

Religions for Peace

Press Statement on *Religions for Peace* Multi-religious Delegation's Visit to Rakhine State

Sittwe and Maungdaw, Rakhine State | May 26-28, 2018



Representatives of the *Religions for Peace* visited Sittwe and Maungdaw in the north of Rakhine State, Myanmar where militant attacks in August 2017 triggered massive operations by the security personnel on the area's Muslim communities and some 700,000 Muslims and hundreds of Hindus have fled for Bangladesh. This region has also seen terrorist attacks by Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) accused of massacres of 100 Hindus and attacks on other ethnic and religious minorities. While acknowledging the authorities' duty to maintain law and order, the delegation expressed a concern that an excessive use of force could hamper the peace and reconciliation process.

The delegation saw from the air hundreds of burned and destroyed Muslim villages before visiting the sites of reception centers and transit camps. Included in the program were meetings with representatives of various ethnic and religious groups.



Bishop Gunnar Stalsett observing burned houses and Muslim villages from the helicopter (May 27, 2018)



Meeting with remaining Muslim communities in Maungdaw, Rakhine State (May 27, 2018)

It was noted with appreciation that refugee return infrastructure such as reception centers and transit camps are ready to welcome returnees from Bangladesh. Technical facilities, equipment, and necessary staffing such as health screening and identification procedures are in place. This calls for speeding up the finalization of the agreement between Myanmar government and the United Nations on the return of refugees from Bangladesh. The delegation affirmed the relevance and urgency of the recommendations from the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State led by Mr. Kofi Annan.



Al Haj U Aye Lwin, Chief Convener of Islamic Center and Founding Member of R/P Myanmar discuss the National Identification and Verification procedures with the local authority at the refugee reception center in Maungdaw, Rakhine State. It was noted that those who have a proof of residence can go directly into the process of issuing a National Identification Card, while those who have lost identification documentations but were able to report on the village of origin will be crosschecked by the immigration with their records in the office and will be exempted from going through the National Verification Card (NVC) procedures. The authority confirmed that NVC is only for undocumented persons. (May 27, 2018)

The members of the delegation exchanged views with Union and Rakhine State government officials, stressing the need to overcome prevalent culture of fear and suspicion and to promote inter-communal harmony, irrespective of religion, ethnicity, gender and citizenship. This multi-religious message for peace found in all religions was shared by members of the delegation.

In response to different narratives of victims, the delegation urged the Union Government to take full responsibilities for a thorough and transparent investigation into multiple crimes perpetrated in Rakhine State, including in the process the entire population such as the Rakhine, Muslims, Myo, That, Dynet, Khamee, Kamen and the Hindu. *Religions for Peace* is encouraging a process establishing facts, restoring rights of victims, and supporting social and political change. The organization will contribute to overcoming fear, hatred and intolerance in Rakhine State and elsewhere.



Meeting with Myo community in Maungdaw, Rakhine State (May 27, 2018)

In the meeting with the *Religions for Peace* multi-religious delegation in Nay Pyi Taw on 25 May, State Counsellor Daw Aung Sung Suu Kyi welcomed the delegation's offer of multi-religious solidarity and accompaniment for humanitarian response and peace building in Rakhine State, as well as in other ethnic conflict situations. The first meeting of a *Religions for Peace Advisory Forum on the Advancement of Peace in Myanmar* is scheduled to take place in October 2018, bringing together representatives of the Myanmar government, the military, parliamentarians from ruling and opposition parties, UN agencies, ASEAN, ICRC, international NGOs, national NGOs, religious leaders, and experts.



The R/P Multi-religious Delegation's Meeting with Daw Aung Sung Suu Kyi in Nay Pyi Taw (May 25, 2018)

Accompanying the delegation were Union Minister for Religious Affairs, Chief Minister of Rakhine State, State Minister for Planning and Finance, and senior officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



Bishop Gunnar Stalsett greeting with Chief Minister of Rakhine State and Union Minister for Religious Affairs (May 27, 2018)

His Eminence Cardinal Charles Bo, on behalf of the delegation, expressed appreciation to the Union and local governments and the military for facilitating this visit.

**Members of the Myanmar National and International Multi-religious Delegation
Visiting Rakhine State**



H.E. Cardinal Charles Bo

Archbishop of Yangon; Patron, *Religions for Peace* Myanmar

Bishop Gunnar Stalsett

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

U Myint Swe

President, Ratana Metta Organization; President, *Religions for Peace* Myanmar

Al Haj U Aye Lwin

Chief Convener, the Islamic Center of Myanmar; Founding Member, *Religions for Peace* Myanmar

Rev. Father Joseph Maung Win

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

Rev. Kyoichi Sugino

Deputy Secretary General, *Religions for Peace* International