Interfaith Youth Building Peace, One Social Media Post at a Time

Meikhtila is a community that is wrought with rumors and fears of imminent violence. It still hasn’t completely recovered from the 2013 intercommunal conflict and is frequently affected by events occurring around the country, particularly the worsening situation in Rakhine state. Since the increase in violence in Rakhine in August 2017, Meikhtila has been bracing for potential intercommunal violence. Fear-mongering ultra-Buddhist nationalist groups took to Facebook and Twitter to spread rumors of an imminent attack in Meikhtila from 10-11 September 2017.

As a result of these rumors, townspeople began following a self-enforced sundown curfew. Fearing that these rumors could instigate violence, Religions for Peace-Myanmar (R/P-M) Meikhtila stepped into action. The Meikhtila Interfaith Youth Network (IYN), Women of Faith Network, and Interfaith Committee began sharing regular updates with one another on the current situation and known facts. This information was then spread to their religious communities through their religious institutions and networks.

"Now is a really important time to act. Rumors are trying to separate people all across Myanmar due to the Rakhine situation, so we have to do more work and organize to prevent some tension amongst the communities. We need to take care to reduce community fear."

- Meikhtila IYN Member

Utilizing their knowledge and skills gained from the refresher trainings held only one month earlier, the IYN began a social media campaign to get the truth out there, combat rumors, and promote positive messages. Their posts helped to allay fears and encouraged the community to seek out the truth from trusted leaders instead of relying on unknown sources on Facebook and Twitter for information.

As a result of their action, people once again felt comfortable to venture out at night. Instead of distrusting one another, the community came together as one to sort out the truth from the rumors. Due to these messages, Meikhtila was able to avoid intercommunal violence fueled by rumors and fanned by fears of what is occurring in Rakhine.

The IYN has gained stature in the community through their messaging campaign and R/P-M Meikhtila has become a trusted entity in the community for promoting truth and working to maintain peace.