In 2013, Meikhtila, a city in central Myanmar, witnessed brutal sectarian conflict that began with a disagreement at a gold shop between the Muslim shop owner and his Buddhist customers. Three days of riots took the lives of 40 people, displaced up to 12,000, ravaged entire neighborhoods and targeted the sanctity of holy sites and religious leaders. These clashes took the homes of both Muslims and Buddhists, forcing them to take refuge in internally displaced person (IDP) camps. While all the IDP camps are now closed, many people have been forced into temporary houses that were not properly constructed and are prone to flooding.

Htet*, a college educated woman, was forced to flee her home and live in the IDP camp begging to survive. After leaving the camp in 2015, she became a teacher to support her widowed mother and six siblings. After living through this difficult period, she decided to become active in her community to prevent future conflicts and to ensure the rights, dignity and flourishing of all people. She joined the Religions for Peace-Myanmar (RfP-M)’s Meikhtila Women of Faith Network (WoFN) and now she is the leader in developing inter-communal initiatives to rebuild relationships between Buddhists and Muslims. The dialogue, facilitation, advocacy and conflict resolution training that she received as part of RfP’s Multi-Religious Networks Promoting Religious Diversity and Tolerance Project, encouraged her to do more for her community, and particularly for minorities and their legal battle with township authorities to return to their land. She is the first Buddhist woman in Meikhtila to have fought against the Buddhist nationalist organization, Ma Ba Ta, on the behalf of a Muslim family, despite the negative treatment she received from some of her Buddhist neighbors.

“Some people blame me because I have a relationship with Islamic community. I don’t care. We can’t solve the problems in our community by blaming, fighting and killing.”

- Htet, Member of the Religions for Peace-Myanmar Meikhtila Women of Faith Network

Women continuously play key leadership roles in all projects and initiatives of RfP-M.