

Religions for Peace

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

***Religions for Peace* Advances Reconciliation and Peacebuilding in Sittwe, Rakhine State, Myanmar**



Children in the Rohingya Community in a Segregated Village near IDP Camp in Sittwe (29 March, 2016)

On 28-29 March 2016, **U Myint Swe, President of *RfP* Myanmar** and **Rev. Kyoichi Sugino, Deputy Secretary General of *RfP* International**, visited Sittwe, Rakhine State, Myanmar, the scene of major inter-communal violence between Rakhine Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims in 2012. Further sporadic

outbreaks since then have left scores dead and over 140,000 displaced.

RfP Myanmar members have been working in their respective communities in Rakhine State (Buddhists and Muslims) to provide humanitarian assistance to vulnerable populations, especially children, affected by conflict.

Buddhists make up 60% of the population, which stands at 3.2 million. Muslims, including Rohingya, are about 30% of the population, and the remaining 10% consist of Chin and a number of small minority groups. The complex historical mixture, combined with inter-communal and interreligious conflict, extreme poverty, and underdevelopment makes reconciliation and peaceful coexistence harder.

On 30 March, **RfP International** and **RfP Myanmar** convened all relevant parties, including Buddhist Ma Ba Tha leaders, Rohingya representatives, and Christian and Hindu communities in Yangon to discuss concerns and work towards advancing a multi-religious consensus on a lasting peace with justice in Myanmar.

RAKHINE MUSLIM COMMUNITY



Rohingya Muslim Leaders in Sittwe with Rev. Sugino

The Rohingya community expressed their hope for the new government. They identified three key issues: education, health, and freedom of movement, while seeking a political solution to the issues of their ethnic identity and citizenship.

Muslim communities, in particular Rohingya, have been progressively marginalized from social and political life. Many have long been denied full citizenship. Children do not attend

schools. **RfP Myanmar** Core Group Member, Ratana Metta Organization, partnered with UNICEF in engaging Muslim leaders in behavior change for parents.



RAKHINE BUDDHIST COMMUNITY



Ven. Ariya Wuntha Sayadaw, Secretary, Sittwe Monastic Education (L) and Rev. Sugino (R)

The majority Rakhine Buddhist community also feels aggrieved - due to discrimination, lack of political control over their own affairs, economic marginalization, human rights abuses and restrictions on language and cultural expression. At the same time, there is a strong fear that they could soon become a minority in their own state.

RAKHINE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY



Rev. Aung Lin, General Secretary, Sittwe Council of Churches and his wife

Rev. Aung Lin and his wife consider education to be the most critical foundation for sustainable peace. They built a school within their church compound for children from different ethnic groups.



Rev. Aung Lin (R) and Rev. Sugino (C)

RAKHINE HINDU COMMUNITY



Mr. Maung Hla, Leader of Hindu Community (L) with Rev. Sugino (R)



There are 15,000 Hindus in Rakhine state and 3,000 Hindus in Sittwe. Since their South Asian features are similar to Rohingya, they started wearing a small arm band to differentiate them from Rohingya.

A 10-member delegation of **RfP Myanmar** will travel to Japan from 4-8 April to meet with the Foreign Minister of Japan, parliamentarians, religious and civil society leaders to further strengthen multi-religious collaboration for peace and development in Myanmar.

RELIGIONS FOR PEACE--the world's largest and most representative multi-religious coalition--advances common action among the world's religious communities for peace. *Religions for Peace* works to transform violent conflict, advance human development, promote just and harmonious societies, and protect the earth. The global *Religions for Peace* network comprises a World Council of senior religious leaders from all regions of the world; six regional inter-religious bodies and more than ninety national ones; and the Global Women of Faith Network and Global Interfaith Youth Network.

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