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

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**

The Rohingya community expressed their hope for the new government. They identified three key issues: education, heath, 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
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 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.
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.