



# IPPFoRB

International Panel of Parliamentarians  
for Freedom of Religion or Belief

14 September 2016

His Excellency U Htin Kyaw  
President  
Republic of the Union of Myanmar

Dear President U Htin Kyaw:

We write as a global network of parliamentarians from diverse political, religious, and geographical backgrounds, committed to the promotion and protection of the freedom of religion and belief for all. In September 2015 and November 2014, we wrote to your predecessor about limitations on freedom of religion or belief and discrimination against religious minorities in Myanmar. We appeal to you with the same message.

Members of our network and other parliamentarians recently traveled to Myanmar on a four-day fact-finding and solidarity visit. This groundbreaking trip was the first of its kind for the International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief (IPPFoRB). The delegation – six Members of Parliament from five continents – met with fellow parliamentarians, ministry officials, and religious and civil society representatives. In meetings, the delegation spoke about the need to uphold international human rights standards by amending or repealing the discriminatory “race and religion laws” and equally protecting all religious communities, which includes expanding rights and protections to Rohingya Muslims.

We are encouraged by the gathering of civil society organizations that occurred while the delegation visited Myanmar to discuss interfaith harmony and anti-discrimination measures. We urge you to ensure that any legislation or policies stemming from these or other discussions are consistent with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), particularly if such measures involve criminalizing hate speech or perceived offenses to religious feelings. In fact, we strongly recommend Myanmar sign and ratify the ICCPR as soon as possible. This would send a strong signal about your country’s commitment to upholding internationally agreed human rights standards.

We were pleased to hear the announcement of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State to be led by former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. We believe the involvement of international stakeholders working side-by-side with Buddhist, Muslim, and government representatives will complement the efforts led by domestic actors under the Central Committee for Peace and Development in Arakan State. While freedom of religion or belief is only one aspect of the broader circumstances in Rakhine State, protecting these rights for all communities, including Rohingya Muslims, is essential to creating lasting peace and prosperity in the state and beyond.

There are many in the international community, including the IPPFoRB, who seek to be helpful in your country's democratic transformation. Myanmar's rich religious and ethnic diversity are integral parts of your country's past, present, and future. Protecting religious and ethnic minorities – Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Animists, and others – must be part of this transformation, and the IPPFoRB stands ready to assist.

Sincerely,

cc: State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi

*The following parliamentarians support this advocacy letter in their personal capacity  
and not as representatives of their government, political party or any other body*

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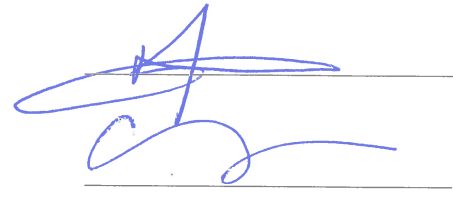
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