

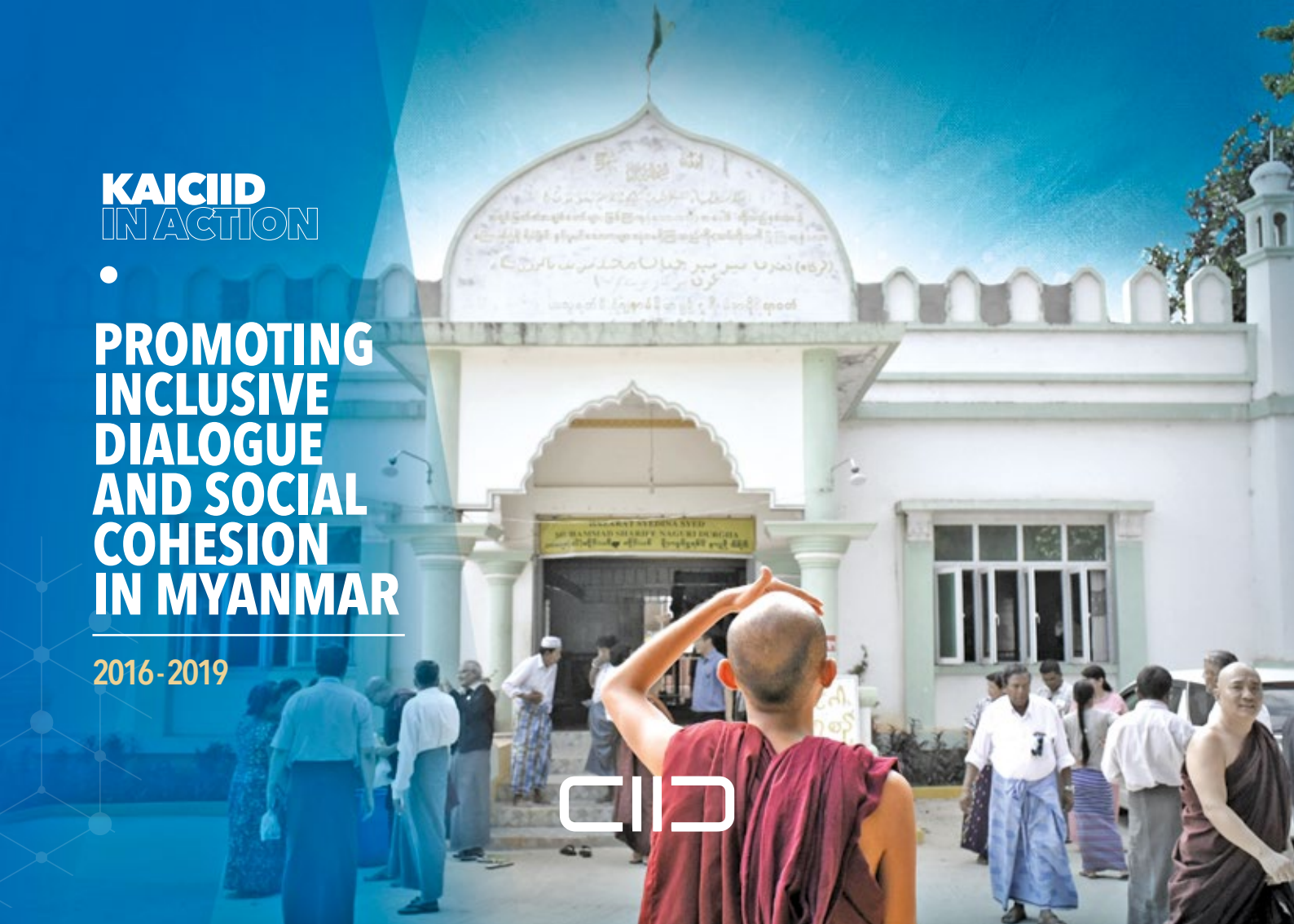
KAICIID
IN ACTION

●

PROMOTING INCLUSIVE DIALOGUE AND SOCIAL COHESION IN MYANMAR

2016-2019

CIID





Religious leaders attend the International Peace Day celebrations in 2017.

About the International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID)

KAICIID is the only intergovernmental organization governed by religious representatives and dedicated to the facilitation of dialogue between different cultures and faiths. The Founding States of the Centre (the Republic of Austria, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Kingdom of Spain, with the Holy See as Founding Observer) constitute the Council of Parties responsible for

overseeing the work of the Centre. Our vision is a world in which there is respect, understanding and cooperation among people; justice, peace and reconciliation; and an end to the abuse of religion to justify repression, violence and conflict. KAICIID's activities are global in scope, with programming focused in four regions across Africa, the Arab Region and Asia.



Cover photo
Participants at a KAICIID-supported training on interreligious dialogue visit religious sites of different faiths in northern Shan State, Myanmar, May 2019.



Young nuns pray at the Shwedagon Pagoda, Yangon region, February 2017

1 BACKGROUND ON KAICIID'S PROGRAMME IN MYANMAR

KAICIID'S BROADER COMMITMENT TO ASIA

South Asia is home to some of the most religiously diverse countries in the world; however, intercommunal tensions can easily escalate into acts of violence, such as the attacks in Sri Lanka on Easter Sunday 2019.

KAICIID facilitates exchanges among religious leaders and faith-based organizations in South and South-East Asia, with a focus on Myanmar, which are designed to help communities find common solutions to shared problems, such as violent extremism, marginalisation and displacement.

Why

is it critical to invest in interreligious dialogue in Myanmar?

In 2010, Myanmar started a remarkable political transition that paved the way for the elections of 2015, which were largely won by the National League for Democracy (NLD). Four years later, the transition process is facing a number of challenges. In addition and after decades of anti-colonial struggle and authoritarianism, the social fabric of the nation remains severely weakened.

Tensions along religious and identity lines continue to prevail nationwide. Nationalist hate speech often triggers discrimination and open violence against religious minorities, notably Muslims and Christians. In Rakhine State, located in the western part of the country, the ethno-religious conflict involving the Buddhist majority and the Muslim minority community has escalated since 2012 resulting in human rights violations as well as millions of people displaced.

© Reuters.
Novice Buddhist monks pass soldiers in Lashio, May 2013.

KAICIID's approach to Myanmar

Since 2016, KAICIID has focused on supporting dialogue and peacebuilding efforts in Myanmar. Guided by the recommendations of the international community, the Centre works to promote the inclusion, as well as the rights and dignity of all people living in the country, with a special focus on marginalised communities. KAICIID also works with local policymakers to support their commitment to engage with religious leaders from diverse backgrounds, in order to promote peace and social cohesion. To that end, the Centre is coordinating and exploring cooperation opportunities with the government of Myanmar.



key milestones and achievements

In 2016, KAICIID supported the establishment of the Peaceful Myanmar Initiative (PMI), an inclusive network for peace and interreligious dialogue.



50 religious leaders and organizations are members of the PMI.



An IRD Training Centre

which is the first of its kind in Myanmar, opened under the auspices of the PMI network.

801 religious and community leaders trained in interreligious dialogue.

76 policy-makers engaged and trained in interreligious dialogue.

216 training participants supported with the implementation of local projects designed to foster dialogue and peace.

Over 37,000 Facebook users engaged through the PMI's social media pages, with over 32,000 likes.



An Interfaith Study Guide on Peace and Dialogue

published and used by PMI Peace Educators in Myanmar.



6 large scale interfaith dialogue events

organized in Yangon, Mandalay and Nay Pyi Taw.



4,523 beneficiaries

reached, including 900+ women and girls.



KAICIID's areas of operation in Myanmar

FOSTERING
COLLABORATION
AMONG LEADERS
OF DIFFERENT FAITHS



PMI core members together with a KAICIID delegation in Yangon in 2017.



Peace concert organized in Mandalay in 2018. The PMI is responsible for overseeing a comprehensive multi-annual strategy that includes the implementation of grassroots activities as well as advocacy initiatives.

Supporting an inclusive and sustainable national interreligious dialogue platform

In March 2016, at the outset of a meeting facilitated by KAICIID in Sri Lanka, a group of influential religious leaders from Myanmar launched a Plan of Action for the promotion of interreligious coexistence in the country. They also established an interreligious platform for peace and dialogue, known as the Peaceful Myanmar Initiative (PMI). The PMI is now one of the most inclusive and largest interreligious dialogue networks in the country, representing the majority of religious denominations in the country and bringing together over 50 religious leaders and organizations. The PMI has a permanent secretariat based in downtown Yangon. The platform is also in the final steps of registering as an NGO under Myanmar law.

Supporting engagement among religious leaders and policymakers

The PMI has consistently built credibility for its capacity to effectively implement dialogue and awareness-raising activities which directly impact communities at the local/grassroots level.

In parallel, it has engaged in advocacy efforts with decision-makers at the national and regional levels in order to exchange on specific

policy issues. For example, the PMI has commissioned a study on inclusiveness in educational programmes and textbooks in secondary schools. The study aims to contribute to the ongoing reform of school curricula carried out by the Ministry of Education.

The PMI has also promoted the inclusion of policymakers during field missions to conflict areas. For instance, in April 2019, a delegation of PMI religious leaders and 12 policymakers conducted a joint trip to Myitkyinar, Kachin State, where they advocated peaceful dialogue.



Authorities attend celebrations for International Peace Day 2018.



PMI member U Seindida meets with Pope Francis in 2018.



PMI members conduct a field mission together with local authorities to Kachin State, April 2019.

3 STRENGTHENING THE CAPACITY OF LEADERS TO PROMOTE INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

Training a new generation on **interreligious dialogue**

Since its establishment, the PMI has focused a large part of its efforts on educating new generations, focusing on community and religious leaders.

In 2018, the PMI marked one of its most important milestones, establishing the first Interreligious Dialogue Training Centre in Myanmar, which is located within the Asia Light Monastery in Pyin Oo Lwin, Mandalay Region. Through the Training Centre, the PMI organizes at least four intensive dialogue trainings each year, targeting different audiences (i.e. religious leaders of different faiths, youth organizations, activists, media representatives and policymakers). The learning modules typically focus on religious literacy, dialogue facilitation, hate speech prevention, advocacy and social media as a tool to prevent violence. KAICIID ensures that 50 per cent of training participants are women.



Aung Khaing Tun @ Shwe Au (Buddhist):

"Thanks to the IRD training from the PMI, I have learned to use 'dialogue' which means sharing and respecting each other's opinion instead of 'debate' which means proving one's point no matter what the cost."



The Interreligious Dialogue Training Centre hosts participants at a Training of Trainers module.



KAICIID Fellows complete an intensive training programme in interreligious dialogue. Yangon, February 2019.



The Interreligious Dialogue Training Centre holds an opening ceremony in 2018.

A training programme

focused on action

After two weeks of intensive courses at the Interreligious Dialogue Training Centre, participants are asked to apply their newly acquired knowledge by developing, designing and implementing a series of activities in their local communities. These initiatives are supported annually through PMI/KAICIID small grants.

Examples of local follow-up activities conducted by participants in trainings between 2018 and 2019.



The "Empowerment Initiative for Women of Different Faiths to Counter Violence against Women and Children" (July 2018, Sagaing Region) resulted in the creation of a network of Buddhist, Christian and Muslim female leaders.



The "Friendship Peace Camp Myanmar" (May 2019, Sagaing University of Education) equipped 28 youth with skills to implement intercommunal dialogue.



The "Diversity and Strengthening of Leadership Training" (July 2018, Mon state) enhanced the leadership skills of activists of the "SEED" cultural organization and of young members of political parties.

4 USING INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE TO REDUCE VIOLENCE AND PROMOTE INTERRELIGIOUS HARMONY



In 2018, KAICIID conducted a joint- assessment mission of refugee camps and schools in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

Promoting social cohesion in Rakhine State

KAICIID's key priority is to work with authorities in Myanmar as well as with community and religious leaders to promote sustainable and lasting solutions to address the situation in Rakhine state. In 2019, in coordination with local authorities, the Centre supported two local civil society organizations to implement social cohesion initiatives such as vocational trainings on agriculture and motorcycle repair, bringing together participants from various communities to build trust among them.

Support for vulnerable communities

Although the Centre and its partners primarily focus on building cohesive and inclusive communities through interreligious dialogue, KAICIID and the PMI have occasionally provided humanitarian support for vulnerable communities in order to foster peace and stability. These relief efforts have been targeted at meeting the needs of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and victims of natural disasters.



In July 2018, following the unexpected flooding in the southern Bago region, PMI leaders collaborated with Members of Parliament to provide relief and humanitarian support to affected communities.



Young novices walk in Yangon, February 2018

Connecting religious leaders with media

Media and information play an important role in the interactions of communities – particularly in regard to hate speech and incitement to sectarian violence. Conflict sensitive journalism is key to ensuring that media outlets provide accurate facts and avoid religious and ethnic stereotypes or discrimination. For these reasons, KAICIID and its partners have consistently worked with both traditional and social media operators in Myanmar. Currently, KAICIID supports Loka Ahlin, a local civil society organization, to facilitate constructive collaborations between journalists, religious leaders and peace activists.

Additionally, KAICIID has contributed to train religious leaders and organizations on the strategic use of social media.

In the context of the 2020 general elections in Myanmar, KAICIID also supports the PMI's engagement with social media influencers, in order to monitor online hate speech and to develop positive content which promotes a peaceful electoral process.



In September 2018, KAICIID organized a "Roundtable on Media and Religion" in Yangon to build the capacity of key local journalists on religious and conflict sensitive reporting.

Social media as a tool for early warning and early response

Because religious leaders and organizations are actively engaged with local communities, they are well-positioned to serve as early warning and response mechanisms and alert authorities to the escalation of intercommunal tensions. Internet and social media platforms represent a new tool for them to respond immediately to threats of potential violence.



Prevention goes VIRAL: the "WHITE ROSE CAMPAIGN"

On 15 May 2019, a mob of almost 200 self-proclaimed "nationalists" surrounded three government-authorised Muslim houses of prayer in Yangon. The houses of worship are the only permitted gathering places for Muslims in that particular area of Yangon during Ramadan. The mob demanded that Muslims cease praying, and then further intimidated and abused local civilians.

U Seindida, a senior Buddhist monk and PMI member, joined with other leading Buddhist activists to counter the violence. Calling on his followers and fellow citizens, he urged them to reject attempts to polarise and divide

the country. In a stirring display of interreligious support, he then presented white roses to members of the Muslim community as a visual reminder of peace and tolerance.

The initiative quickly spread across social media, where it was labelled as the "white rose campaign". White roses were handed to Muslim communities around the capital, and people took to social media to call for peace and freedom of belief. As a result of the campaign, the houses of prayer have been re-opened, and order has been restored in Yangon.



HOW TO GET INVOLVED:



As a religious leader,
MP, student, activist,
blogger, journalist
or simply an individual.



Follow the PMI's updates on the web and social media.

Apply to the KAICIID International Fellows Programme.

Contact the PMI to join a training activity on interreligious dialogue.

Join the competition for short (online) films on social cohesion.

Partner with the PMI to discuss collaboration on a research initiative, for instance on policy issues promoting social cohesion and non-discrimination.

As an organization



Provide financial support to the PMI and to other local implementing partners in Myanmar.

Preventing electoral violence.

Conducting dialogue initiatives in conflict-prone areas of Myanmar.

Contact the PMI to discuss collaborations on one of its key priorities:



Countering hate speech.

Engaging journalists and social media influencers to promote social cohesion.

For more information,
please contact:

THE INTERNATIONAL DIALOGUE CENTRE (KAICIID)

Schottenring 21, 1010 Vienna, Austria

Email: Office@kaiciid.org

Phone: +43 1 313 22 0

<https://www.kaiciid.org>

OR

PEACEFUL MYANMAR INITIATIVE / PAUNGSIE METTA INITIATIVES

No.(64), 5th floor, Lanthit Street,
(4)Ward, Lanmadaw Township, Yangon

Phone: +959774289560

Email: pmi.myanmar@gmail.com

www.pmimyanmar.org

CIID

