ABG) agreed to appoint an independent moderator with technical and political support from the United Nations to facilitate dialogue between both sides on the political status of the island of Bougainville. Similarly, in India (Nagaland), the armed group NSCN-IM demanded that a third international party facilitate its dialogue with the government, suggesting the United Nations or a European government as possible candidates. The Indian government also asked the different armed groups operating in the country to find common ground to make it easier to sign a single peace agreement. Along these lines, the Philippine government continued to promote convergence and rapprochement between the two largest factions of the MNLF, as well as harmonisation between the peace agreement signed in 1996 with the MNLF and the 2014 peace agreement between Manila and the MILF. In 2024, the Philippine government and the NDF held exploratory talks to design a negotiating

*Many of the negotiations in Asia and the Pacific revolved around the implementation of previous agreements*

format and framework so the commitments they made in November 2023 to resolve their historical conflict through dialogue could be put into practice. However, while the NDF demands that this framework recognise the principles and agreements reached since the early 1990s, Manila wants a new format that is better adapted to the current circumstances of the conflict. In the case of China (Tibet), the Tibetan government in exile tried to get Beijing to admit that both parties had been engaged in exploratory talks in a third country and to recognise representatives of the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) as legitimate negotiating partners. The Chinese government has only wanted to negotiate with personal representatives of the Dalai Lama. In Thailand, representatives of the new government said that the state's negotiation strategies and models in recent decades had to be rethought. Moreover, it was revealed to the public during the year that four peace process experts (Thai, British, German and Norwegian) had been observing and supporting the negotiating process in Thailand since 2019, both officially and in the informal and exploratory phases. In the inter-Korean negotiations, the South Korean government presented its political strategy to achieve the reunification of both countries, which includes, among other issues, the creation of an inter-Korean consultative body to deal with various aspects of bilateral relations. However, the North Korean government rejected the proposal.

**In Asia and the Pacific, only five of the 12 negotiating processes were facilitated by third parties, making it the part of the world where they had the lowest proportion of external support.** Specifically, the negotiating processes with strictly direct dialogue between the parties and no external facilitation were North Korea and South Korea, North Korea and the USA, the Indian states of Assam and Nagaland, the Philippines (MNLF), China (Tibet) and China-India. The five negotiating processes that did have external support were between the Philippine government and the NDF, which had the support of Norway; between Manila and the MILF, with the facilitation of Malaysia; between the government of Papua New Guinea and the Autonomous Bougainville Government (ABG), facilitated by an independent moderator with the support of the United Nations; between Thailand and the armed opposition group BRN, with the facilitation of Malaysia; and between Myanmar's military junta and various armed groups, where China used pressure to push through various dialogue initiatives and ASEAN tried to facilitate a solution to the political crisis that has been gripping the country since the 2021 coup d'état. Compared to other regions of the world, the mediation efforts in Asia and the Pacific were relatively simple and characterised by a single third party. The most important exception were the negotiations over the implementation of the peace agreement signed

by the Philippine government and the MILF in 2014. Here, in addition to the talks between the government and MILF panels, facilitated by Malaysia, the process to implement the peace agreement was supported by the Third Party Monitoring Team, in charge of supervising the implementation of the agreements signed between the MILF and the Philippine government, and the International Decommissioning Body, made up of Türkiye, Norway, Brunei and local staff from the Philippines, to supervise the demobilisation of 40,000 former MILF combatants. Like other third parties, **international and regional organisations** played only a limited role in facilitating and supporting negotiating processes in Asia, and in fact did so at much lower proportions than in elsewhere in the world. Exceptions include the United Nations' facilitation of the dialogue between the government of Papua New Guinea and the Autonomous Bougainville Government to determine the political status of Bougainville, mainly in support of the independent moderator appointed by both parties, Jerry Mateparae, and the role played by ASEAN in promoting a solution to the political crisis in Myanmar following the 2021 coup d'état. Informally, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) also played a supporting role in the negotiations between the Philippine government and the MNLF, as well as in the relations between the MNLF and the MILF.

Most of the negotiating processes in Asia and the Pacific **trended towards stagnation**, impasse and even regression. There were no meetings or contacts between Pyongyang and Washington regarding the denuclearisation of North Korea, whilst relations between North Korea and South Korea hit one of the lowest points in recent years, with Pyongyang accusing Seoul of trying to replace the negotiations on reunification with a strategy to weaken and absorb North Korea and with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un determined to end the reconciliation and reunification of the Korean peninsula as a long-term political objective. The Philippine government and the NDF publicly revealed that they had been engaged in exploratory talks, but there were no formal meetings during the year and no significant progress was made in trying to make effective and operational the commitment made in late 2023 by both parties to explore a political and dialogue-based solution to the conflict. Tensions rose between the central government of Papua New Guinea and the Autonomous Bougainville Government (ABG) over the deadlock and lack of progress in the negotiating process on the political status of the island, with the president of the ABG accusing the central government of failing to comply with the roadmap agreed in 2021 and of not wanting to implement the results of the 2019 independence referendum. The political crisis that Thailand experienced during the year slowed down and paralysed the negotiating process between the

***Most negotiations in Asia and the Pacific were bilateral and direct, without third-party facilitation***



government and the BRN, prompting harsh criticism from the BRN of Bangkok's lack of will and strategy to resolve the conflict. Later, a senior Thai government representative raised the possibility of changing the negotiating model used in recent years. Not only was there no public record of significant progress in the negotiations between the Chinese government and the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), but the exploratory talks were not even recognised and no agreement was made on their content. Finally, ASEAN failed to facilitate a solution to the political crisis gripping Myanmar since the 2021 coup d'état, whilst the attempts made by the military junta and various armed groups to reach ceasefire agreements did not curb a significant rise in violence or prevent the armed opposition from making significant military advances.

Despite the general stagnation and paralysis in the negotiating processes in Asia and the Pacific, significant **headway** was also made in some cases. Perhaps the greatest new development were the alleged exploratory talks between Beijing and the Tibetan government in exile, which were only acknowledged by the latter. According to most analysts, the last rounds of dialogue between the Chinese government and special envoys of the Dalai Lama were held in 2010. Though the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) was sceptical about the course and outcome of these exploratory talks, many analysts confirmed that there had been fresh contact between the parties and recognised their potential importance. Another important development in Asia and the Pacific was the agreement on the historical border dispute between India and China reached in October, which helped to reduce the political and military tensions that had worsened in the region since 2020, after direct clashes that resulted in fatalities. Whilst the agreement did not resolve the underlying dispute over defining the border, it did stipulate confidence-building measures such as troop withdrawal and peaceful patrolling in disputed border areas in the eastern part of the Indian territory of Ladakh.

The joint appointment by the central government of Papua New Guinea and the Bougainville Autonomous Government (ABG) of an impartial moderator supported by the United Nations illustrates the difficulties and tensions of the negotiations that began after the independence referendum in Bougainville in 2019, but both parties admitted that it could also mark a turning point. In the Philippines, the different factions of the MNLF were satisfied with the progress made in the reintegration of a significant amount of their ex-combatants, one of the main aspects of the 1996 peace agreement that was still pending implementation. In the same vein, the MILF welcomed the cooperation between the negotiating panels of the Philippine

government and the MILF and between Manila and the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) in implementing the 2014 peace agreement and in the institutional rollout of the new autonomous framework in Mindanao. Although the MILF was unhappy with the slow pace of the disarmament and demobilisation of its combatants, both parties remained solidly committed to the peace process overall. The resumption of negotiations between the Thai government and the armed group BRN raised big expectations because it not only put an end to the 12-month impasse in the talks, but it was also the first round of negotiations after almost a decade of rule by either a military junta (2014-2019) or a government proceeding from it (2019-2023). In the first half of the year, both parties reached an agreement that the facilitator of the dialogue described as a significant step forward and a major turning point in the peace process. Although high levels of violence continued in Myanmar and there were no significant political negotiations between the military junta and the various armed groups operating in the country, positive developments included temporary and geographically limited ceasefire agreements signed with the Three Brothers Alliance, made up of the Kokang armed group MNDAA, the Ta'ang armed group TNLA and the Rakhine armed group AA, and, at the end of the year, with the MNDAA. In Assam, the peace agreement signed in late December 2023 began implementation, including the dissolution of the armed group ULFA-PTF 44 years after it was founded.

Finally, women were hardly involved in negotiating processes during the year and no significant progress was reported in the implementation of the **gender, peace and security agenda**. One of the few exceptions was in the Philippines, where some women held key positions in the negotiating process between Manila and the NDF, such as the facilitator of the dialogue and the head of the NDF's negotiating panel, and where some implementation activities were carried out both for the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security nationwide and for the Bangsamoro Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security in Mindanao. Along the same lines, during celebrations of the tenth anniversary of the peace agreement between the Philippine government and the MILF, it was recalled that the negotiating process had enjoyed much higher female participation than most others in the world. Several women's organisations in Myanmar demanded the implementation of the women, peace and security agenda, whilst the United Nations promoted several projects for women's participation in the main forum for negotiations between the central government of Papua New Guinea and the Autonomous Bougainville Government: the Joint Consultative Body (JCB).

*Regarding the evolution of peace negotiations in Asia and the Pacific, in most contexts there was stagnation, paralysis and even setbacks*

## 4.2 Case study analysis

### 4.2.1 Asia

#### East Asia

China (Tibet)	
<b>Negotiating actors</b>	China, Tibetan government in exile
<b>Third parties</b>	--
<b>Relevant agreements</b>	--
<b>Summary:</b> <p>The official phase of the Sino-Tibetan negotiating process took place mainly between 2002 and 2010, but its origins date back to the late 1970s, shortly after Mao's death and under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping. In 1979, when the Tibetan government in exile had already developed its Middle Way strategy (renouncing independence and opting for significant autonomy for Tibet), the Dalai Lama's elder brother visited Beijing and Deng Xiaoping reportedly offered the possibility of starting negotiations in which all issues except Tibetan independence could be addressed. As a result of this initial approach, four fact-finding missions to Tibet and two exploratory meetings between the parties were carried out in the first half of the 1980s. In the second half of the 1980s, the Dalai Lama presented his Five-Point Peace Plan, which called for an end to the transfer of the Tibetan population, respect for human rights and the start of formal negotiations on the status of Tibet on the premise of a democratic model of self-government in which historic Tibet (comprising the Amdo, Kham and U-Tsang regions, and not just the Tibet Autonomous Region) would hold most powers. The Chinese government, now led by Jiang Zemin, rejected these proposals and cut off contact and increased criticism of the Dalai Lama from 1993 onwards. Following several years of increasing international pressure on Beijing to resume dialogue, Jiang Zemin was eventually replaced as China's top leader by Hu Jintao, who conducted ten rounds of negotiations between 2002 and 2010, all of them held in China (except one in Switzerland in 2005). The Tibetan delegation based its negotiating strategy on the Middle Way and on achieving a model of autonomy for Tibet within the framework of the Chinese Constitution. Faced with protests that began in Tibet in 2008 and a campaign of self-immolations since 2009, Beijing concluded that the autonomy proposal presented in 2009 was leading to covert independence for Tibet and ended the negotiations.</p>	

The head of the Tibetan government in exile, Penpa Tsering, said repeatedly during the year that unofficial talks with the Chinese government had been taking place, facilitated by a third country at Beijing's request. Though he did not reveal the name of the country or the official rank of the Chinese government representatives participating in the talks, Penpa Tsering acknowledged that his government did not have high expectations of the outcome, but he also stressed the importance of maintaining open communication with Beijing and of thinking long-term, beyond the current mandate of Xi Jinping. In keeping with recent years, the Tibetan government in exile reiterated its commitment to its Middle Way policy, which rules out independence for the region and calls for the implementation of real and genuine autonomy for the six million Tibetan people

in accordance with the Chinese Constitution and the Regional Autonomy Law. The area in question would be geographically larger than the current Tibet Autonomous Region and the autonomous authority would hold powers with the greatest impact on preserving Tibetan identity. The Chinese government did not acknowledge that any such unofficial talks had taken place, but it did note that it had two conditions for any contact or negotiations with Tibet. Firstly, **any such contact would have to be made directly with personal representatives of the Dalai Lama and not with the Tibetan government in exile**, officially known as the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA). Secondly, **the subject of the dialogue would have to be limited to the Dalai Lama's personal future (or at most, that of those close to him) and could not include more important political issues such as the level of autonomy for Tibet**. Following these statements, one of the Dalai Lama's two personal envoys who had been involved in the talks that took place between 2002 and 2010, Kelsang Gyaltsen, said that Beijing's position towards Tibet had hardened in recent years, particularly given its refusal to discuss any form of self-government. Penpa Tsering downplayed the importance of Beijing's refusal to acknowledge the negotiations, saying that it is Chinese government policy not to recognise any initiative for dialogue on Tibet. The president of the CTA also described the Tibet situation as an unresolved conflict and said that his government will continue to urge the international community to pressure Beijing to resume negotiations. Along these lines, **in June, both the US Senate and the US House of Representatives passed the Promoting a Resolution to the Tibet-China Dispute Act, which President Joe Biden subsequently signed into law. Also known as the Resolve Tibet Act, it calls on the Chinese government to resolve the Tibetan conflict through dialogue without preconditions** in accordance with international law. Whilst Biden made it clear that the US still recognises Tibet as part of China, the new law recognises the Tibetan people's right to self-determination, empowers the State Department to counter Chinese government disinformation about Tibet, including the claim that Tibet has been part of China since ancient times, and allows Washington to press for negotiations on Tibet's future. Shortly before Biden signed the Resolve Tibet Act, **a bicameral US delegation travelled to the seat of the Tibetan government in exile to meet with the Dalai Lama**. Former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said the law sent a very clear message to China and confirmed that the situation regarding the resolution of the Tibetan conflict had changed. Beijing was unhappy with the new US legislation and the bicameral delegation's meeting with the Dalai Lama. **The president of the CTA said that the Resolve Tibet Act was a historic step forward and a very important turning point, as it put pressure on Beijing and encouraged other governments to follow the same path**. In December 2023, the European Parliament also passed a resolution urging Beijing to start talks on Tibetan autonomy. In late December, facing a possible resumption of talks between China and India on border disputes, the CTA declared that if India wanted to ensure peace on its

borders with China, it should address the historical dispute over Tibet with Beijing, adding that the state of Arunachal Pradesh, and any other territory disputed by China, is an integral part of India.

North Korea – South Korea	
<b>Negotiating actors</b>	North Korea, South Korea
<b>Third parties</b>	--
<b>Relevant agreements</b>	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 Kumsangsan 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.

This year marked a historic turning point in negotiations between North and South Korea on reunification and reconciliation in the Korean peninsula. At the beginning of the year, North Korean leader **Kim Jong-un declared that his country was ending its goal of achieving reunification, as he had foreshadowed in late 2023. Throughout the year, he promoted the constitutional reforms and government action necessary to make this decision effective.** Some analysts said that Kim Jong-

un’s decision marked a drastic change and a turning point compared to his predecessors in office. **Previously, despite the high historical political and military tension between the two countries, North Korea had always considered the reconciliation and reunification of the Korean peninsula as a political objective** and had maintained open channels of dialogue and political cooperation to that end. In mid-January, in a speech to the Supreme People’s Assembly, Kim Jong-un said that his government would no longer seek or accept any kind of dialogue on reunification and reconciliation, calling South Korea his country’s main enemy and that Seoul sought only “unification by absorption”. Kim Jong-un called for amending the constitution to consider South Korea to be the country’s “invariable principal enemy”, to eliminate the idea of a shared state between two countries divided by war and to specify that in the event of war on the Korean Peninsula, North Korea would seek to “occupy, subjugate and reclaim” South Korea as part of its territory. Shortly after the speech, Kim Jong-un said that if North Korea were provoked, its military would completely annihilate the United States and South Korea. Declaring that war on the peninsula could break out at any time, he added that his country does not seek war but has no intention of avoiding it.

Pyongyang took several steps to implement the change in political strategy dictated by Kim Jong-un throughout the year, such as the demolition of monuments in honour of reunification; the elimination of symbols of inter-Korean reconciliation; the abolition of concepts such as “reunification”, “reconciliation” and “compatriots” in textbooks, propaganda and films; the modification of the national anthem and official maps; the abolition of the eleven government agencies that manage relations and dialogue with South Korea, including the Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Fatherland, the National Economic Cooperation Bureau and the Mount Kumgang Tourism Region; and the deployment of thousands of soldiers in the Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) to destroy the railway lines that connect the two Koreas and to place thousands of new landmines, further entrenching the division of the peninsula.

Despite this situation, South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol urged North Korea to resume dialogue several times during the year. In August, during a ceremony to commemorate the anniversary of Korean liberation from Japanese occupation in World War II, Yoon Suk-yeol said that he was willing to resume talks with the North Korean government if it took just one step towards denuclearisation. He also **presented his seven-step political strategy to achieve the reunification of both countries**, which some media outlets called the “August 15 Unification Doctrine”. Among other issues, Yoon Suk-yeol proposed the creation of an Inter-Korean Working Group made up of several working groups that could deal with various aspects of economic cooperation, humanitarian aid, contacts and exchanges between citizens of both countries, meetings of families separated by the Korean War (1950-53) and the reduction of

political and military tension on the peninsula. The day after the president's speech, the South Korean government established a working group to implement some of the plans outlined in it, such as the creation of a North Korean freedom and human rights fund to support civil society organisations in North Korea and the establishment of the aforementioned Inter-Korean Working Group. **Yoon Suk-yeol's proposal was criticised by the North Korean government and some analysts argue that it had little traction because it is not so much an attempt at negotiation as a unilateral unification strategy aimed at undermining the North Korean regime,** providing the North Korean people with an alternative to Pyongyang's propaganda about the outside world and arousing a greater desire for freedom and democracy through unification with South Korea. In his speech, Yoon Suk-yeol emphasised the importance of freedom, human rights and access to information in North Korea and of providing support for North Korean defectors and initiatives in favour of democracy and human rights in North Korea. Some argue that **Yoon Suk-yeol's proposal differs substantially from those of some of his more progressive predecessors in office, who renounced unification by absorption and sought inter-Korean dialogue, peaceful coexistence and economic cooperation to facilitate gradual and peaceful unification.** In this regard, the head of the Office of National Security and the Unification Doctrine publicly revealed by the president said that South Korea's reunification strategies over the past 30 years had not worked and stressed the importance of unilateral and proactive action for unification.

## South Asia

India (Assam)	
<b>Negotiating actors</b>	Government, ULFA-PTF
<b>Third parties</b>	--
<b>Relevant agreements</b>	Memorandum of Settlement (2023)
<b>Summary:</b> 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.	

**The peace agreement reached on 29 December 2023 that included the dissolution of the ULFA-PTF began to be implemented during the year.** The details of the tripartite pact between the Indian and Assam governments and the pro-negotiation faction of the ULFA were revealed at the start of the year. The agreement provided for the armed group to renounce violence, disband and disarm, abandon its cantonment centres and participate in the political processes established by law. It included an economic package to develop the state of Assam and recognised its territorial integrity through the dialogue-based resolution of territorial disputes with other Indian states. It also provided guarantees for the maximum representation of indigenous communities in the Assam Legislative Assembly. **As a result of the peace agreement signed on 29 December 2023, the pro-negotiation faction of the ULFA was dissolved in January.** The decision to disband was made at the armed group's last general meeting held in Sijahar, 44 years after it was founded. The meeting was attended by prominent ULFA leaders such as Arabinda Rajkhowa, Anup Chetia, Raju Barua, Pranati Phukan and Sasa Choudhury. The peace agreement provided for the group to disband and surrender its arms and ammunition no longer than 30 days after it was signed. In exchange for disbanding, charges of sedition against the ULFA would be lifted. The agreement also stipulated that the 700 members of the ULFA and their families had to leave the nine cantonment centres where they had been staying since the peace negotiations began in 2011. **A seven-person monitoring committee was formed to monitor the implementation of the agreement.** This committee was headed by ULFA General Secretary Anup Chetia, who **also announced the creation of an organisation called Asom Jatiya Bikash Mancha, which would aim to preserve the unique cultural and linguistic heritage of the Assamese community.** ULFA chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa said that the former group would not participate in political parties in the state, but that their members could do so as individuals if they so wished. Following the ULFA's meeting, a 13-member delegation led by Arabinda Rajkhowa and Anup Chetia met Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and discussed the rehabilitation of former combatants. The minister promised to establish a mechanism for rehabilitation and full implementation of the peace agreement.

The former armed group and the government met several times to make progress on implementing the agreement during the year. In November, the ULFA presented a project to the Indian government with a rehabilitation plan for its former combatants. The project contemplated the development of economic activities related to agriculture and livestock. Anup Chetia said he hoped the implementation of the agreement would be completed before the parliamentary elections in 2026. After the agreement was signed, the ULFA faction opposed to the negotiations, ULFA-I, remained active. Led by Paresch Baruah, its bases are in Myanmar and it was speculated that it could have approximately 200 members. Anup Chetia called on the Indian government



to step up its efforts to start negotiations with the ULFA-I and stop recruiting young people.

### Gender, peace and security

No information came to light on the participation of any women in either the peace negotiations or the signing of the agreement. The agreement made no specific mention of women's rights or gender inequalities. The only mention of women was included in the annex on development projects that the Indian government pledged to carry out, which referred to a women's empowerment project involving textiles in forest-dependent communities. Though the need to consider former combatants' age and level of educational to adapt their rehabilitation was discussed, no mention was made of female combatants or those associated with the armed group.

India (Nagaland)	
<b>Negotiating actors</b>	Government, NSCN-IM, NNPG: GPRN/NSCN (Kitovi Zhimomi), NNC, FGN, NSCN(R), NPGN (Non-Accord) and NNC/GDRN/NA, ZUF
<b>Third parties</b>	--
<b>Relevant agreements</b>	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 process between the Indian government and the Naga insurgent groups continued. After several years of stalemate, **in November the NSCN-IM, the main armed opposition group, issued an ultimatum to the Indian government threatening to resume its armed struggle if its conditions were not accepted.** These conditions included a **flag and a constitution for Nagaland**, which have both been central subjects of discussion since the 2015 Framework Agreement and on which no progress has been made in the last decade, as well as a new **demand to seek third-party**

**intervention that could facilitate the talks**, which had always previously been conducted directly between the parties. Some media outlets suggested that the NSCN-IM would like the facilitation of the UN or a European government. In a statement issued on 7 November, the chief negotiator and leader of the NSCN-IM and the head of the self-proclaimed Government of the People's Republic of Nagalim, Thuingaleng Muivah, claimed that the Indian government had betrayed the spirit of the Framework Agreement, whose content has never been made public by either party, by refusing to recognise a flag and a Constitution for Nagaland and threatened to resume "violent armed resistance against India". Whilst this was a change of tone in the rhetoric of the NSCN-IM, which has upheld a ceasefire agreement since 1997 and has participated in over 600 rounds of negotiations with the Indian government, different analysts questioned the insurgent group's ability to resume armed activity, given the de facto demobilisation of its estimated 5,000 fighters, as well as the different regional political context, especially in Bangladesh and Myanmar, where the armed group has had some bases in the past. In October, the Nagaland state government convened a consultative meeting with different Naga civil society actors. During the meeting, the attendees stressed the importance of getting the various armed actors in the state to unify their position and prevent factionalism and division so they can sign a single peace agreement. The need for the Indian government to appoint a new negotiator with a higher political profile than the current one was also raised during the meeting. The attendees argued that this should be a minister from the central government, as the current negotiator, AK Mishra, is a former director of the Indian Intelligence Bureau. Different Naga groups criticised the idea, describing it as a ploy to delay the talks.

Meanwhile, the NNPG, an umbrella organisation bringing together seven Naga insurgent groups, called for the peace agreement to be finalised before the end of the year according to the terms agreed in 2019 with the Indian government, including two demands: a separate page in Indian passports for Naga people and a bicameral parliament. The Indian government did not comment on the NNPG's request.

India – China	
<b>Negotiating actors</b>	India, China
<b>Third parties</b>	--
<b>Relevant agreements</b>	Border patrol agreement (2024)

#### Summary:

The border shared by China and India has been the subject of disputes since the 1950s, following the partition of India and Pakistan and the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. This border has never been formally delimited by an agreement between the two countries and there are several areas over which there is conflict. There was

a serious escalation of tension in 2020, with the first direct clashes between both countries' armies in which 20 Indian soldiers died. In the years following these armed clashes, both countries maintained a high-level military dialogue, with more than 20 rounds of talks. Alongside the technical military talks, some informal high-level political meetings also took place, especially as part of the BRICS international meetings.

**India and China were engaged in talks over the border dispute, resulting in an agreement in October that eased tensions between both countries.**

Since tensions between them rose sharply in 2020 as a result of direct clashes between their armed forces, which caused fatalities for the first time since 1975, they have been holding military-level talks to try to address the dispute. The first meeting in six months took place between Indian Minister of External Affairs Subrahmanyam Jaishankar and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi during the Munich Security Conference in February. The 21st round of talks took place at the same time, attended by commanders of the respective armies. India said the aim of the talks was complete disengagement in eastern Ladakh, noting that the main points of contention were the border points of Demochok and Depsang. On 4 July, a new meeting of foreign ministers took place in Astana during the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit, where both sides agreed to intensify negotiations to resolve the border dispute. From that point on, the negotiations took on a new tone. Shortly afterwards, a second meeting of foreign ministers took place in Vientiane during an ASEAN summit, where they again agreed to continue to push the negotiations forward. These two high-level meetings were followed by several meetings held as part of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs. At a meeting in Beijing in August, both sides agreed to "narrow down" their differences, marking a change in the language they had previously used to refer to the border dispute, as well as in the frequency of the meetings. In previous years, meetings had taken place every four to six months, but the pace quickened significantly after the meetings between the foreign ministers in July. Further meetings took place in September between diplomats from both countries during a BRICS meeting in St Petersburg, with both sides making positive statements about the progress of the negotiations.

Finally, both countries made significant headway in the negotiations in October and reached an important agreement. Whilst the deal did not fully resolve the conflict over the definition of the border, it did considerably reduce tension as it stipulated that the parties would withdraw their troops, dismantle temporary infrastructure (such as tents and huts) and restart pre-2020 patrols in disputed areas such as Depsang and Demchok, in the eastern part of the Indian territory of Ladakh. The agreement mainly provides for peaceful disengagement and patrolling on the border as a way to reduce tensions

***China and India reached a major agreement to ease tensions in their border dispute***

between both powers. According to Indian Minister of External Affairs Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, the deal symbolised a return to the border conditions of 2020 before the outbreak of violence. However, it was not clear whether the agreement also entailed the withdrawal of thousands of additional troops that had been deployed in the border area following the escalation of violence in 2020. The agreement was finalised shortly before the BRICS summit in Russia in late October, which was attended by the leaders of both nations. In an event to discuss India's participation in the summit a day before it began in Russia, Indian Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri made a statement to the media. China subsequently confirmed that the agreement had been reached. During the summit, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi held their first bilateral meeting in five years. The agreement goes beyond the border conflict between China and India and considers the global context of alliances and competition for regional dominance, as well as their mutual interest in maintaining economic interactions as the two most populous countries in the region and the world.

During the meeting, Modi and Xi agreed that bilateral dialogue between their respective foreign ministries would be resumed to rebuild and stabilise their relations. In recent years, communication between the two countries had been almost exclusively limited to the border issue. A meeting on the border dispute was also arranged between the top officials in charge of it in each country:

Indian National Security Advisor Ajit Doval and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, who is also a senior member of the Politburo of the Chinese Communist Party. This meeting took place in Beijing on 18 December and the parties agreed to speed up efforts to resolve the border dispute by further specifying the agreements. They also discussed the importance of boosting cross-border trade and cooperation, including the resumption of the Indian pilgrimage to China's Xizang Autonomous Region. In November, it was confirmed that verification patrols had begun, as established in the agreement.

**Southeast Asia and Oceania**

Philippines (MILF)	
<b>Negotiating actors</b>	Government, MILF, Interim Government of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao
<b>Third parties</b>	Malaysia, Third Party Monitoring Team, Independent Decommissioning Body
<b>Relevant agreements</b>	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)

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**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.

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Overall, **significant progress was made in implementing the 2014 peace and institutional cooperation agreement between the negotiating panels of the Philippine government and the MILF and between the Manila and the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), but there were also tensions linked to the demobilisation of the MILF and the date of the first elections in the BARMM.** In terms of institutional support for the implementation of the 2014 peace agreement, the 34th meeting of the Peace Implementation Panels of the Philippine government and the MILF was held in early February. At the meeting, the parties agreed on some of the principles and mechanisms for expediting socio-economic development programmes for demobilised MILF combatants (numbering more than 26,000 by late 2024) and granting amnesty to those accredited to the National Amnesty Commission, though discussions on the reconstitution of the International Monitoring Team (IMT) were postponed. Meanwhile, Manila and the BARMM government met four times during the year, in January, May, July and October, as part of the Inter-governmental Relations Body (IGRB), the main negotiating and institutional coordination body between both governments to implement the peace agreement (2014) and the Bangsamoro Organic Law (2019). In this regard, in late July, the third progress report on the IGRB was delivered to President Ferdinand Marcos, which, among other issues, recognised the important progress that had been made in integrating former members of the MILF and the MNLF into the National Police, including amnesty granted to ex-combatants of both groups; the transfer of assets from the Philippine government to the BARMM government; and the awarding of contracts for oil and coal exploitation in the Bangsamoro region. Both President Marcos and several senior government

officials stressed that the establishment of peace and development in Bangsamoro was one of his administration's top priorities.

In late March, the chairman of the MILF Peace Implementation Panel, Mohagher Iqbal, released a report on the state of implementation of the agreement. The report praised the adoption of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL), the institutional development of the BARMM and international support for the process to implement the agreement. It also identified difficulties and challenges, such as the lack of socio-economic support for demobilised former MILF combatants to facilitate their full reintegration into civilian life; the lack of progress in other parts of the "normalisation" agreement, such as the disbanding of private armed groups, the transformation of former MILF camps into productive zones and the reduction in the circulation of small arms and light weapons; and the impasse in the creation of a professional civilian police force for Bangsamoro. The report also criticised the failure to adopt the recommendations of the report of the Transitional Justice and Reconciliation Commission, which aims to promote reconciliation in the region, rectify historical injustices towards the Moro people and address the violation of human rights and land dispossession. Finally, the report noted that the terms of reference of the IMT, which is responsible for monitoring, verifying and investigating violations of the ceasefire agreement, had not been renewed. In late October, Iqbal doubled down on his criticism and said that since the peace agreement specifies that the disarmament of the MILF will be carried out alongside the implementation of other provisions, **the nearly 14,000 combatants who have not yet begun to disarm and demobilise would not do so until tangible progress had been made on providing socio-economic support to already demobilised former combatants or on dismantling and suppressing private militias in the region.**

**There was also much uncertainty about the date of the regional elections in the BARMM during the year, which will involve the direct election of members of Parliament for the first time and will end the transitional period of the BARMM,** officially known as the Bangsamoro Transition Authority, in which the MILF holds the majority in Parliament and heads the BARMM government. Although this transitional period was initially planned to last three years (2019-2022), in 2021 the government of former President Duterte postponed the first regional elections in the BARMM for another three years, until May 2025. In September, the Philippine Supreme Court ruled that the inclusion of Sulu Province in the BARMM was unconstitutional, given that the majority of the population of the province rejected the ratification of the BOL in the 2019 referendum. As a result, the province's seats in the Bangsamoro Parliament were left vacant. Citing the institutional and legislative adjustments resulting from the ruling, as well as other aspects related to the pending BARMM legislation, in late October the Bangsamoro Parliament passed a resolution

calling to extend the transitional phase of government for another three years (until 2028), but Manila was opposed. However, both the Office of the Presidential Adviser on Peace, Reconciliation and Unity (OPRARU) and the governors of several provinces in Mindanao have spoken out in favour of postponing the BARMM elections for one year (until May 2026) and bills were even floated in the Senate and the House of Representatives to that end. At the end of the year, President Marcos did not explicitly comment on the matter, though he did say that his government would assess the relevance and feasibility of any delay in the elections. In mid-November, the MILF said it supported holding the elections in May 2025, as planned.

### Gender, peace and security

During the commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the signing of the peace agreement between the Philippine government and the MILF, the head of the government's negotiating panel, Miriam Coronel-Ferrer (considered the first woman to sign a comprehensive peace agreement), said that women's active participation in the agreement is one of its internationally recognised distinctive features. According to some sources, although women are underrepresented in negotiating processes worldwide (making up just 13% of negotiators, 3% of mediators and 4% of signatories between 1992 and 2018), women accounted for 40% of the people involved in the negotiating process between the Manila and the MILF. The president of the Bangsamoro Women's Commission (BWC), Bainon Karon, said that the peace agreement was sensitive to the women, peace and security agenda and that women are playing an essential role in the new Bangsamoro region. She also noted that there are currently 16 female MPs in the Bangsamoro Regional Parliament and that gender equity is one of the Bangsamoro government's priority lines of action.

Philippines (MNLF)	
<b>Negotiating actors</b>	Government, MNLF (factions led by Nur Misuari and Muslimin Sema)
<b>Third parties</b>	--
<b>Relevant agreements</b>	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).

In 2024, the Philippine government and the two main MNLF factions fully agreed on the complete implementation of the 1996 peace agreement and significant progress was made in the reintegration of ex-combatants, whilst the two main MNLF factions increasingly found common ground. In 2024, the Office of the Presidential Adviser on Peace, Reconciliation and Unity (OPAPRU) repeated its intention to achieve the full reintegration of around 7,000 former MNLF combatants and their families, improving their socio-economic conditions and promoting the development of self-sufficient communities. To this end, the Philippine government launched the MNLF Transformation Programme in September 2023. Based on the socio-economic provisions of the 1996 peace agreement, this programme has four key components: security, socio-economic development, confidence-building and community recovery and reconciliation. Under the agreement, around 5,750 MNLF fighters were integrated into the Philippine Armed Forces, surrendering their weapons to the government in the process, and another 250 were reportedly incorporated into auxiliary units. The agreement also provided for the eventual integration of the maximum number of MNLF forces into the Special Regional Security Force (SRSF). The Marcos administration said that the Transformation Programme approach has two phases: the integration of MNLF members into the military or the police and individual and community interventions to produce peace dividends. At the end of the year, the OPRARU stated that nearly 2,000 former co-combatants had completed the verification process, handing over 1,996 weapons, and that 794 had applied for amnesty offered by the government.

At various times during the year, notably in his State of the Nation address and at the commemoration of the signing of the 1996 peace agreement, President Marcos repeated his administration's intention to fully



implement the commitments of all the peace agreements signed with the different armed organisations that have operated in the country in recent decades. During the Fourth Convergence Meeting between the two main MNLF factions held in mid-August, their respective leaders—Nur Misuari, the group’s founder, and MNLF chairman Muslimin Sema, who is also the Labour Minister of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BAMMM)—voiced support for the government in its goal of implementing the 1996 peace agreement. The meeting was convened to introduce the new members of the GPH Management Committee, headed by retired Brigadier General Buenaventura Pascual, to these two main MNLF factions. In September 2023, the government pledged to foster rapprochement between the two MNLF factions by establishing an MNLF Joint Executive Committee represented by their respective leaders, urging them both to develop a shared roadmap for implementing joint peace and development initiatives. The Sema faction decided to actively participate in the implementation of the 2014 peace agreement between the Philippine government and the MILF, while the Misuari faction decided to focus on the full implementation of the 1996 agreement. Misuari has a son and a daughter who are members of the Bangsamoro Parliament, whilst Muslimin Sema’s son is one of its deputy speakers. Both Omar Sema and Abdulkarim Misuari are two of the most prominent figures of the MNLF and two of the main dialogue partners with the Philippine government. During the Fourth Convergence Meeting, Manila and the two MNLF factions explored various areas of cooperation, such as security, the socio-economic situation, amnesty and community reconciliation. Both sides said they were committed to greater local coordination between MNLF groups and state security forces and bodies to achieve sustained peace and stability in the region.

### Gender, peace and security

In 2024, the Bangsamoro Women’s Commission partnered with the United Nations system, national and international NGOs and local authorities to carry out several activities to disseminate and implement both the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2023-2033 and the Bangsamoro Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2023-2028, promoted by the government of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao and inspired by United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. For example, on 27 March, the Bangsamoro Women’s Commission, the Philippine Center for Islam and Democracy and Mindanao State University launched a diploma programme on Women, Peace and Security, the first in the Philippines.

Meanwhile, the president of the Bangsamoro Women’s Commission (BWC), Bainon Karon, noted during her State of Bangsamoro Women address in November

that women in the Bangsamoro region have become key actors in the 1996 peace agreement between the Philippine government and the MNLF, as well as in other peace agreements in the region, describing their participation as critical to preserving peace and security in Mindanao.

Philippines (NDF)	
<b>Negotiating actors</b>	Government, NDF (umbrella organisation of various communist organisations, including the Communist Party of the Philippines, which is the political wing of the NPA)
<b>Third parties</b>	Norway
<b>Relevant agreements</b>	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.

**The Philippine government and the NDF held no formal meetings during the year, nor was any significant progress in the negotiating process discussed publicly, but both parties acknowledged that exploratory talks had been facilitated by the Norwegian government and repeated their commitment to explore a political and dialogue-based solution to the conflict.** The current phase of exploratory talks began in late November 2023 with the signing of a joint communiqué in which Manila and the NDFP committed to resuming peace talks to try to end an armed conflict that began in the late 1960s. Prior to this date, the negotiations had been stalled for seven years, since the Duterte administration called off the negotiations in November 2017. Explaining the socio-economic and political causes of the conflict, the communiqué was hailed by both parties and by certain governments and international organisations and raised significant expectations about a negotiated resolution of the conflict because it was preceded by

presidential pardons of members of the NDF, the NPA, the Communist Party of the Philippines and four other armed organisations. However, significant doubts persisted about the scope and course of the negotiating process between the parties in 2024. Firstly, **many of the public statements made by Manila and the Philippine Armed Forces focused on the defeat of the NPA**, a group they consider to be in its death throes; on the promotion of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programmes for combatants; on support for community development programmes in regions where the NPA historically had greater influence and sway; and on the substitution of negotiations with the NDF for local peace talks with local NPA units. Moreover, Philippine Vice President Sara Duterte, the highly popular daughter of former President Rodrigo Duterte, is staunchly opposed to the joint communiqué between Manila and the NDF, which she described as a “deal with the devil” and a form of capitulation to terrorists and enemies of the state. According to some analysts, Vice President Sara Duterte’s opposition to the negotiating process is significant because she is also the co-vice chairperson of the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC), which leads the country’s counterinsurgency policy. Secondly, some analysts questioned the NDF’s lack of sincerity and political desire to resolve the conflict through dialogue. In this regard, groups close to the government bristled at the announcement of the Third Rectification Movement in late December 2023, **when the Communist Party of the Philippines declared the primacy of armed struggle to achieve transformation and described the peace talks as an additional strategy for the advancement of its objectives**. Finally, some analysts also focused on the uncertainty surrounding the content, timelines and aims of the exploratory negotiations that began in late 2023. From time to time, both parties have acknowledged that the framework, timing, agenda and priorities of the negotiations are still being discussed, but whereas the Philippine government has stressed the start of a new process, and not simply the resumption of the previous talks, the NDF has argued that the negotiating framework agreed upon by both sides must be built on the basis of the agreements signed in recent decades, mainly the Hague Joint Declaration (1992, which defines the framework, principles and agenda of the negotiations), the agreements on security guarantees and immunity for NDF negotiators (1997) and the agreement on human rights and international humanitarian law (1998).

On this last issue, **a major crisis of confidence between the parties erupted in late October, which the NDF said nearly led to the collapse of exploratory talks**. In late October, three prominent leaders of the communist movement were arrested: acting Communist Party of the Philippines Chairman Wigberto “Baylon” Villarico and two senior NPA officials, Porferio Tuna and Simeon Naogsan. The NDF considers them peace consultants and therefore covered by the Joint Agreement on Safety and Immunity Guarantees (JASIG). However,

the National Security Council accused the NDF of systematically engaging in propaganda, whilst declaring that the Philippine government had officially ended the JASIG in 2017, coinciding with Duterte’s termination of the peace talks. In mid-December, the NPA announced that it would not declare a Christmas truce in 2024, as it had done many times throughout its history, citing violations of international humanitarian and human rights law by state forces, while the Minister of Defence ruled out any ceasefire with the NPA, which he called a criminal and terrorist group.

## Gender, peace and security

The current interim chair of the NDF negotiating panel is Juliet de Lima, while another negotiator, Coni Ledesma, also sits on the panel. Kristina Lie Revheim is the special envoy to the peace process for the government of Norway, which has been facilitating the dialogue for years.

Myanmar	
<b>Negotiating actors</b>	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, MNDA
<b>Third parties</b>	China, ASEAN
<b>Relevant agreements</b>	Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (October 2015)
<b>Summary:</b> 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.	

**Several attempts were made at rapprochement between Myanmar’s military junta and armed opposition groups during 2024. Some ceasefire agreements were also**

negotiated as a result of pressure from China, which sought some stability in the country and aimed to protect its economic interests.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, ASEAN continued its unsuccessful attempts to promote a negotiated solution to the political crisis and armed conflict in Myanmar, which worsened after the military coup in February 2021.

**During Chinese-facilitated negotiations that resumed in January, the Burmese government and the Three Brothers Alliance**, made up of the Kokang armed group MNDAA, the Ta'ang armed group TNLA and the Rakhine armed group AA, all agreed to a ceasefire in northern Shan State. Known as the Haigeng Agreement, the deal temporarily stopped the conflict on the Chinese border and was upheld until June, when the armed groups accused the military junta of having breached the agreement and of having carried out attacks against areas they controlled. These insurgent groups responded with their own armed attacks. In July, the armed groups announced a new ceasefire with allusions that they had come under heavy pressure from China to end the violence. The Three Brothers Alliance first announced a four-day ceasefire (effective from 14 to 18 July) in Shan State, but it did not cover the Mandalay region, where much of the fighting had taken place. The insurgents claimed that the four-day ceasefire was a gesture of goodwill towards China. Subsequently, and again due to Chinese pressure, the ceasefire was extended until the end of July. The extension was supposed to partially respond to China's demands, but without abandoning the insurgent offensive aimed at capturing the city of Lashio, the seat of the country's northeastern military command. Finally, in August, the insurgents took Lashio, which was a military loss of enormous importance for the military junta.

As a consequence of the military advance of various armed groups in different parts of the country, which have stepped up their armed offensives considerably and their ability to put the Burmese Armed Forces in check since 2023, **China intensified pressure on these organisations to negotiate with the military junta, especially the TNLA and the MNDAA. In late November, the TNLA said it was willing to negotiate with the military junta, demanding that it put an end to the air strikes in areas under its control. In December, a few days after the TNLA's announcement, the MNDAA declared a unilateral ceasefire with which it intended to begin Chinese-facilitated negotiations with the Burmese government.** Some media outlets reported that the leader of the armed group MNDAA had been arrested

***China stepped up pressure on Burmese armed groups to negotiate with the government in an attempt to stabilise the country and protect its economic interests***

a few days before in China to pressure the group to agree to negotiate with the Burmese government. The MNDAA indicated that it was willing to negotiate on the situation of Lashio, which the insurgents had captured in August. In fact, in the first few days of December, thousands of displaced people were able to return to the city after the Burmese Armed Forces ended the air strikes there. Also in early December, the Kachin armed group KIA announced that it had sent a delegation to China, accepting the Chinese government's invitation to sit down for talks. According to later reports, the capture of several military bases by the insurgency was discussed in the talks, which were attended by higher-ranking members of the Chinese government than those who usually participate in negotiations with the armed groups. Alongside Beijing's pressure on the different armed groups to stop expanding their offensives, it also stepped up its support for the military junta in an attempt to halt the destabilisation of the country. Thus, China invited Min Aung Hlaing to visit the country for the first time since the military coup in 2021 and reportedly supported elections to be held in Myanmar in 2025, including financial aid for preparing an electoral census beforehand.

Meanwhile, ASEAN continued to fail to promote dialogue. During the organisation's summit in October, chaired by Laos, it reaffirmed its commitment to implementing the five-point consensus for peace in Myanmar, which includes the immediate cessation of violence and dialogue between all parties. This plan, approved after the 2021 coup, has proven ineffective in solving the crisis in the country, given the parties' lack of willingness to talk and mutual recognition. **Various analysts have exposed the limitations of this framework, which holds all actors equally responsible for the country's crisis and has allowed the Burmese government to buy time to deal with the armed opposition.** Thailand said it was willing to play a role in resolving the conflict and Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra, who was sworn into office in September, met with junta leader Min Aung Hlaing at the eighth Greater Mekong Subregion Summit in China in November. She also proposed hosting a meeting called "Extended Informal Consultation on the Situation in Myanmar" in December, which was supported by Laos' rotating ASEAN chair for the year 2024. The meeting took place in Bangkok on 20 December and brought together the regional organisation's foreign ministers. It was preceded by an informal meeting of the ministers of the ASEAN troika mechanism, made up of its former, current and incoming chairs: Laos, Indonesia and Malaysia.

<sup>2</sup> China has significant economic interests in Myanmar in the context of the development of the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) as part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which is aimed at creating infrastructure linking Asia with Europe, in emulation of the Silk Road. The escalation of the armed conflict in Myanmar directly threatens several pieces of this infrastructure.

Gender, peace and security

Women’s civil society organisations demanded the implementation of the women, peace and security agenda. The founder and executive director of the Women’s Peace Network, Wai Wai Nu, addressed the UN Security Council during the open debate on the women, peace and security agenda, highlighting the impunity of human rights violations against women in the armed conflict and asserting that accountability and justice are essential for peacebuilding in the country and essential pillars of the women, peace and security agenda.<sup>3</sup> She also called for the ICC to intervene to find a solution to the situation in the country. The Women’s Peace Network released a report highlighting the important role that women played in the pro-democracy movements in the country, though it also called attention to the continued exclusion of women in the leadership of the government in exile.<sup>4</sup>

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.

**In the first half of the year, negotiations between the Thai government and the armed group BRN resumed after a 12-month impasse and some progress was made.**

However, the process slowed down and came to a standstill in August following the dismissal of Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin and his replacement in office by Paetongtarn Shinawatra, the daughter of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. In early February, the negotiating delegations of the Thai government and the BRN met in Kuala Lumpur after a year-long impasse in the peace process. **This seventh round of negotiations since the peace process began in 2013 raised some expectations in Thailand and among members of the international community, not only because it ended the deadlock, but also because it was the first after almost a decade of Thai rule by a military junta (2014-2019) or by a government arising from it (2019-2023).** Although no official details of the agreements reached at the meeting were released, some said that both parties were negotiating and developing a roadmap (officially called the Joint Comprehensive Peace Plan) that focuses primarily on two issues: 1) the reduction of violence in the southern part of the country, supervised by a mechanism to be decided between both parties; and 2) public consultations with relevant and representative political, social and religious actors in the three southern Muslim-majority provinces (Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat) to address political solutions to the conflict and substantive issues in the negotiations, such as the form of governance in the southern part of the country and aspects related to identity, religion, education, the economic model and human rights. Previously, in March 2022, both parties had agreed that solutions to the conflict should be based on the will and aspirations of the Patani people and should be consistent with the unitary state and the Constitution of Thailand. At the end of the round of negotiations, the facilitator of the dialogue on behalf of Malaysian government, Zulfiki Zainal Abidin, held a press conference accompanied by the heads of the negotiating panels of the Thai government and the BRN and said that **the agreement between the parties was a significant step forward and an important turning point in the peace process.** Along the same lines, the lead negotiator of the BRN, Anas Abdul Rahman, said that his group had high hopes and expectations of achieving a lasting peace with the new administration of Srettha Thavisin, who had taken office in September 2023. Later, in late February and early March, both parties’ technical teams met to finalise the commitments made at the February meeting. In addition, on 2 March, for the first time, a public **statement was released by the four peace process experts (Thai, British, German and Norwegian) who have observed and supported the negotiating process since 2019**, both officially and in the informal and exploratory phases. This statement stressed the importance of the commitments achieved thus far and highlighted the parties’ determination to reach a political agreement through dialogue. In late May and again in June, the Thai government and the BRN met again in Kuala Lumpur to address some of the main

3 NGOWGWPS, Statement by Ms. Wai Wai Nu at the UN Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security, 24 October 2024.  
4 Women’s Peace Network, “The situation of Women, Peace, and Security in Myanmar”, October 2024.



aspects of the substantive agenda of the negotiations, including the cessation or reduction of hostilities, public consultations, political solutions to the conflict and a review of the Joint Comprehensive Peace Plan and the tentative timetable for its implementation.

Also in June, the Thai government and the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre (SBPAC) hosted a trip to southern Thailand by a delegation from the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), which met with many religious representatives from the region. According to several media reports, some Muslim leaders asked the OIC delegation (which included representatives from Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, Egypt, Nigeria, Pakistan, Maldives, Iran and Indonesia) to draft a policy on peace and conflict resolution and to pay special attention to the problems faced by young people in southern Thailand. Also in mid-June, the new Parliament that emerged from the May 2023 general elections established an ad hoc committee consisting of 35 members of the House of Representatives to provide recommendations to the government on possible ways to resolve or manage the conflict in the southern part of the country, as well as proposals to improve the process and system of consulting with and involving civil society in resolving the conflict.

In the second half of the year, especially after the dismissal in August of Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin and the subsequent appointment of Paetongtarn Shinawatra, there was no progress and no meetings between the two parties. Some analysts believe that the influence of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra over the new government could lower the level of interest or sap the political will to pursue peace negotiations with the BRN. Indeed, the armed struggle in the conflict in southern Thailand was resumed in 2004, when Thaksin Shinawatra was in power. In late December, the BRN issued a statement voicing concern about the delay in appointing a negotiating panel and the lack of clarity from the new government about its plan to resolve the conflict in southern Thailand. The BRN said that it was still willing to resume dialogue, but also called for international law and not just the Thai Constitution to be the political framework. It also urged the government to show a greater political desire to manage the conflict and to respect the agreements reached in the previous decade. The BRN's statement came a few days after Paetongtarn Shinawatra's visit to Malaysia, where, among other bilateral issues, he discussed the conflict with Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim. However, some sources indicate that no progress or substantial commitments were made at the meeting. After the meeting, the Thai prime minister said that another meeting with Anwar Ibrahim would probably be held in February or March 2025 to discuss the peace process in southern Thailand. In late December, Anwar Ibrahim appointed Thaksin Shinawatra as an unofficial advisor for Malaysia's ASEAN chairmanship in 2025. (nou del 7 de gener, 2n pack). Finally, in July, **Malaysia appointed Datuk Mohd Rabin Basir**, the former director-general of

the National Security Council, as the **new facilitator of the peace process**, replacing Zulfiki Zainal Abidin, who was appointed facilitator of the Mindanao peace process in the Philippines.

### Gender, peace and security

Following a visit to the country in December, including to southern Thailand, the UN Working Group on Discrimination against Women and Girls urged the Thai government to adopt a quota system to achieve gender parity in political representation positions. At the national level, women account for 19.2% of the members of Parliament and 20% of government ministers. At the local level, only 10% of mayors are women. The Working Group also urged Bangkok to address harassment, intimidation and threats against women human rights activists and to ensure that civil society and women human rights activists in particular can participate in formulating laws and policies.

### 4.2.2 The Pacific

Papua New Guinea (Bougainville)	
<b>Negotiating actors</b>	Government of Papua New Guinea, government of the Autonomous Region of Bougainville
<b>Third parties</b>	United Nations, Jerry Mateparae
<b>Relevant agreements</b>	Bougainville Peace Agreement (2001)
<b>Summary:</b> 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.	

**Given the rising tensions between the central government of Papua New Guinea and the Autonomous Bougainville Government (ABG) due to the deadlock and lack of progress in the negotiating process on the political status of Bougainville, both sides agreed to the appointment of an independent moderator to facilitate the dialogue, who will enjoy the technical and political**

support of the United Nations. Due to the impasse in the negotiations in the first quarter of 2024, during the May meeting of the Joint Consultative Body (JCB), the main negotiating mechanism between the two governments, co-chaired by the prime minister of Papua New Guinea and the president of the ABG, the parties agreed to appoint an independent person to facilitate the dialogue, with the support of the United Nations. From among 15 possible candidates, in September both sides **announced the choice of Jerry Mateparae, a professional diplomat and a former governor-general of New Zealand, chief of the Defence Force of New Zealand and commander of the Bougainville Peace Monitoring Group.** Mateparae played a central role in the signing of a final ceasefire agreement in 1998 that ended a ten-year war (1988-98) between the Papua New Guinea Defence Force (PNGDF) and the armed opposition group Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA), in which an estimated 10% of the island's population died. Both sides valued Mateparae's knowledge of the country and the region, as he also played a significant role in Timor-Leste's transition to independence and political stabilisation. In early October, shortly after being appointed to the post, Mateparae met with both sides and expressed his optimism about the future of the negotiating process. In the same vein, the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Papua New Guinea, one of the United Nations positions that supports the peace process in the country, together with the UNDP and the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, stressed both parties' political desire to resolve the conflict, describing the negotiations in Papua New Guinea as one of the few examples in the world of an attempt at dialogue-based conflict resolution today. At another JCB meeting in late November, both governments decided to limit the term of the independent moderator until June 2025, coinciding with the general elections in Bougainville, and to extend the terms of reference of Mateparae's mandate and make it more flexible. In addition to facilitating dialogue between the two governments, Mateparae will also assist the bicameral Standing Committees on Bougainville in Parliament.

**Despite the appointment of an independent moderator, tension was palpable throughout the year due to the lack of progress in the negotiating process.** The Bougainville Government repeatedly accused the central government of failing to comply with the roadmap agreed in 2021, known as the Wabag Agreement, or alternatively as the Joint Roadmap for the Implementation of the Referendum Results. This roadmap was validated by the Era Kone Covenant in April 2022, according to which the national Parliament was supposed to ratify the results of the 2019 referendum in 2023. However the session in which that was supposed to have taken place was postponed in 2023 and again in 2024. As stipulated in the Era Kone Covenant, the implementation of the political agreement between the parties resulting from

the negotiating process, including the possibility of independence, should take place no earlier than 2025 and no later than 2027. Although there have been many rounds of negotiations in recent years and some significant agreements have also been reached, there is still considerable disagreement between both sides on key aspects of the process, such as the majority required in the national Parliament to decide on the possible independence of Bougainville (a simple majority for the Autonomous Bougainville Government and two-thirds majority for the national Government), the timelines and requirements for such a vote to be held in the national Parliament, the primacy or prevalence of the 2001 peace agreement over the Constitution of Papua New Guinea, whether or not it is necessary for the citizens of the entire country to vote on Bougainville's possible independence and, most importantly, the political status of Bougainville (independence versus some other political arrangement). At the end of the year, Bougainville's President Ishmael Toroama reiterated that the power to decide Bougainville's political status lies solely with the people of Bougainville, and not with the citizens of Papua New Guinea as a whole, and that its status had already been determined in the 2019 referendum, in which almost 98% of the population voted in favour of independence, so negotiations should focus on a framework agreement to implement Bougainville's independence. In this regard, **Toroama and other senior government officials have repeatedly floated the possibility of declaring Bougainville's independence unilaterally if Port Moresby does not show the political desire to implement the results of the referendum.**

Some analysts have warned that persistent deadlock in the negotiations could significantly increase the potential for conflict in Bougainville. In September 2023, Pope Francis spoke about the tension and called for responsibility and cooperation on both sides to reach a final agreement on the status of Bougainville. The government of Papua New Guinea argues that the peace agreement stipulates that any final decision on the political status of Bougainville rests solely with the national Parliament and that both this decision and the negotiating process between the parties must be conducted in accordance with the Constitution. Port Moresby maintains that it cannot negotiate any form of political agreement, including independence, until Parliament decides on the issue. **It has also occasionally asserted that a political agreement on Bougainville could consider options other than independence for the island.** Finally, the first draft of a constitution for a possible independent Bougainville was presented in March. The draft had been prepared by a commission of 40 speakers, including representatives of women, young people, former combatants, churches and other groups after more than two years of consultations with different sectors of society. President Toroama welcomed the fact that a participatory constitution was being drawn

up and urged the Bougainville Constitutional Planning Commission (BCPC) to continue the consultations with civil society.

### **Gender, peace and security**

Through various peace-building projects and by providing support for dialogue between the central government and the Autonomous Bougainville Government, the United Nations has helped several women to participate in the Joint Consultative Body (JCB), the main negotiating mechanism between the parties. Specifically, three

women from the Bougainville House of Representatives, three women from different departments of the ABG (the Department of Bougainville Independence Mission Implementation, the Department of Community Government and the Department of Education) and other women leaders who play important roles in Bougainville, including national MP Francisca Semoso, participated in the meetings of the JCB and in the Joint Technical Committees. In June, the Autonomous Bougainville Government officially presented its Gender Equality Policy before representatives of UN Women and the governments of Australia and New Zealand.

