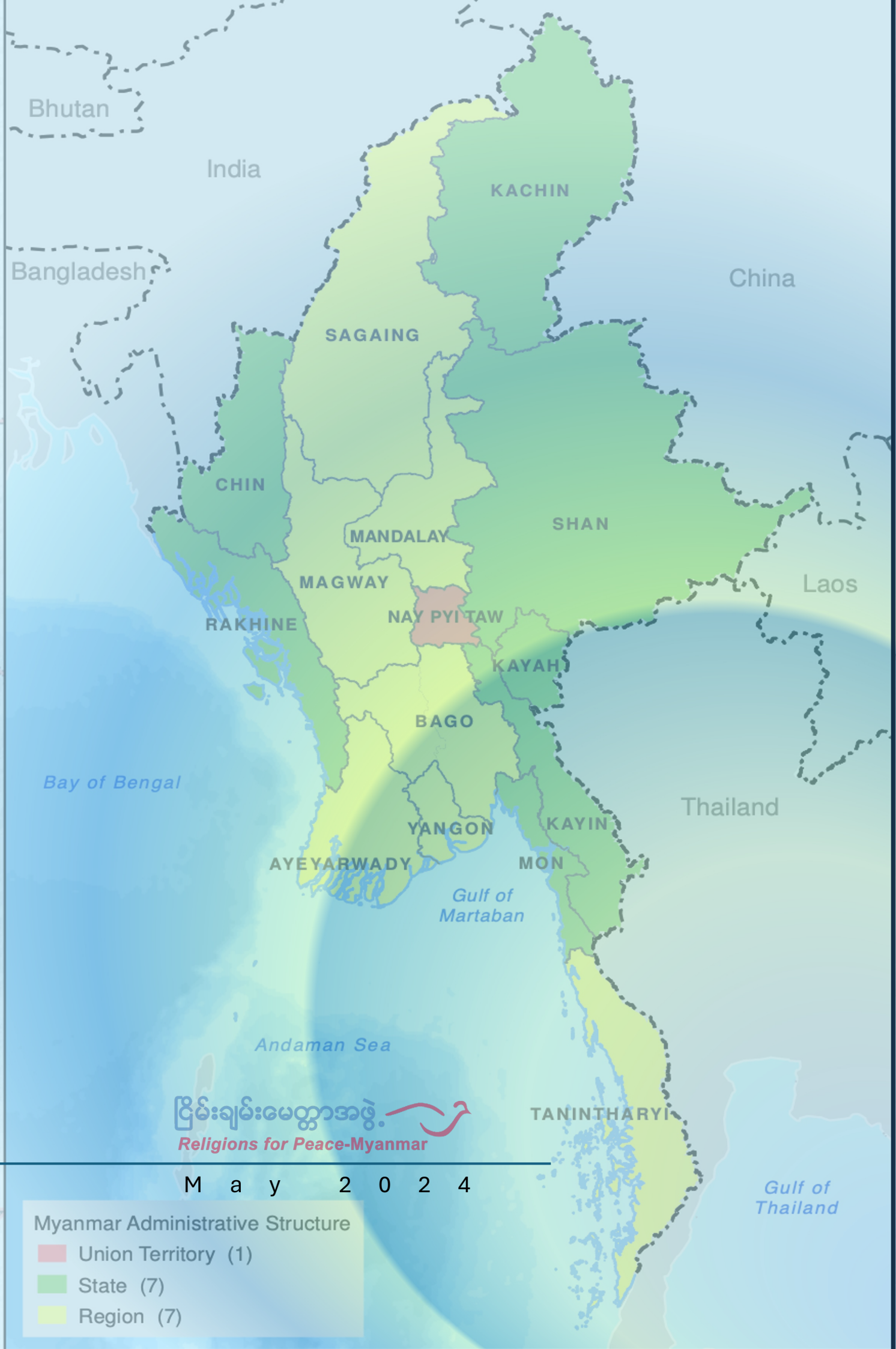


REPORT





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*Religions for Peace-Myanmar*

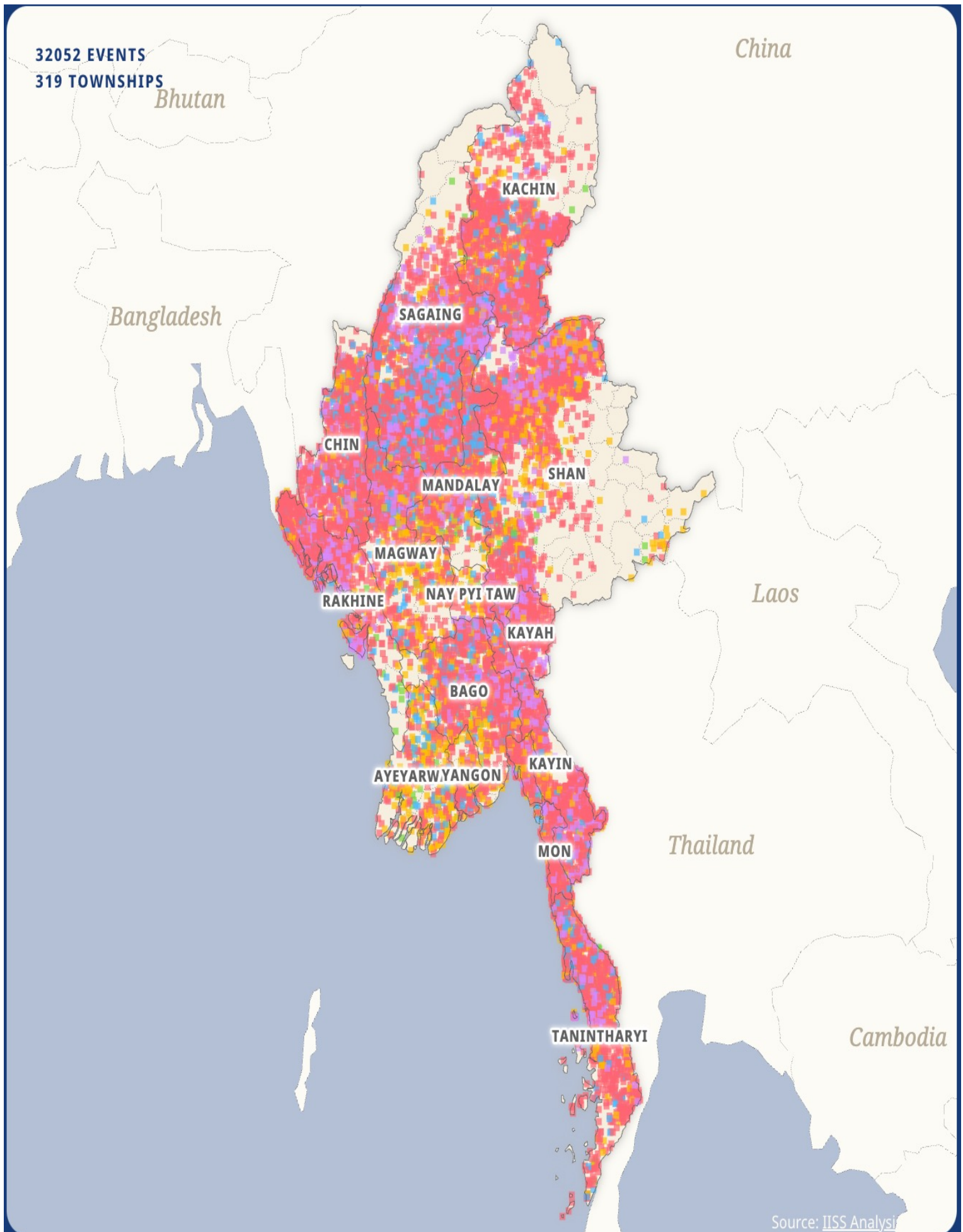
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Myanmar Administrative Structure

- Union Territory (1)
- State (7)
- Region (7)



# Myanmar Conflict Map



# Religions for Peace Myanmar Network Locations in Myanmar





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# Acronym

NCM – Nyein Chan Metta

*RfP-M – Religions for Peace Myanmar*

RfP – Religions for Peace

WoFN – Women of Faith Network

IYN – Interfaith Youth Network

IDP – Internally Displaced People

IRC/IC – Interreligious Committee/ Interfaith Committee

MCC – Myanmar Council of Churches

M&E – Monitoring and Evaluation

HAHS – Multi-religious Humanitarian Assistance and Healthcare Support in Myanmar

UN – United Nations

NGO – Non-governmental/profit Organization

CSO – Civil Society Organization

SSS – Southern Shan State

MAF – Myanmar Armed Force

CP – Child Protection

## Summary

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the military coup in Myanmar, the struggle for religious harmony and peace has intensified, posing significant challenges to social cohesion across the nation. Amidst this tumultuous period, the initiative undertaken by Religions for Peace in Myanmar, in collaboration with the support of *RfP* Japan, stands as a beacon of hope. By leveraging online platforms for discussion and dialogue, *RfP-M* seeks to foster understanding and empathy among diverse religious and ethnic communities, striving to build bridges of solidarity and collaboration in the face of adversity.



The humanitarian assistance provided by *RfP* Japan, guided by the principles of compassion and solidarity, plays a critical role in alleviating the plight of conflict-affected communities in targeted areas of Myanmar. Through the provision of essential resources and support, *RfP-M* not only addresses immediate material needs but also offers psychological sustenance to individuals and groups grappling with the profound impact of sociopolitical upheaval. The holistic approach adopted by *RfP-M* underscores its commitment to promoting healing and reconciliation within the fabric of Myanmar's society.

As the country navigates through this period of uncertainty and disarray, the invaluable contributions of *RfP* Japan and each supporter in Japan serve as a testament to the enduring power of peaceful coexistence and cooperation among people of different faiths and backgrounds in Myanmar. Through joint efforts focused on community outreach and empowerment, *RfP-M* fosters a sense of belonging and resilience among vulnerable populations, reinforcing the foundations of trust and mutual respect essential for sustainable peacebuilding in Myanmar. By championing the values of empathy and inclusivity, *RfP-M* envisions a future where the diverse tapestry of Myanmar's religious landscape thrives in harmony.



During the ongoing crisis in Myanmar, *RfP-M* has demonstrated a deep commitment to maintaining strong connections with local actors as a means to effectively provide social support within the affected communities. This steadfast dedication has enabled our organization to swiftly respond to the urgent needs of those most impacted by the turbulent circumstances unfolding in the region. In our unwavering pursuit to make a positive difference amidst adversity, collaborative efforts with local partners continue to remain at the forefront of our operational strategy.



In light of the complex challenges faced, *RfP-M* has proactively engaged in closed coordination with various INGOs and NGOs. By leveraging these strategic partnerships, we have been able to bolster our collective capacity and mobilize resources efficiently toward targeted relief efforts. This alignment of efforts amplifies our interventions' impact and underscores the importance of fostering synergistic relationships within interreligious communities.



As we navigate the complexities of the crisis in Myanmar, the significance of collaboration with INGOs and NGOs cannot be overstated. Coordination with these external partners enhanced the effectiveness of *RfP-M*'s social support initiatives in Myanmar's conflict-affected areas. The organization can further strengthen its collaborative efforts with local actors and external agencies to maximize support for the affected

populations in Myanmar.



IDP, Ghe Kaw, Kayah State



Social cohesion training with local CSO in Putao, Kachin State



Meeting with community in most remote village in Rathedaung, Rakhine state

## *RfP*-Myanmar Network

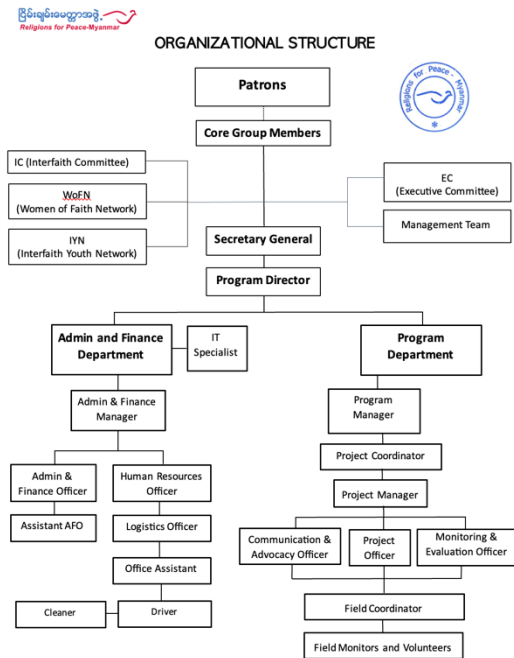
*Religions for Peace*-Myanmar has established a robust network within key townships such as Myitkyina, Kyaukphyu, Patheingyi, Sittwe, Meiktila, and Pyaw. Since 2015, the Interreligious committees have been diligently formed in these regions, serving as



pillars of unity and cooperation among diverse religious communities. Amidst the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the recent Military coup within the country, *RfP*-Myanmar has successfully maintained closed cooperation channels with the Interreligious committees during critical situations. Although committees have not been established in all areas such as

Southern Shan and Kayah States, advocacy efforts with faith leaders from other regions

and states have been actively pursued, ensuring collaborative interfaith activities during times of crisis. By promoting interfaith engagement and collaboration, the Interreligious Committees have helped bridge cultural and religious divides, ultimately strengthening social cohesion and harmony within diverse communities.



In order to enhance the promotion of IYN and WoFN in Myanmar within the framework of Interreligious committees, it is imperative that a concerted effort be made to bolster engagement and support from all relevant stakeholders. While notable progress has been observed in the involvement of women and youth members in crisis response activities within targeted areas, there remains a crucial need to further elevate their visibility and contributions. By emphasizing the importance of active participation and collaboration among team members, we can cultivate a culture of inclusivity and empowerment that resonates effectively with the overarching goals of promoting peace and harmony through interfaith dialogue and action.

Moreover, in recognizing the invaluable role that Youth and Women teams play in the multifaceted landscape of community development and conflict resolution, it becomes evident that a strategic approach to their promotion and recognition is paramount. This necessitates a comprehensive assessment of current practices and a formulation of innovative strategies that not only showcase the commendable efforts of team members but also seek to amplify their impact on the ground. By harnessing the collective expertise and dedication of individuals involved in these teams, we can propel meaningful change and foster a more resilient and cohesive society that is built on the principles of mutual respect, understanding, and solidarity.

*Religions for Peace-Myanmar* is currently operating under a low profile due to the recent crisis in Myanmar. The organization has applied for a registration extension; however, the request has not been granted. It is important to note that many organizations in Myanmar are facing similar challenges in obtaining official recognition. In this challenging time, all organizations in the country are navigating uncertain waters together. Despite the setback, *RfP-M* remains committed to its mission and continues to work towards promoting social cohesion within the diverse community in Myanmar.



## Core Members

On 10<sup>th</sup> November 2022, Mr. Myint Swe retired from his esteemed position as the President of *RfP*-Myanmar. As a result of this significant transition, the organization now comprises six core members, with the notable inclusion of the Secretary General.



Following Mr. Swe's departure, Hindu assumed the role of President, ushering in a new era of leadership for *RfP*-Myanmar. A pivotal decision was reached to augment the core membership by two representatives from each religious group, underscoring a commitment to

diversity and inclusivity within the organization. Notably, His Eminence Cardinal Charles Bo has emerged as a steadfast patron of *RfP*-Myanmar, lending his influential voice and unwavering support to its noble endeavors. His Eminence also addressed during the HAHS project end review meeting that the importance of fostering interfaith dialogue and understanding within the context of Myanmar's sociocultural landscape.



In light of the recent leadership restructuring within *RfP*-Myanmar, the organization now boasts a total of six core members, each playing a vital role in shaping its mission and vision for the future. With Hindu at the helm as President and the

Secretary General overseeing operational matters, the enhanced core membership structure signals a strategic move towards greater representation and collaboration across diverse religious backgrounds.



*RfP*-Myanmar conducted an Advisory Forum three times in Naypyitaw, with the active participation of Government Leaders, International religious leaders, Diplomats, representatives of international organizations, political parties, Civil Society Organizations, and experts. With this action, *RfP*-Myanmar was well known by all levels of communities in Myanmar. However, due to the leadership transition within the organization and the political crisis in the country, *RfP*-Myanmar is challenged to maintain the organization's image of strength in the country.

### 2021 – 2022

1. U Myint Swe, President (Buddhist)
2. Rev. Fr. Joseph Maung Win, Secretary General (Deceased Feb 23, 2020) (Catholic)
3. Al Haj Kalifah U Aye Lwin (Islam); EC member- *RfP* Asia (2021 – present)
4. Dr. Hla Tun (Hindu)
5. Rev. Fr. Geore Shwe Htun (Catholic) – Releasement of Fr. Joseph Mg Win
6. Daw Yin Yin Maw (Successor of SG position) (MCC)
7. Rev. Shwe Lin (MCC) (team competed in 2017)



8. Rev. Mahn Palmerston (MCC) – took over MCC portion 2018 to date)

#### List of Core Members from 2023 to date

1. U San Min, President (Hindu)
2. Daw Yin Yin Maw, Secretary General (MCC)
3. Al Haj Kalifah U Aye Lwin (Islam), EC Member – *RfP* Asia
4. Rev. Fr. George Shwe Htun (Catholic)
5. Rev. Mahn Palmerston (MCC)
6. U Win Swe (Buddhist)

### Humanitarian Assistance

In response to the escalating critical situations in Myanmar, the *RfP*-M network extended a helping hand to families deeply impacted by the turmoil. Our dedicated team made meaningful efforts to reach out to individual families affected by conflict, offering vital humanitarian support to ensure their basic needs and sustenance. Through the collaborative efforts of local interreligious committees, we were able to deliver crucial aid and resources to those struggling to survive in these challenging times. While our resources were limited, we proactively shared valuable information with UN Agencies and other humanitarian organizations to facilitate further support for the conflict-affected communities in Myanmar.



The provision of humanitarian assistance to the affected families in Myanmar was a testament to our commitment to providing tangible relief in the face of adversity. By approaching each family with care and compassion, we sought to alleviate their immediate hardships and offer a glimmer of hope in their time of need. The coordinated efforts with local interreligious committees underscored the importance of working together towards a common goal of assisting the most vulnerable members of society, despite the challenges that lay ahead.





As we navigated the complexities of the crisis in Myanmar, our focus remained on fostering collaboration and building bridges with key stakeholders to amplify the impact of our humanitarian efforts. By engaging with UN Agencies and other relevant organizations, we aimed to leverage additional resources and expertise to address the pressing needs of the conflict-affected communities more comprehensively. Through continued advocacy and strategic partnerships, we endeavored to pave the way for sustained support and assistance to those grappling with the repercussions of the ongoing turmoil in Myanmar.



Kyaukphyu



Lashio



Meiktila



Myitkyina



Patheingyi



Pyaw



Sittwe

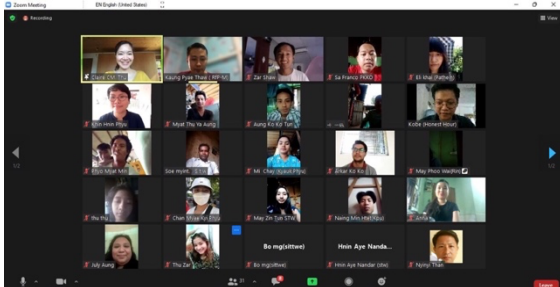


Yangon

During the crisis period, humanitarian assistance to the vulnerable was provided with respective interreligious committee members from each area. A distribution procedure was applied based on the safety context of the particular area. We had to fully observe the security concerns. Therefore, different techniques were applied in different areas.

## Psychosocial Support

In 2022, *RfP-Myanmar* collaborated with Honest Hour Company, an esteemed professional specializing in mental healing and offering psychosocial support training services. Amidst the tumultuous challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and political upheaval stemming from a military coup, the members of the *RfP-Myanmar* network found solace in the comprehensive Psychosocial Support training delivered through a sophisticated online platform. This platform served as a crucial avenue for individuals grappling with the hardships of the dual crises to openly share their experiences of stress and depression, fostering a supportive environment for healing and



growth. Throughout 2022, a total of 20 sessions of psychosocial support training were successfully conducted, attracting over 300 eager participants seeking respite from their emotional burdens.

In a demonstration of the transformative impact of the psychosocial support training initiative, participants who underwent the sessions in 2022 were empowered to navigate their personal struggles and equipped with the tools to disseminate their newfound knowledge within their respective communities. The ripple effect of this shared wisdom reverberated across various regions, amplifying the reach and effectiveness of the training program. By cultivating a network of individuals well-versed in psychosocial support principles and strategies, *RfP*-Myanmar and Honest Hour Company have laid a solid foundation for holistic healing and mental well-being within their communities, championing resilience in the face of adversity.

As the psychosocial support training echoes reverberate throughout Myanmar's diverse landscapes, a sense of hope and solidarity emerges, underscoring the enduring power of compassionate outreach and collective healing efforts. Through the combined efforts of *RfP* Myanmar and Honest Hour Company, a legacy of healing and support takes root, inspiring individuals to emerge stronger and more resilient in the face of ongoing challenges and uncertainties.



## Awareness on Resilience

In addition to offering crucial humanitarian assistance in Myanmar, our organization also places a strong emphasis on promoting awareness of resilience and providing much-needed psychosocial support as the country navigates through its most challenging times. As countless individuals have been displaced and lost their homes and possessions, the toll on mental well-being cannot be understated. The inability to restore certain properties has only exacerbated the situation, leading to increased levels of psychological distress and illness among affected populations. Recognizing the vital role that resilience plays in coping with adversity, our programs are designed to equip individuals with the tools and knowledge needed to remain mentally strong amidst the upheaval and uncertainty that currently grips Myanmar.





Moving forward, it becomes paramount to address the following questions: How can communities promote a culture of resilience in times of crisis in order to safeguard mental well-being? What specific strategies and resources can be implemented to support individuals in overcoming the trauma of losing their homes and possessions? In what ways can ongoing psychosocial support be tailored to address the diverse needs of those affected by the crisis in Myanmar and ensure long-term resilience and recovery?



## Support for Youth Career

Under the auspices of the esteemed HAHS project generously funded by RfP Japan, a total of 36 dynamic interfaith youth hailing from various regions across Myanmar, including Kyaukphyu, Lashio, Meiktila, Myitkyina, Patheingyi, and Sittwe, have been the fortunate beneficiaries. These dynamic young individuals, through their participation in a comprehensive sewing training program, have not only honed their craft but have also gained the skills necessary to establish and manage their tailoring enterprises from the comfort of their homes.



By adeptly fulfilling customer orders and creating bespoke garments, these talented youth are not only fostering self-sufficiency but are also contributing towards the financial stability of their families. Moreover, in a poignant juxtaposition, during the tumultuous times of crisis in Myanmar when the SAC sought to conscript vulnerable youth under coercive laws, this initiative served as a vital sanctuary, offering a haven and a promising career pathway for the discerning participants.



## Creating Connections for Social Unity in Times of Crisis

In an earnest effort to foster social cohesion among communities affected by conflict, *Religions for Peace-Myanmar* diligently continues its mission. Through a series of sharing sessions, tree plantation, and conducted psychosocial support virtually and in person, the organization provides a platform where individuals can openly express their views and share their experiences of suffering from the front lines of turmoil. This endeavor serves as a crucial bridge, connecting those who have been displaced from their homes and are now residing in areas with less conflict, with their counterparts in faith communities based in Yangon. It is through this exchange of narratives and perspectives that a sense of unity and understanding is cultivated, paving the way for healing and reconciliation amid adversity.



empowered to heal their wounds but also to build bridges of compassion and empathy with one another.

As social cohesion remains a priority in conflict-affected regions, the sharing sessions organized by *Religions for Peace-Myanmar* stand as a testament to the power of dialogue and collective storytelling in fostering understanding and reconciliation. In a landscape marked by division and strife, these gatherings offer a glimmer of hope and a path towards resilience and unity that transcends boundaries of faith and geography.



## Collaborating with Unicef

Nyein Chan Metta (*Religions for Peace-Myanmar*) (NCM) has contracted with UNICEF a Humanitarian Programme Document as a response to the sudden onset or rapid deterioration of a humanitarian crisis and/or contingency purposes, under the project named “Protection of Violations of the Rights of the Children through Faith Network” for 11 months; 19 January to 19 December 2022, in the Kayah, SSS and Kachin states. After adding Sagaing region, the most devastated conflict-affected area in mid-2022, the project timeframe was extended to March 2023. Due to the underspent budget balance, No Cost Extension of the project was permitted until June 2023. Project extension was granted as Phase II Humanitarian Programme Document and the timeframe is for 12 months (15 July 2023 to 15 July 2024) with the same contingency purposes.

In addition to the four target areas, NCM added Rakhine, Magway and Chin states which have suffered devastating impacts of Cyclone Mocha in May 2023 placing the people in increasing peril amidst the escalating fighting, rising displacement and extreme protection threats.



Aftermath Thirty four months of military coup in November 2023, the conflict situation see a bit of transformation. Three-member alliance of revolution militant forces launched an offensive called "Operation 1027," in northern Shan State and has made big gains causing threat to MAF's power. The offensive has seized key towns, stimulating ethnic groups elsewhere and spotlighted the military's weakness. In fear of airstrikes, many of the civilians from northern Shan State have displaced into other states and regions including Southern Shan State where NCM targeted areas are; Taunggyi, Aye Tharyar and Nyaung Shwe townships.



On 13th November, the Arakan Army potentially broke a cease-fire with the MAF in Rakhine State and forceful impact fall on many towns of Rakhine state, including Buthidaung and Rathedaung which are NCM target areas in northern Rakhine. NCM target area Samee, in Paletwa district, Chin state also suffered from the resumed fighting and had to flee to safer remote villages. Analysts said that the biggest development on the battlefield this year was an increase in airstrikes, with the deadliest killing at least 168 people in Sagaing region in April. NCM targeted areas in Sagaing are scattered around the region. Except for one IDP camp based in Mandalay region, none of the other four townships are stable to implement project activities as their communities used to flee back and forth, depending on the stability.



On November 7, Karreni resistance forces launched "Operation 1107" in Loikaw, Kayah State and captured at least two military bases. Foreseeing the counteroffensive of MAF, 90% of residents from Loikaw fled to safe places; deep into the remote forest or villages and into towns of Southern Shan State, resulting in the increase of IDPs in the existing camps of NCM targeted areas. Despite, the worsening situation, CP awareness and PSS activities for target communities have enlightened by six grave violation knowledge and ways to protect their children and where to report for Case Management.

It is now estimated that 19 million people need humanitarian aid. As a result of displacement, the health care and education of 6 million children are interrupted and they are suffering from food insecurity, malnutrition, protection risks including forced recruitment, and mental distress.



Declined economic situation placed families in increasing financial distress with limited coping capacities. Food insecurity and lack of shelter and drinking water is a threat for the displaced people.

Child Protection project and Humanitarian assistance need to be strengthened at this crucial moment. The UN Humanitarian Coordination group reported that out of the 56.6 million total population, 18.6 million are in humanitarian need and 5.3 million population whose properties have been destroyed and socioeconomic been diminished are targeted for humanitarian



assistance. The humanitarian needs and response plan need more funding. While children and their communities are now suffering from prolonged armed conflict, the cost of resettlement and rehabilitation aftermath of civil war would be huge if and when the nation gains normalcy in the future.

In a strategic collaboration with UNICEF, *RfP*-Myanmar has made significant strides in championing the cause of child protection in Myanmar. Through this partnership, *RfP*-M has extended its reach to 144 IDP camps, providing crucial support and intervention for more than 38,855 children in Chin, Kachin, Kayah, Southern Shan, Rakhine States, and Sagaing Region. This groundbreaking initiative underscores the unwavering commitment of both organizations to safeguard the rights and well-being of the most vulnerable members of society, ensuring that every child in Myanmar can thrive in a safe and nurturing environment.



The tragic airstrike conducted by the military regime resulted in the devastating loss of innocent children, many of whom tragically lost their lives or sustained severe injuries. This ruthless act of aggression has left numerous children with lifelong disabilities, forever altering the course of their existence and shattering the hopes and dreams they once held. The haunting repercussions of this indiscriminate violence will continue to resonate through the lives of these young victims, leaving a stark reminder of the atrocities committed in the name of power and dominance.

## Salutations for Spiritual Occasion



On auspicious religious occasions, *RfP*-Myanmar exemplifies the essence of respect and continuity by extending sincere greetings to esteemed faith leaders. Embracing the diversity of religious celebrations, from the joyous Christmas festivities to the vibrant Thidingyunt, the luminous Deepawali, and the blessed Eid Mubarak, *RfP*-Myanmar upholds a tradition of reverent acknowledgment that strengthens the bonds within the community. Through meticulously organized programs, the dedicated staff at *RfP*-Myanmar orchestrates harmonious gatherings, where the uplifting presence of faith leaders imparts not only blessings but also a sense of unity and spiritual grace. The exchange of greetings becomes a heartfelt ritual, embodying the essence of mutual respect and interfaith harmony.





In the ambiance of sacred gatherings, the staff at *RfP*-Myanmar is privileged to receive the profound blessings and wise guidance bestowed by the esteemed faith leaders. This interaction transcends mere formalities and resonates with a profound sense of reverence and appreciation for the diverse spiritual tapestry that enriches the

collective experience of the community. As the warmth of festive greetings mingles with the solemnity of spiritual blessings, *RfP*-Myanmar continues to stand as a beacon of inclusivity and respect, fostering a spirit of kinship that transcends religious boundaries and unites all in a shared journey of faith and understanding.



## Constraints and Challenges

With its more restrictive provisions, the New Registration Law impeded all NGOs/CSOs working for humanitarian assistance in emergencies. However, NCM is considering a mechanism to attain organization registration through the support of lawyers' expertise to obtain registration extensions.

When undertaking humanitarian support efforts in Myanmar, one of the primary challenges *RfP* Myanmar staff faces is the constant threat of insecure travel due to multiple checkpoints scattered across the region. These checkpoints delay and prolong the journey to reach affected populations and pose significant security risks for individuals navigating them. The limited accessibility to certain areas further exacerbates the situation, with the need for careful planning and coordination to ensure the safety of staff and resources in this volatile environment.

Another key obstacle encountered in the field is the communication barrier that hampers the efficient delivery of aid and support services. The blocking of communication channels and the loss of phone connectivity for field staff significantly hinder the ability to coordinate logistics, share critical information, and maintain contact with key personnel. In a situation where swift and effective response is crucial, the need for more reliable means of communication further complicates the already demanding task of assisting those in need.

Moreover, the constrained availability of transportation options adds another layer of complexity to the humanitarian operation in Myanmar. The reliance on limited transport resources not only slows down the process of reaching out to affected communities but also contributes to delays and difficulties in the distribution of essential supplies. What used to be achievable within a day before the escalation of conflicts now often requires two to three days, with unforeseen obstacles along the way leading to instances where staff find themselves stranded and compelled to spend nights wherever they manage to reach.

During these challenging times, the people of Myanmar are bravely fighting for survival amidst the crisis that has engulfed their nation. They are not only facing internal conflict but also the constant threat of violence and instability, making it perilous for them to travel within the country. The citizens are caught in a dangerous and highly

conflict-ridden zone, struggling to navigate through the chaos and uncertainty that surrounds them. The journey to the countryside, once a peaceful escape, has now become fraught with dangers and obstacles that they must overcome to seek refuge and solace. The resilience and determination of the Myanmar people in the face of such adversities are truly commendable, as they continue to persevere and strive for a better future despite the immense challenges they face.

The escalating conflict situations particularly in Kayah, Kachin, Shan, Rakhine, Chin states, and Sagaing region present significant challenges for successfully implementing projects in these targeted areas. The deteriorating security conditions threaten the safety of field staff and volunteers and hinder data collection and access to those in need of humanitarian aid. The nullification of the bilateral ceasefire agreement in Rakhine state has forced NCM staff from Northern Rakhine and Chin states to flee for safety, disrupting the continuity of services and support they provided. The cycle of violence and displacement is exacerbating the difficulties in tracing victims for proper case management in the affected regions, creating additional obstacles for field workers who are increasingly at risk during their movements due to scrutinization at checkpoints and other security vulnerabilities. The ongoing conflict's lasting impacts on children, such as the lack of access to education leading to early marriage, recruitment by armed groups, and exposure to human trafficking, further compound the already dire humanitarian situation these areas have been facing since the coup started in Myanmar. The interruption of communication channels, scarcity of essential supplies, and the desperate needs of displaced populations, compounded by the cold season, exacerbate the challenges faced by the field staff and volunteers striving to assist in these crises.

## Home Visit Photos







While implementing "the Multi-religious Humanitarian Assistance and Healthcare Support in Myanmar - (HAHS)" project, the Program Manager and M&E Officer visited vulnerable households in 7 different areas affected by the crisis, listened to their suffering, and received guidance from Faith Leaders for further interfaith cooperation.

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 20 May 2024

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