

Preparation for Commission III:

### **"Welcoming the other through Human Development that Respects the Earth"**

**"Welcoming the Other" includes the proactive commitment to help the "other" to develop and unfold their human dignity in the holistic terms of a shared positive vision of Peace rooted in each believer's religious tradition. Development is integral to Peace.**

Religious for Peace-Myanmar was formed with the basic principles that respects religious differences, honors the different ways religious communities are organized, and committed to cooperative action for peace and bases its work on deeply held and widely shared values, and was launched in September 2012.

*Religions for Peace* Myanmar (*RfP-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 Organisation (Buddhist); the Myanmar Council of Churches (MCC); the Catholic Church; the Sanatan Hindu Organisation in Myanmar; and the Islamic Centre of Myanmar. It works on national, regional and local levels and capitalises on each organisation's ability to mobilise its existing infrastructure of thousands of local congregations.

**Vision:** Myanmar community with diverse religious belief lives in peace and harmony.

**Goal:** Peaceful and harmonious pluralistic society.

#### **Objectives:**

- Reduce discrimination and alleviate poverty
- Improve access to education, health and livelihoods,
- Promote post conflict reconstruction and reconciliation, women empowerment and justice for all
- Advance inter-communal harmony and social cohesion
- Work for sustainable peace and development in partnership with other organisations

**Its Mission is to** strive to accomplish our vision by means of advancing inter-communal harmony and social cohesion through interreligious cooperation. *Religions for Peace* Myanmar (*RfP-M*) serves as a platform for religious leaders for joint advocacy, coordinated program responses and training, mobilization of local communities around issues of public concerns and for channeling resources through local congregations and other faith groups.

Bearing in mind our traditions informing us that societies will be judged ultimately by the condition of their most innocent, most dependent and most vulnerable members – their



children, RfP-M projected its activities to advance and strengthen multi-religious collaboration for child protection.

**With the support of *Religions for Peace International, GHR Foundation*, Religions for Peace Myanmar (RfP-M) is currently undertaking initiatives to deliver important services to support vulnerable children and their families; and strengthen child protection systems. Our future work plan includes support for advocacy activities on peace building, outreach to all religions and action-oriented interfaith dialogue. We work throughout Myanmar in advancing the shared moral and spiritual values of Buddhism, Islam, Christianity and Hinduism, to provide a basis for communal harmony. Through the “Protecting Vulnerable Children through Inter-religious Cooperation in Myanmar” project, vulnerable children from 11 townships in 5 states and regions are benefiting from the activities of the project.**

In addition, the Religions for Peace Myanmar Interfaith Youth Network was formed in February 2013, with the objective to increase the social work spirit, build youth capacity, increase more participation to the development works and to create a new generation for Ratana Metta Organisation (RMO). It focuses to build a “representative, action-oriented and sustainable” interfaith youth network in Myanmar.

RMO is helping RfP activities through organizing of TOT training for youth who will provide multiplier training in 10 villages. Currently, 210 youth from 12 townships joined RfP Interfaith Youth Network. The number of members will be increased with the expanding of youth network by the six implementing partners in their projected townships .



## Map of the Project Area :

“Protecting Vulnerable Children through Inter-religious Cooperation in Myanmar”  
(2013-2014)

*This project covers villages in 11 townships of five states and regions of Myanmar.*





### **Interfaith Youth Network – peace building and interfaith dialogue**

With the support of US small grant, the RfP-Myanmar Interfaith Youth Network and the five active partners will implement the project “Increasing Religions for Peace Advocacy for Peace Building and Augmenting Interfaith Youth Networks in 5 townships” .

The project actors are being trained on Peace Building to assist with effective conflict transformation and peace building initiatives; and to apply Peace Education knowledge to the activities. They will conduct multiplier training and assist Interfaith dialogue by religious leaders of Buddhist, Islam, Christian and Hindu faith at the projected areas.

The project aims to understand religious perspective of all four main religions and help the implementation of project activities for attitudinal change for peace building initiatives and in communication, negotiation and mediation should there be a need for conflict transformation and Peace building.

### **Ratana Metta Organisation (RMO) activities**

Formed in 2004, Ratana Metta organization has been working on development programmes on health, child protection, livelihood and Peace, in more than two hundred villages in ten states and regions. Peace building is integrated in all development programmes and Interfaith Youth Network programmes.



In collaboration with UNDP, RMO is implementing the Project - “Support to Improved Livelihoods and Social Cohesion in Myanmar Sub-Project” in Mrauk Oo Township, Rakhine State, with an aim to improve access to and reducing inequalities in resources, incomes and livelihood opportunities and to enhance social cohesion within communities in six villages of Mrauk Oo Township, Rakhine State. The poor, conflict-affected, IDPs, returnees and the host communities, in particular, traditionally marginalized or vulnerable groups including ethnic minorities and women are the target beneficiaries. 480 households from six villages will be benefited from this project.

In partnership with UNICEF on “Faith for Children” communication initiative programme, a booklet elaborating on Buddhist teachings integrated with key behaviours is used as a communication tool for children and monks, to practice key behaviours through Buddha’s teaching. About 3,000 monasteries from 880 villages/wards in Myanmar have become community centres to disseminate key community practices. Religious leaders from these monasteries are being empowered to persuade communities to practice key behaviours

through Buddha's teaching under Faith for Children initiative. Monks managing monastic schools are directly involved in shaping the behaviors of the young children.

RMO has organized the dissemination of messages through special sermons to 200 villages around the country. These engagements have contributed to improved child survival and development in the project areas. Given the fact that Buddhism makes 80% in Myanmar, the project has become a success for integration of development programme with religious teachings. The same idea will apply for Christian and Muslim faith and the project is expected to expand by 2014. Scholars from Christian and Muslim faith are being explored for development of such booklet.

### **Challenges**

- Shortage of funding to support development works
- Community and local authorities' lack of experiences for development work to enhance social cohesion through interreligious cooperation
- A divisive force among the beneficiaries with diverse Religious Practices
- Lack of firm support in comparison to the government backed " Interfaith Dialogue Group Myanmar" which also is laying firm groundwork like RfP-M.

### **Additional output:**

At the 8<sup>th</sup> World Assembly, Kyoto declaration on Confronting Violence and Advancing Shared Security has affirmed that shared security requires all sectors of society to acknowledge our common vulnerabilities and to share responsibility to address them.

Given the recent conflict in June between the Muslim and Buddhist workers from Myanmar working in Malaysia, Ven. Sitagu Sayardaw Ashin Nyannissara, has supported the return of the some Myanmar. In November, at the 2013 gathering of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists for International Buddhist –Muslim forum on Peace and sustainability, in Kuala Lumpur, RfP-M has initiated a meeting for Muslim and Buddhist resident community and social workers' associations, to promote peace and harmony among themselves and has issued a statement to form a Network consisting of both religions, to work in peace and harmony, to ensure the conveying of correct information in order to reduce the hostility towards others.

In October 2013, SITAGU INTERNATIONAL BUDDHIST ACADEMY has conducted "Interfaith Academic Conference on security, peace and coexistence" conference in Yangon, involving international level religious leaders.

At the national level, RfP-Myanmar is implementing the development works in collaboration with all four major religions in Myanmar: Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christian. Advocacy for Peace Building and Augmenting Interfaith Youth Networks will present a common pronounce to the community about the work of Religions for Peace and its objective for advancing inter-communal harmony and social cohesion through interreligious cooperation with the key being to harness each other's strengths into a common vision.

At the regional level, religious and CSO leaders from Myanmar have participated in the Buddhist-Muslim Collaboration Platform for Peace and Sustainability forum in November 2013, Malaysia and have been exposed to Muslim and Buddhist leaders across Asia as well as to regional issues. The International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) have supported Myanmar to challenge fundamental attitudes that linger the level of violence across ethnic and religious divisions.

RfP-Myanmar is now participating at the 9<sup>th</sup> World Assembly for the first time. With limited experience, we welcome your support in addressing the challenges facing Myanmar.

### **Conclusion**

Peace cannot be obtained through prayers and preaches, through conferences and meetings but peace needs actions. Since **Development is integral to Peace**, we will welcome the other, through human development works that respects the Earth, its people, and contribute towards the achievement of Millennium Development Goals, empower the poor legally, and improve the health situation of mankind as well as of the globe.

