



Brief Profile of *Religions for Peace* Myanmar

About Us:

Launched in September 2012, *Religions for Peace* Myanmar (*Religions for Peace-M*) is the country's first full-fledged representative and action-oriented interreligious body for reconciliation, peace and development. It brings together all of the major religious institutions of Myanmar, including the Sitagu International Buddhist Academy; the Ratana Metta Organization (Buddhist); the Myanmar Council of Churches (MCC); the Catholic Church; the Sanatan Hindu Organization in Myanmar; and the Islamic Centre of Myanmar. It works on national, regional and local levels and capitalizes on each organization's ability to mobilize its existing infrastructure of thousands of local congregations.

Mission:

Communities with diverse religious beliefs live in peace and harmony in Myanmar. *Religions for Peace* Myanmar will endeavor to synergize strength from Myanmar's plurality.

Vision:

Advance inter-communal harmony and social cohesion through interreligious cooperation.

What We Do:

Religions for Peace Myanmar works to advance and strengthen multi-religious collaboration for peace and development. Through multi-religious action, *Religions for Peace* Myanmar has provided support to vulnerable children and their families whilst strengthening child protection systems across Myanmar. *Religions for Peace* Myanmar promotes peacebuilding and social cohesion initiatives through national initiatives and locally through its local interfaith councils, Interfaith Youth Network and Women of Faith Network. Initiatives are aimed at encouraging local and interfaith dialogues, concern for shared well-being, tolerance and an increase in understanding amongst ethnic and religious groups.

Member and Partner Organizations:

Sitagu Sayadaw Community: Bhante Ashin Nyanissara, commonly known as Bhante Sitagu Sayadaw is one of the most respected Buddhist monks in Myanmar. Known for his linguistic and oratorical skills, charismatic leadership and a socially-engaged vision that subsequently materialized in many of his projects, in which he created a following. With funds collected by his international sermon trips, the Sitagu Sayadaw Community was able to establish several social projects throughout the country. This includes the BBM College in Lower Myanmar, a monastery in Upper Myanmar, a water pump in the Ayeyarwaddy River and a hospital in Sagaing. The Sitagu Sayadaw Community continues to grow throughout Myanmar today, being involved in community social projects all across the country.

Myanmar Council of Churches (MCC): Founded in 1949, MCC is a national body of Christian churches across Myanmar that promotes understanding and cooperation among different Christian denominations. The council shares their resources amongst each member church and coordinate themselves with a number of social welfare activities for their local communities. There are at least 16 churches in this council guiding the path for peace building and interfaith dialogue throughout Myanmar.

Catholic Bishops Conference of Myanmar: The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Myanmar is the assembly of the Bishops of Myanmar (16 Archdioceses and dioceses with 18 active Bishops and 5 retired Bishops throughout the country) exercising together certain pastoral offices for Christ's faithful in the whole of Myanmar. The Conference includes various commissions, agencies, councils and other bodies to serve the country with her people. The Conference enables the Bishops to exchange views and share their wisdom and experience in order to promote the common good of the church in Myanmar.

Islamic Centre of Myanmar: The Centre works to create a harmonious and pluralistic society with all religions throughout Myanmar. It encourages interfaith dialogue and relations through conversation and community projects.

Judson Research Centre at Myanmar Institute of Theology: The Centre was established in 2003 and provides a platform for scholars, religious leaders, theological students and young people from different faiths to learn and work on interfaith relations and current issues in Myanmar. It is committed to promoting mutual understanding, respect and trust among different faiths, and advancing cooperation for peace, just, participatory, responsible and sustainable society.

Sanatan Dharma Swayamsevak Sangh (Sanatan Hindu Organization in Myanmar): Sanatan Dharma Swayamsevak Sangh (SDSS) is a Hindu organization. The organization originates in India; however, SDSS also has a branch in Myanmar. Their general philosophical outlook is cultural nationalism known as integral humanism, aimed at revitalizing the spiritual and moral traditions of Hinduism. SDSS believes that Hinduism is not simply a religion, but a way of life. In the more recent years of the organization, it has been involved with engaging in aid activities and cooperating with other organizations to do so.

Ashoka Social Development Association: The Association is a civil society organization that is currently working water shortage issue in Mone Ywae village in Nyaung Oo Township. The Association builds canals and bridges and also implements water and sanitation activities.

Shri Kali Temple: The Temple was built by Tamil migrants in 1871 and is known for its dramatic sculptures of Hindu gods Ganesh, Shiva, Laxmi and many others.

Implementing Partners

Ratana Metta Organization (Buddhist): Ratana Metta Organization (RMO) was initiated and founded by nine Buddhist organizations on September 10, 2004. As a local organization addressing social and humanitarian issues, RMO has been working in the following areas:

- Prevention, treatment, care and support for people living with HIV/AIDS;
- Promotion of awareness of child rights and child protection and support and care for orphans and vulnerable children;

- Alleviation of poverty through providing livelihood support for livestock breeding and micro finance for income generation.

Currently, with international support and local donations, RMO is implementing 11 projects in different areas in Myanmar. They are collaborating with the International HIV/AIDS Alliance, UNICEF (Myanmar), LIFT, Pact and Thadar Consortium and the UNDP in areas such as health care, community development and child protection.

Karuna Myanmar Social Services (Catholic): Karuna Myanmar Social Service (KMSS) was established by Archbishop Matthias U Shwe with priests and followers with the inspiration “Option for the Poor” in 1994.

KMSS’s primary focus is to serve the poor and the needy. The way that KMSS hopes to help with these issues is to focus on holistic development, realization of justice and peace, environmental protection, humanitarian assistance and emergency relief services to improve the living standard of people, regardless of faith, gender and ethnicity. The activities implemented by KMSS include health programs on basic sanitation and health awareness raising courses; disaster risk reduction to disaster-afflicted people, migrants and prisoners; micro-financing; social education; child care and development; and special care for HIV/AIDS.

Positive Muslim Group (Muslim): Positive Muslim Group (PMG) is an active organization focusing on health, education and development in Yangon Division. Through the awareness-raising training on HIV/AIDS and treatment for affected people, it strives for an HIV/AIDS free and healthy life for people in Myanmar. PMG also mobilizes resources to improve the financial conditions of poor families and students. It provides micro-credit and development programs to assist families to generate income and create funding for scholarship programs so that poor students can continue their studies. Most importantly, as a Muslim organization, PMG spares no efforts to promote peace studies and raise awareness about interfaith dialogue to promote peaceful coexistence of people from different religious traditions in Myanmar. It also organizes trainings, forums and conferences for youth leaders in communities to help with the advancement of interfaith movement and to work for a peaceful, healthy and united life for all the people in Myanmar.

Urban Rural Mission (Protestant): Urban Rural Mission (URM) was started by the Myanmar Council of Churches (MCC) in 1978. The goal of URM is to build capacity for a democratic community in the future through providing civic education for members of different faiths, so that they can advocate for themselves on issues of human rights and work in solidarity with others to make collective decisions for social changes.

URM is present in Yangon and 23 community organizers in 9 different parts of Myanmar dealing with cases of child-soldiers, sexual abuse, rape crimes, land grabbing and human trafficking. It is currently collaborating with Act for Peace, Australia, to promote democracy and peace and to carry out trainings peace building, civic education and human rights, which has helped to advocate for the oppressed, abused, exploited and marginalized people in the country. URM is also involved with MCC in the implementation of Child Protection Policy which has been approved and in the process of being translated into Burmese.

Yangon Kayin Baptist Women's Association (Baptist): Established and registered in 1858, Yangon Kayin Baptist Women Association (YKBWA) aspires to stand for both the physical and spiritual development of women. YKBWA has approximately 5,000 members, most of who are from remote areas in Myanmar.

YKBWA has been working in the area of women empowerment and social economic development by:

- Providing skills training, vocational training and awareness raising training;
- Assisting members to generate income through micro enterprises with micro credit scheme;
- Supporting disadvantaged women and domestic helpers with protection, job opportunities and skills training;
- Providing spiritual guidance for families and children;
- Helping empower women in families and communities through leadership training.

Founding and Core Members:

1. Venerable Dr. Ashin Nynnisara (Bhante Sitagu Sayadaw) – Founding Member of *Religions for Peace Myanmar* and Chancellor of Sitagu International Buddhist Academies
2. Archbishop Charles Bo – Founding Member of *Religions for Peace Myanmar* and the President of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Myanmar
3. Daw Yin Yin Maw – Founding Member of *Religions for Peace Myanmar* President, Myanmar Council of Churches
4. Grand Mufti U Ko Lay – Founding Member of *Religions for Peace Myanmar* and Grand Mufti, Suratee Jamia Masjid
5. U Myint Swe – President of *Religions for Peace Myanmar* and President of Ratana Metta Organization (RMO)
6. Rev. Father Joseph Maung Win – Core Member of *Religions for Peace Myanmar* and Head of the Office of Yangon Archdiocesan Commission for Ecumenism and Interfaith
7. Al Haj U Aye Lwin – Core Member of *Religions for Peace Myanmar* and Chief Convener (President) of the Islamic Center of Myanmar.
8. Dr. Hla Tun – Core Member of *Religions for Peace Myanmar* and Coordinator of Sanatan Dharma Swayamsevak Sangh (H.Q.)
9. U Tun Tun Oo – Core Member of *Religions for Peace Myanmar* and National Secretary of Myanmar Council of Churches

Executive Council:

The Executive Council of *Religions for Peace Myanmar* consists of representative leaders from different religious traditions and individuals who have exhibited proven record of leadership and engagement in the promotion of peace and harmony in their respective religious communities and through inter-religious dialogue and

cooperation. The Executive Council aims to ensure a balanced representation of religious traditions and engagement of women and youth.

Religions for Peace Myanmar Women of Faith Network (WoFN):

Formed in September 2014, and officially launched in December 2014, the *Religions for Peace Myanmar WoFN* mobilizes existing religious organizations and women's groups for multi-religious cooperation with a shared mission to build peace, protect the earth and promote just and harmonious societies.

The WoFN is an action-oriented interreligious women network is comprised of representatives from religious women's organizations, inter-religious bodies, religious bodies and institutions from four main religions: Buddhist, Christian, Hindu and Muslim, bringing certain special value for the network, beyond the constituency and congregations of religious organizations.

The WoFN works on development and peacebuilding programs, capacity building and empowerment of women, and the advancement of women's involvement in the peace process at home, in the community and in conflict affected areas through multi-religious cooperation. The WoFN is committed to gender equality, prevention of domestic abuse and advancement of women's issue. It is a member of the Gender Equality Network (GEN); an active inter-agency network of over 117 national and international NGOs, networks, and technical specialists.

Religions for Peace Myanmar Interfaith Youth Network (IYN):

Formed in February 2013, *R/P-IYN* is a representative, action-oriented and sustainable interfaith youth network in Myanmar. Embracing youths from Buddhist, Muslim, Christian and Hindu faiths.

With the core values of team spirit, mutual understanding, loving kindness, respect, good examples and trust, *Religions for Peace Myanmar IYN* advocates for peace building and augmenting interfaith youth network through peace sharing session, visits to religious sites, volunteering services in HIV/AIDS shelter, building knowledge on elections, civil society, nutrition, health and child protection and campaigning against hate speech.

Religions for Peace Myanmar IYN is currently working on peace building amongst youths with outreach activities to end hate speech and promote, respect, understanding and tolerance in order to build a peaceful pluralist society.

Secretariat Staff:

Patrick Aung Tu – Program Manager

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