

A Letter to the Peoples of Myanmar May 24, 2018

**A Multi-religious Vision of Peace and Development in Myanmar
A Letter to the Peoples of Myanmar**

Dear Brothers and Sisters of this golden land, Shwe Myanmar,

It is at a crucial moment in the history of this country that we, as Buddhist, Christian, Hindu and Muslim leaders from Myanmar and across the region, come to you in solidarity with hope for peace.

We stand together now at a crossroad where the future of this nation will be determined. Through the relentless efforts of innumerable men and women in this great nation, you have striven to overcome suffering and heal the wounds of the past. Myanmar showed to the world that people once enemies could sit together in the parliament and a peaceful transition of power was possible.

We share with you today the vision of a future, one which is based upon Myanmar's rich history and tradition of multi-religious and multi-ethnic coexistence. This future harbors a relationship of respect and sustainability with our environment, compassion and appreciation for fellow citizens of the country, and a sense of community with neighboring countries and within the international community. At the deepest level, this promising future is secured upon the values and virtues of compassion, shared well-being and justice imbedded in Myanmar's great religious traditions.

You recall an expression of such inherent virtues of Myanmar during the great Nargis disasters. Buddhist monks saved affected people in all villages, Christian humanitarian agencies distributed aid to those suffering beyond their ethnic and religious boundaries, and Hindu, Muslim and other groups were united to help one another to alleviate the suffering of their fellow country men and women. Compassion and common living are the fundamental values and virtues of the peoples of Myanmar, and unity in diversity is the strength of this nation. We all know that a sense of preference and superiority of one race over another goes against the fundamental tenets of the Myanmar's religious traditions and brings hatred, discrimination and violence. We reject the misuse of religion and race to divide our people.

In our collective efforts to resolve inter-communal conflicts and to advance national reconciliation, as Myanmar national and international religious leaders, we wish to bring your prayers for peace to the Panglong 21st Century Peace Conference. This will strengthen the transition from dictatorship to democracy, from conflict to peace, and from closed to open economy.

We are painfully witnessing increasing hostilities and the large displacement of people in Kachin and Shan States, which further weakens the peace and reconciliation process. We are committed to working with the Union Government and other relevant actors to

A Letter to the Peoples of Myanmar May 24, 2018

achieve a nationwide ceasefire agreement and sustainable peace with the vision of a democratic federal system in Myanmar.

We share a vision of development in Myanmar, which is built upon the notion of human dignity, human rights and shared well-being. This vision harnesses principles of fair distribution of Myanmar's resources as a necessary step on the path to national unity. We have witnessed so much wealth going to and enriching only a few. Most conflicts involve issues of who controls resources. The future of Myanmar depends on its commitment to and capacity for transparency and sharing in the use of resources.

At the very foundation of sustainable peace is respect for and realization of human dignity, the undeniable and sacred essence rooted in our nature as human beings and as peoples. As we shed light on the shared tragedies facing many under-represented and disadvantaged populations of Myanmar, we urge all peoples of faith and good will to support the unfolding vision of peace, rich with diversity, equality, respect and dignity. We praise initiatives taken by local communities to advance social cohesion.

You recall that the profound spiritual heritage of Myanmar is expressed in the teachings of the world's great religions practiced in this country. Buddhism teaches that "hatred can not be ceased by hatred, but by compassion." Christ preached "you have heard that eye for an eye and tooth for tooth, but I say pray for your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." Hinduism teaches us to be "free from attachment and without hatred to any creature," while Islam calls us not to "let the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice." The shared message by all the world's great religious traditions is not to repay vengeance with vengeance but with compassion and reconciliation.

You recall Pope Francis's address to you during his most recent visit to the country. He said that many in Myanmar bear the wounds of violence, wounds both visible and invisible. We are often misguided to think that healing can come from anger and revenge. Yet the way of revenge is not the way of the world's religious traditions. When hatred and rejection is experienced, we respond with forgiveness and compassion. The present waves of hate speech and incitement to violence on Facebook and other social media violate the fundamental spiritual principles of tolerance and respect.

We are painfully aware of the suffering of displaced people due to war, violence and lack of security. A disproportionate majority of those fleeing their places of origin are severely disadvantaged, women and children, the newborn and the elderly. We implore the Union Government and all relevant partners to undertake necessary actions to secure peace and well-being for the displaced and marginalized populations. For those who were forced to flee the country, it is crucial that they can return to their rightful homesteads in order to reestablish their lives with full dignity and security.

It is not enough, however, for internally and externally displaced peoples to simply return to their homes. With the great support offered by the good peoples of Myanmar, these returning members of society should be further integrated by cultivating peace with neighbors, communal participation and representation in local and national governments. This step advances inclusive citizenship, fosters their right to participate fully in

A Letter to the Peoples of Myanmar May 24, 2018

communities and systems of government, and secures their renewed flourishing of human potentials and social well-being.

Particularly the plight of all the communities living in Rakhine State has attracted international attention. Good and laudable efforts are being advanced, including the agreement between Bangladesh and Myanmar on the return of refugees and the invitation to the United Nations to facilitate this process, urging priority to peace, development, education and human rights for all communities in Rakhine State.

Out of fraternal concern for the other family members, let us together exert our utmost effort to find a comprehensive and thorough solutions to the complexities and sensitivities that prevail in Rakhine State. We are of the opinion that the recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State led by Mr. Kofi Annan regarding the developmental, human rights and security crises in the State provides a framework that needs to be seriously supported. It is indeed heartening to know that the Union Government has agreed to implement the Advisory Commission's recommendations.

Terrorism can never be condoned and we fully acknowledge the duty of the authorities to maintain law and order. At the same time, we are concerned that an excessive use of force in countering insurgency could jeopardize the peace and reconciliation process.

We encourage the Union Government to take full responsibilities for a thorough and transparent investigation into multiple crimes perpetrated in Rakhine State and elsewhere. We urge the Union Government to include in this effort the entire population such as the Rakhine, Myo, That, Dynet, Khamee, Kamen and the Hindu.

In search for a solution based upon human dignity and shared well-being and from the perspectives of global responsibility sharing, we call for an international conference with the participation of concerned States, United Nations, ASEAN, ICRC and other relevant international actors to address the critical humanitarian issues facing Myanmar. This includes the vulnerability of those living within Rakhine State, those suffering in refugee camps in neighboring Bangladesh, and those desiring dignified and safe return to the places they know to be their homes in Myanmar. We call for the exploration of global sharing schemes. The proposed international conference should also address the suffering of people affected by other internal conflicts, including displaced populations from the most recent escalation of armed conflicts in Kachin and Shan States.

We ask *Religions for Peace* as an organization to facilitate and serve the above noted process and accompany it together with other international non-governmental organizations that are engaged in the issues of peace, conflict resolution and reconciliation and in Myanmar.

Finally, we must together prepare our children for the responsibility of maintaining and unfolding this vision. To bring quality education and to teach the youngest members of society about the beauty of multi-religious coexistence and the virtue of compassion to carry this vision forward into our shared future is a collective goal shared by all peoples of faith and good will.

A Letter to the Peoples of Myanmar May 24, 2018

Today, we stand in solidarity with all peoples of faith and good will to proclaim that the forces that would divide us will no longer hold sway over our shared hope for peace.

The future of the peoples of Myanmar is in our prayers.

Members of the Myanmar National and International Multi-religious Delegation

Signed by:

Myanmar National Delegates

+ 

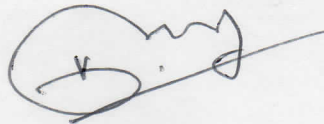
H.E. Cardinal Charles Bo
Archbishop of Yangon;
Patron, *Religions for Peace* Myanmar

Sayadaw U Naryaka
Faundaw Oo Sayadaw

Venerable Ariya Wun Tha Bhiwun Sa
(Myawaddy Sayardaw)
Abbot, Myawaddy Mingyi Monastery in Mandalay



U Myint Swe
President, Ratana Metta Organization,
President, *Religions for Peace* Myanmar



Grand Mufti U Ko Lay
Grand Mufti, Suratee Jamia Masjid,
Patron, *Religions for Peace* Myanmar



Al Haj U Aye Lwin
Chief Convener, the Islamic Center of Myanmar;
Founding Member, *Religions for Peace* Myanmar



A Letter to the Peoples of Myanmar May 24, 2018

Daw Yin Yin Maw

Former President, Myanmar Council of Churches;
Chair, *Religions for Peace* Myanmar Women of Faith
Network

Rev. Father Joseph Maung Win

Head of the Office of Yangon Archdiocesan Commission
for Ecumenism and Interfaith;
Secretary General, *Religions for Peace* Myanmar

U San Min Naing

Core Member, Peaceful Myanmar Initiative (PMI)
EC Member, *Religions for Peace* Myanmar

International Delegates

The Most. Ven. Kotugoda Dhammawasa Thera

Sadharama Keerthi Sri Tripitaka Visharadha Aggamaha
Panditha; Supreme Patriarch of Amarapura Nikaya;
(Theravada Buddhism), Sri Lanka

The Most Ven. Tep Vong

Great Supreme Patriarch of Cambodia;
(Theravada Buddhism), Cambodia;
Co-President, *Religions for Peace* International

Rev. Nichiko Niwano

President, Rissho Kosei-Kai;
(Mahayana Buddhism), Japan,
Honorary President, *Religions for Peace* International

A Letter to the Peoples of Myanmar May 24, 2018

Prof. Dr Din Syamsuddin

Special Envoy for Interreligious Dialogue and Cultural Affairs; Former Chairman of Indonesian Ulema Council; (Islam), Indonesia; Moderator, *Religions for Peace Asia*

Dr Vinu Aram

Director, Shanti Ashram; (Hinduism), India; Co-Moderator, *Religions for Peace International*

Bishop Gunnar Stalsett

Bishop Emeritus of Oslo; (Christian), Norway; Honorary President, *Religions for Peace International*

Rev. Kyoichi Sugino

Deputy Secretary General, *Religions for Peace International*

A Letter to the Peoples of Myanmar May 24, 2018

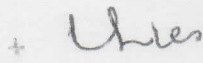
Today, we stand in solidarity with all peoples of faith and good will to proclaim that the forces that would divide us will no longer hold sway over our shared hope for peace.

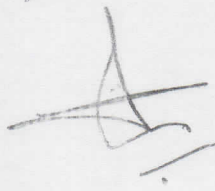
The future of the peoples of Myanmar is in our prayers.

Members of the Myanmar National and International Multi-religious Delegation

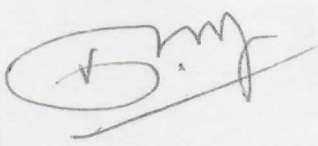
Signed by


Myanmar National Delegates


+ 
H.E. Cardinal Charles Bo
Archbishop of Yangon,
Patron, *Religions for Peace Myanmar*


Sayadaw U Naryaka
Faundaw Oo Sayadaw

Venerable Anya Wun Tha Bhiwun Sa
(Myawaddy Sayardaw)
Abbot, Myawaddy Mingyi Monastery in Mandalay


U Myint Swe
President, Rarana Metta Organization,
President, *Religions for Peace Myanmar*


Grand Mufti U Ko Lay
Grand Mufti, Suratee Jamia Masjid;
Patron, *Religions for Peace Myanmar*


Al Haj U Aye Lwin
Chief Convener, the Islamic Center of Myanmar;
Founding Member, *Religions for Peace Myanmar*