



Intercommunal Conflict in Mandalay Region and Southern Shan State Myanmar

A Conflict Assessment in Mandalay,
Meiktila, and Taunggyi

Caitlin J. Pierce
Adapt Research and Consulting
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Executive Summary

Intercommunal conflict is a destructive force in Myanmar. While violence is only one manifestation of this conflict, many other less obvious forms of intercommunal conflict exist. A recent opinion poll of Myanmar people placed intercommunal conflict as the second-biggest problem facing the country today, behind unemployment.¹ For the purposes of this assessment report, intercommunal conflict refers to tensions and violence between Myanmar's Buddhist, Muslim, Christian, and Hindu communities.

This report is a follow up to *Intercommunal Violence in Myanmar: Risks and Opportunities for International Assistance (2014)* and explores specific local dynamics of intercommunal conflict and conflict management mechanisms in Mandalay, Meiktila, and Taunggyi. This assessment was undertaken over four weeks in May 2015 and included several weeks of field interviews, conducted jointly with national colleagues from Mercy Corps and Swe Tha Har, a local peace and development NGO. The study found striking differences between the degree of conflict present in each location, as well as in the capacities of local conflict management mechanisms.

Mandalay and Meiktila – Overview

- Mandalay and Meiktila appear to be experiencing quite different local conflict dynamics and conflict management systems, owing in part to the very different levels of intercommunal violence that each has experienced in the past few years.
- In Mandalay there seem to be strong interfaith and intercommunal dispute resolution mechanisms in place, and leaders in Mandalay have confidence in their efforts.
- High levels of anxiety remain in Meiktila, and interfaith leaders are not comfortable taking on a dispute resolution role.
- In both locations, examples of accommodating behavior suggest that communities are, for the moment, prioritizing peace over justice and equality. However, the examples in Meiktila appear more serious in their scope and explicit threats are made to encourage accommodation.
- In Mandalay there are also instances of conflict between Buddhist and Christian communities, though most tensions are between Buddhist and Muslim communities.

Mandalay and Meiktila – Drivers of Intercommunal Conflict

- Rumors, hate speech, and lack of trusted information is a pervasive driver of conflict.²

¹ International Republican Institute, 2014.

² Recent research challenges the emphasis placed on rumors and hate speech e.g. Matt Schissler 2015.

- Symbolism and a lack of understanding of different religions drives anxiety and conflict.
- Ma Ba Tha has increased its presence in some townships in Mandalay and Meiktila since 2013. In both areas they are able to influence government and judicial decision-makers.
- In Mandalay there are strong countervailing forces to push back against Ma Ba Tha influence. No such forces exist in Meiktila.
- Third party outsiders (i.e. people not from the neighborhoods in which they are seen) are frequently cited in Mandalay as perpetrators and instigators of conflict.

Mandalay and Meiktila – Local Interfaith and Dispute Resolution Actors

- In Mandalay there are groups working specifically to resolve individual disputes; in some cases these actors also work on general interfaith activities.
- In Meiktila, no groups are willing to work on dispute resolution.
- Teachers may have an important role to play in promoting tolerance and diversity in mixed schools.
- In Meiktila people are increasingly turning to Ma Ba Tha monks to resolve their civil disputes, rather than to the courts. Ultimately this could lead to resentments and become another driver of conflict.

Taunggyi – Overview

- In Taunggyi a “negative peace” prevails. In other words, the lack of violent conflict does not mean that conflict does not exist. Instead, tensions are suppressed rather than worked through in a constructive way.
- While most Muslims are quick to point to individual disputes, unfair treatment, or the need to accommodate Buddhist preferences, Christians and Buddhists for the most part say that Taunggyi does not have any intercommunal problems.
- Since 2013, relationships between Muslims and Buddhists have eroded.
- Many examples of accommodating behavior on the part of Muslim communities suggest that communities are, for the moment, prioritizing (or accepting) peace over justice and equality. In the long run this may result in a violent backlash as resentments build
- Since 2013, there has been an increase in avoidance, in which individuals limit their interaction with other religions. For example, Buddhists shop primarily or exclusively at Buddhist shops, and Muslims at Muslim shops.
- There is a large number of actors working on intercommunal dispute resolution in Taunggyi. However, the actors do not all respect one another and there are large power imbalances between entities responsible for negotiating disputes.
- Muslim community members are not happy with their leaders dispute resolution outcomes, and several actors involved in dispute resolution have questionable legitimacy.

Taunggyi – Drivers of Intercommunal Conflict

- Inter-personal disputes are a serious *trigger* of intercommunal conflict. These disputes (e.g. having a motorbike accident) are quickly seen as a religious dispute when the parties belong to different religious communities.
- Events that happen elsewhere (e.g. Mandalay, Meiktila, Iraq) have a huge impact on the psyche of Taunggyi, for example driving a negative perception of Muslims as violent.
- A lack of inter- and intra-religious understanding also prevails. Many Buddhists believe that Islam is not transparent, for example, as demonstrated by women wearing hijab. For some, these symbols even become points of division in long-term friendships.

Taunggyi – Local Interfaith and Dispute Resolution Actors

- In Taunggyi there are many actors working on intercommunal dispute resolution and few actors working on interfaith activities.
- The actors (government, Islamic groups, Buddhist groups, and private citizen groups) involved in dispute resolution appear to be engaged in suppressive activities, rather than truly solving the underlying disputes in a way that is seen as fair.
- Many of those working on interfaith activities are displeased with the way that disputes have been resolved, and many who are working on dispute resolution do not believe that interfaith activities can accomplish much.
- There are also concerns that some groups who are acting as “private citizens” in fact have the backing of Ma Ba Tha and the police.

Areas for Further Research and Action

- Many of the current dispute resolution practices are fostering new resentments and risk becoming a driver of future conflict. Further research might explore which practices are breeding the most resentments and suggest programming to change them.
- Ma Ba Tha is not a homogenous organization; it has diversity both within and across geographic locations. For example, not all Ma Ba Tha monks are extremists, and in some instances have protected individual Muslims from harm. Further research could examine the internal politics of Ma Ba Tha and which members in each location may be more moderate.
- Women are not involved in dispute resolution but still have important roles to play in other stages of conflict. They are they main actors in the market place, where religious symbols seem to be both misused and misunderstood. It is also a place where information is exchanged and rumors can be spread or dampened. Many teachers are also women. Further research should examine the specific roles that women play in community mediation and as conduits of information.

- Schools were cited as both places where hatred can be formed at a young age, as well as where the psychological after-effects of violence are seen. Further research should examine the flexibility that schools (or teachers associations) have to incorporate (formally or informally) interfaith activities.
- In Meiktila (and perhaps elsewhere), violence in 2013 produced “winners” who previously did not have any position of note in the community but who gained either money or new social status by leading efforts during the riots. These individuals now have authority to promote or curb violence. Further research could seek to examine whether a similar group exists in Mandalay or Taunggyi and who, if anyone, has influence on these groups.
- Across all locations, the conditions for specific geographic risk were: large Islamic community; strong Ma Ba Tha presence; poor, uneducated areas. Though not a criteria, the assessment bore out previous hypotheses that peri-urban areas (approximately 10 km from city center) might be particularly vulnerable to drivers of conflict. This is a useful hypothesis for further research to continue testing.
- Local dynamics will take a long time to change: while tensions have escalated dramatically since 2013, the root causes of conflict have been present for a long time. While a first phase of programming might best work with likeminded individuals, ultimately some of the less-inclined actors (e.g. Ma Ba Tha monks, police, etc.) will need to be brought on board over the course of several years.

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Introduction

Intercommunal conflict is a destructive force in Myanmar. While violence is only one manifestation of this conflict, many other less obvious forms of intercommunal conflict exist. A recent opinion poll of Myanmar people placed intercommunal conflict as the second-biggest problem facing the country today, behind unemployment.³ For the purposes of this assessment report, intercommunal conflict refers to tensions and violence between Myanmar's Buddhist, Muslim, Christian, and Hindu communities.

This conflict assessment was commissioned by Mercy Corps to inform planning for Local Resilience for Peace (LRP), a program, which Mercy Corps is jointly implementing with Swe Tha Har, a local NGO that works on peace and development issues in Myanmar.

LRP aims to reduce inter-communal violence (ICV) in Myanmar by strengthening local resiliencies for peace in two regional hubs (Mandalay and Taunggyi). Specifically, LRP will build the capacity of local actors, including influential leaders of ethnic and religious constituencies and civil society organizations, to respond proactively to communal tensions by resolving intercommunal disputes and promoting tolerance and reconciliation between diverse ethnic and religious communities. The program will also build relationships, communication channels, and networks between these actors and with other key stakeholders, such as government. To achieve this, LRP will:

1. Strengthen the ability of diverse local leaders to work across lines of ethnic and religious division to resolve disputes. (Objective 1)
2. Empower local civil society organizations and activists to prevent intercommunal violence by promoting tolerance and networking with local authorities. (Objective 2)

By building local networks of effective, diverse actors with an interest in promoting peaceful multi-ethnic, multi-religious communities, the program seeks to lay the foundation for locally-led monitoring, prevention, and response to ICV.

The purpose of this conflict assessment was two-fold:

1. To inform strategic program implementation decisions, including selection of program participants (e.g. local leaders, CSOs), target townships, and key activities designed to strengthen existing conflict management mechanisms; and
2. To provide a qualitative baseline against which program impact can be examined.

Previous research⁴ has examined intercommunal violence nationally, and this assessment sought to take a much closer look at a few specific locations. As such, the assessment and this

³ International Republican Institute, 2014.

⁴ Gray and Roos, 2014.

report focus less on factors that may be more consistent nationally (e.g. deeper, historical root causes of conflict) and more specifically on locally specific present and immediate factors that are drivers of conflict.

The assessment was undertaken over four weeks in May 2015. It included a literature review; a planning meeting between Adapt, Mercy Corps, and Swe Tha Har; two weeks of interviews in Mandalay, Meiktila, and Taunggyi with a variety of stakeholders; daily debriefs with the Swe Tha Har and Mercy Corps field teams; one validation workshop; and a donor validation meeting with the Peace Support Fund. The assessment also built on actor mapping conducted by Mercy Corps and Swe Tha Har in each location, including an inception workshop with over 50 participants in Taunggyi.

What is “Conflict” in Myanmar Language?

The word “pe-hti-be’-hka” is different from the meaning of conflict in English, which includes both violent and non-violent conflict. In the Myanmar language, conflict connotes an act of physical violence.

This can lead to interviewees saying that there is no conflict (or has been no conflict), due to a lack of violence.

In order to adapt to this difference, the assessment team developed tools to inquire about different types of conflict in indirect ways. For example, the team asked interviewees “what would happen if a Buddhist and Muslim got into a motorbike accident? Would this be different from if two Buddhists crashed?” These illustrative examples of intercommunal interactions yielded many insights about non-violent conflict such as levels of tension and accommodation. The team also asked questions about “tensions” and “disagreements.”

The findings of this assessment underscore the importance of considering the unique conflict and actor dynamics in each geographic location, as previous research suggests⁵. Violent conflict is only one manifestation—and a rare manifestation—of conflict between individuals and groups. Non-violent conflict is important to address, however, as it has significant impacts on communities. As this assessment shows, it can lead to increased polarization, reduced job opportunities, lack of access to justice, and all of these factors may ultimately lead to episodes of violent conflict if pushed too far. By focusing on each stage of the conflict cycle⁶, the assessment revealed nuanced differences between locations, and indicated

that while violent conflict may not always be visible, tensions existed in all locations between communities that might give rise to violence.

⁵ Gray and Roos, 2014.

⁶ Latent conflict, conflict emergence and conflict handling (completion, collaboration, compromise, avoidance, accommodation), escalation, violent conflict, de-escalation, and post-conflict peacebuilding.

Methodology

This assessment sought to answer the following key questions:

Relations between people of different ethnic & religious groups: What are the relationships between people of different ethnic and religious groups like? Have there been incidents of intercommunal tension or violence?

Conflict drivers: What are the key drivers of tension between people of different ethnic and religious groups? What factors lead or permit these tensions to erupt into violence? While drivers of conflict tend to be present and immediate, root causes of conflict are deeper, more historical factors in promoting conflict. Previous research has found that across Myanmar, root causes of intercommunal violence include: policies and practices that deny or discriminate against non-Buddhist identities, fear of Islamification and demographic besiegement, economic grievances, weak rule of law and lack of access to justice.⁷ This assessment focused primarily on the drivers in each geography.

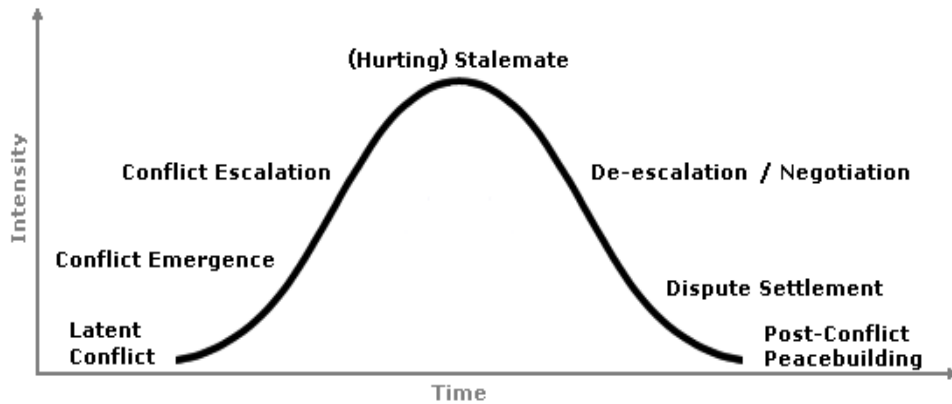
Local conflict management mechanisms: How have incidents of intercommunal tension or violence been addressed? What formal or informal structures exist to address such incidents and/or promote tolerance and peaceful coexistence? Who is leading local efforts to address intercommunal violence and promote peaceful coexistence?

Geography: What towns, village tracts, and townships in the target area are most vulnerable to intercommunal violence?

Stage /manifestation of conflict: We might expect that a location that has experienced recent violent conflict might have very different dynamics than a location that has not—for example, strength of conflict management mechanisms, level of tensions, and presence of accommodating behaviors. Recognizing that each study location has had a very different experience with the scale and timing of violent conflict, the assessment team also sought to gather information to form a more nuanced understanding of the different type or stage of conflict that people are currently experiencing in each location, as well as which actors are involved in the different stages.

⁷ Gray and Roos, 2014.

It has become common practice to describe conflicts as passing through various stages; the process is a dynamic one, and some stages may repeat several times.⁸ The same can be applied to religious conflict. Some of these stages may be observed directly, and in other instances they may be observed through the presence of conflict management techniques such as accommodation, avoidance, or compromise.⁹



Key informants were interviewed in each hub location (Taunggyi and Mandalay, including Meiktila). These are individuals who could provide an overview of the conflict dynamics in the region, specifically conflict drivers, resiliencies, and actors at the township levels. Key informants were identified through existing Mercy Corps and Swe Tha Har networks, and in particular the Actor Mapping portion of the LRP program. (See Appendix I for questions)

Storytelling Inquiry complemented the traditional interview format. This type of inquiry comes from the field of “participatory action research”¹⁰ and is very similar to the approach a journalist would use when interviewing someone. By asking open-ended questions about an individual’s experience, it provides specific details and examples that often reveal nuances about community members’ feelings or relationships between key actors. (See Appendix I for questions and Appendix II for compilation of stories).

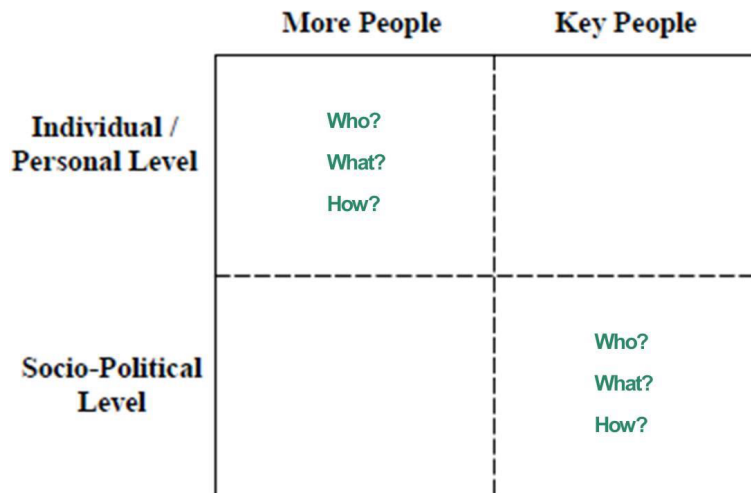
Qualitative Baseline Development: Part of any program’s objective is to show impact over time. Recognizing that this is a 9-month program, the development of a baseline should not require a lot of time or resources, but it should provide an effective snapshot of key indicators. For LRP, the high level indicators for which it is most important to show impact are listed in Appendix I, as are the methods the team used to gather information to form a qualitative baseline for each.

D) Types of Interviewees: An effective conflict management program will target people who can influence large numbers of their community as well as targeting the general public. One useful

⁸ Brahm, 2003.

⁹ For example, as this assessment’s analysis of Taunggyi will demonstrate, even though Taunggyi has not experienced recent violent conflict in the way Mandalay and Meiktila has, that does not mean conflict is not present.

¹⁰ Burns, 2007.



tool is the “more people, key people” framework from the Reflecting on Peace Practice Project.¹¹

This requires careful consideration not only of natural allies who may already be involved in interfaith or peacebuilding efforts, but also of those who are opposed to peace and the individuals and institutions that may be able to influence that opposition.

We interviewed 30 people in Mandalay/Meiktila and 30 people in Taunggyi:

- religious leaders (Buddhist, Muslim (different sects), Christian), both lay and formal
- youth leaders
- interfaith CSOs
- non-interfaith CSOs
- journalists
- ward and village officials
- teachers
- religious teachers
- shop owners
- funeral service organizations
- government interfaith group leaders
- law and order group
- ethnic cultural CSOs

Most individuals involved in interfaith activities have ordinary full-time jobs (doctors, lawyers, businessmen, music teacher, teacher, etc.) This provides each with a unique perspective grounded in the day-to-day lives of their communities, but in some cases may also make them more risk-averse when taking on specific activities of conflict management.

We did not interview some important groups of individuals due to security concerns and under advisement of the program team: **police, district government officials, Ma Ba Tha monks**

The missing perspectives of these groups of actors constitutes a limitation of this study. Government officials and police have a formal responsibility in conflict and dispute resolution.

¹¹ Collaborative Development Associates, 2004.
http://www.conflictsensitivity.org/sites/default/files/Reflecting_on_Peace_Practice.pdf

Ma Ba Tha monks have also, in each location, been involved in dispute resolution and in suppression of non-Buddhist groups. Better understanding the challenges these groups face, their capabilities, and intentions could help lay the groundwork for longer-term programming that builds a just dispute resolution system in each location.

Mandalay and Meiktila

Mandalay and Meiktila appear to be experiencing quite different local conflict dynamics and conflict management systems, owing in part to the very different levels of intercommunal violence that each has experienced in the past few years. In Mandalay and Meiktila, both Muslim and Buddhist communities appear eager to return to the level of trust and positive relationships that they shared before the violence in 2013 and 2014. However, while there seem to be strong interfaith and intercommunal dispute resolution mechanisms in place in Mandalay, and leaders in Mandalay have confidence in their efforts, high levels of anxiety remain in Meiktila. In Meiktila interfaith leaders are not comfortable taking on a dispute resolution role, and the only place available to host interfaith events is the monastery compound where U Zin Paein provided refuge to over 1,000 Buddhists and Muslims during the 2013 violence.¹² Even within interfaith associations in Meiktila, group dynamics appear uneasy.

The last episode of violent conflict in Mandalay was in 2014. During this violence, two people died (one Muslim man and one Buddhist man). Many saw the limited scope of this violence as a demonstration of security force effectiveness, and indeed it was much more contained than the 2013 violence in Meiktila in which 1000s of Buddhists and Muslims were displaced, homes burned and looted, and 40 people killed.¹³

However, a more nuanced story of the violence in Mandalay exists. As one youth leader recounted, during the first two days of the conflict, the police remained inactive—it was only when citizens made requests to the President’s Office and a representative was sent to Mandalay to take official control of the police force that they began to take action to quell the violence. Another reason the violence may have been contained was that a number of citizens in Mandalay had taken note of Meiktila’s experience and formed groups to prevent such an

¹² Interfaith Committee, U Zin Paein, 12 May 2015.

¹³ Physicians for Human Rights, 2014

In several years, a future study may want to examine the changing dynamics between the Chinese communities and those who have historically lived in Mandalay; however, for now no overt tensions appear to exist, and religious conflict is of greatest concern in these locations.

occurrence in Mandalay.¹⁴ The layout of the two cities may also have played a role in more limited physical destruction.¹⁵



Angry mourners follow the casket of Tun Tun, the Buddhist victim of the 2014 Mandalay riots. The group would later go and destroy the Muslim part of a cemetery near the city. (Photo: Steve Tickner / The Irrawaddy)

Moreover, limited violence does not indicate that tensions cooled quickly. Several community members told how the body of the dead Buddhist was paraded through the town on the way to its funeral, drawing as much attention as possible, and indeed for weeks afterwards, photos of the dead bodies were plastered on taxis, bus stations, and other locations to ensure maximum viewing.

In both locations, examples of accommodating behavior suggest that Muslim communities are, for the moment, prioritizing or accepting peace over justice and equality, sometimes with direct government involvement. However, the examples in Meiktila appear more serious in their scope and explicit threats of what the consequences will be if accommodation is not made. In the long run this may result in a violent backlash as resentments build. In Meiktila, Muslims who were returned to their previous neighborhoods after the conflict were allowed to do so only with the condition that they not seek reparations from their Buddhist neighbors who had

¹⁴ The Mandalay Peace Committee and Interfaith Group, for example, were founded after leaders went to Meiktila on humanitarian missions and were struck by the destruction that this intercommunal violence had caused.

¹⁵ Several CSO representatives told researchers that in Mandalay people know that if they set a building on fire a whole neighborhood will go up in flames, due to the close proximity.

looted their properties and would not speak about the violence.¹⁶ In other instances, Muslims gave gifts of money and goods to Buddhist neighbors as a preventative effort against future violence.¹⁷ A parallel system of justice has also emerged in which Buddhists seek out the assistance of Ma Ba Tha monks to adjudicate civil disputes with Muslims rather than going to the courts. This clearly speaks of an institutional problem with access to justice, but the fact that Muslim individuals are willing to listen to the “rulings” of Ma Ba Tha monks constitutes an example of accommodation as well.

In Mandalay, both Christian and Muslim communities are undertaking accommodating behavior with the encouragement of government. When a Ma Ba Tha monk requested that a mosque close a religious school, the Muslim leaders went to the government for help; the government requested that they temporarily close the school in order to avoid a bigger conflict, and so it was closed. In the area of Patheingyi, the YMCA (Young Men’s Christian Association) built a new school; however, Ma Ba Tha monks requested that they close it, and after unsuccessful mediation by the Interfaith Committee, the YMCA decided to close the school. This brand new building now sits vacant, too.

Drivers of Intercommunal Conflict

In Mandalay it appears that the primary drivers of this conflict are rumors and hate speech (especially on social media); a lack of trusted information sources; a misunderstanding of each religion’s symbolism; strong Ma Ba Tha presence; and third party outsiders.

Poverty and a lack of education were also frequently cited as factors that make individuals susceptible to recruitment by more nefarious leaders and messages.

Rumors, hate speech, and lack of trusted information: In Mandalay, rumors of motorbike gangs with weapons are not uncommon; however, various interfaith groups report that when they go to assess the situation, no such actors are found. In Meiktila, similar anxieties exist, and in both locations, a parallel universe of hate speech, nationalist messages, and efforts to

“ Facebook is a parallel universe for the religious problems of Mandalay. I have tried to promote peace on my Facebook page, and people report it as inappropriate, and so my account was closed. When we called to Facebook to ask why, they told us, and we explained the situation, so they gave me a new account. We urged them to get a Myanmar speaker on their staff to review these types of issues in detail. They did, but he has not been in the country for a long time, so we are not confident that he really understands the issues and the problems with hate speech.”

- Monk, Mandalay, May 2015

¹⁶ Swe Tha Har colleague

¹⁷ Meiktila Interfaith Committee, 12 May 2015

combat them exist on Facebook. Some believe that the violence in Mandalay was directly linked to inflammatory messages being posted on Facebook, eventually causing the platform to be shut down.¹⁸ Local news sources such as radio stations, local newspapers, and national newspapers are viewed as untrustworthy.¹⁹ In Mandalay, some monks involved in promoting messages of tolerance and peace on Facebook have found that conflict mongers will flag their posts to Facebook as “inappropriate and offensive,” resulting in suspension of their accounts.²⁰ Faith leaders of different religions—Buddhism, Islam, Bahi, Hinduism—all reported that they fear a lack of followers’ true understanding of the messages of each religion is likely also to blame for hate speech.

Symbolism: In at least some cases it appears that rumors stem from a lack of understanding of different religions. A strong demonstration of faith or large gathering of members from one religion breed anxiety. This has also increased notably since the violence in each town. In Meiktila, nationalist songs and Buddhists songs are now more frequently played in the market, raising anxiety of Muslim neighbors. Religious flags are also placed in greater numbers on houses than before, as people believe this will keep them safe if violence comes again.²¹ Unfortunately, such a demonstration of religion is also likely to raise anxieties in the other group. Symbolism associated with religious festivals is particularly complicated. In Mandalay, for example, heightened levels of rumors about groups of Muslim men sharpening swords can be traced to the days preceding Eid, in which animals are slaughtered. The slaughtering of cows during Eid is additionally problematic in mixed communities, as Buddhists and Hindus consider cows to be sacred, and see their slaughter as a personal affront to their religion and beliefs, as opposed to simply a manifestation of another’s.²²

“A couple days ago, a Muslim killed a Catholic (he stabbed him in a fight). Many people came running into the street with lots of emotions high, but the Catholic has the features that make him look like a Muslim. So people thought it was just two Muslims who had killed each other, and they left.”

-- Female, Christian, CSO Worker, Meiktila

¹⁸ <http://www.irrawaddy.org/multimedia-burma/security-tight-mandalay-outbreak-communal-violence.html>

¹⁹ In Meiktila the Interfaith Committee went so far as to say that the only way to have a trusted local news source would be if BBC or CNN hired a reporter to cover issues in Meiktila.

²⁰ Some youth leaders advocated to Facebook to hire a Burmese-reading individual to monitor these flags and determine whether the posts truly are offensive before automatically suspending an account once a certain number of complaints is received.

²¹ Meiktila Interfaith Committee, Meiktila CSOs, 12 May 2015

²² Community member involved in interfaith, Chan Aye Tharzan Township, 13 May 2015



Religious flags lining the road between a Buddhist and Muslim village in AmaraPura, Mandalay.
(Photo: Caitlin Pierce)

In some instances, different sects of Islam believe that Muslims in Mandalay need to try to assimilate more into the community—by not wearing hijab, for example.²³ It is not clear whether this is in keeping with other actions motivated by accommodation, or if it stems from the recognized need on the part of some Muslims for a more open type of Islam (e.g. allowing Buddhists into mosques).²⁴

Strong Ma Ba Tha presence: Ma Ba Tha did not establish a strong presence in some of the target locations below (e.g. Meiktila and Amarapura township of Mandalay city) until after the violence in 2013 and 2014. In Meiktila, Ma Ba Tha has been able to exert unchecked influence on the community and judicial institutions, as there are no other strong actors in the town who are able to push back against this influence. In Mandalay, Ma Ba Tha is also very strong, but there are many other monasteries, monks, and generation 88 leaders who are able to speak out against Ma Ba Tha.

²³ Mandalay Peace Committee Sub-Committee member, 14 May 2015

²⁴ Gray and Roos, 2014.

Third party outsiders: In Mandalay, many people cited “third party outsiders” (people not from the neighborhoods in which they are seen) as perpetrators of violence and troublemakers.²⁵ While this driver was difficult for the assessment team to either confirm or refute, it is also in some ways the least important driver of conflict. Without existing anxieties, outsiders would not be able to influence the communities towards violence. It is relevant, however, in that many interfaith leaders in Mandalay believe these third party outsiders have the backing of government, and with express political ends, most notably but not limited to undermining political opponents before the upcoming elections. This belief contributes to interfaith leaders’ reluctance to work with police and other government representatives. Conversely, everyone this assessment team spoke with in Meiktila was able to give precise accounts of who started the 2013 violence, and did not mention third party outsiders.²⁶

Who is Ma Ba Tha?

Background: Committee for the Protection of Race and Religion, locally known as Ma Ba Tha, was founded in June 2013. There are no current estimates of how many monks are part of Ma Ba Tha. Though sharing the same beliefs as 969, Ma Ba Tha is a more formalized, structured entity, rather than a social movement.

Views: Ma Ba Tha is not a homogenous entity. It includes both old and young monks, some of whom are hardliners in their approach to the protection of nationality and religion, and others who remain friends with Muslims and even on occasion are known to protect Muslim individuals from violence by Buddhists.^{20a}

Geography: Reports indicate that in its birthplace of Mandalay region, Ma Ba Tha members are more universally hardline than in other areas, such as Taunggyi. In Mandalay, for example, one non-Ma Ba Tha monk suggested that there were at best 30 Ma Ba Tha monks who might be open to working productively on interfaith efforts. In Taunggyi, some members have dispelled crowds before riots began.

Politics: Reports also differ on how much tolerance different groups of Ma Ba Tha monks have for government involvement or affiliation with their work. For example, once some government officials in Mandalay began to get involved in activities and tried to donate money to the group, some monks have distanced themselves from the group, as they do not want the government taking advantage of their followers and power.^{20b}

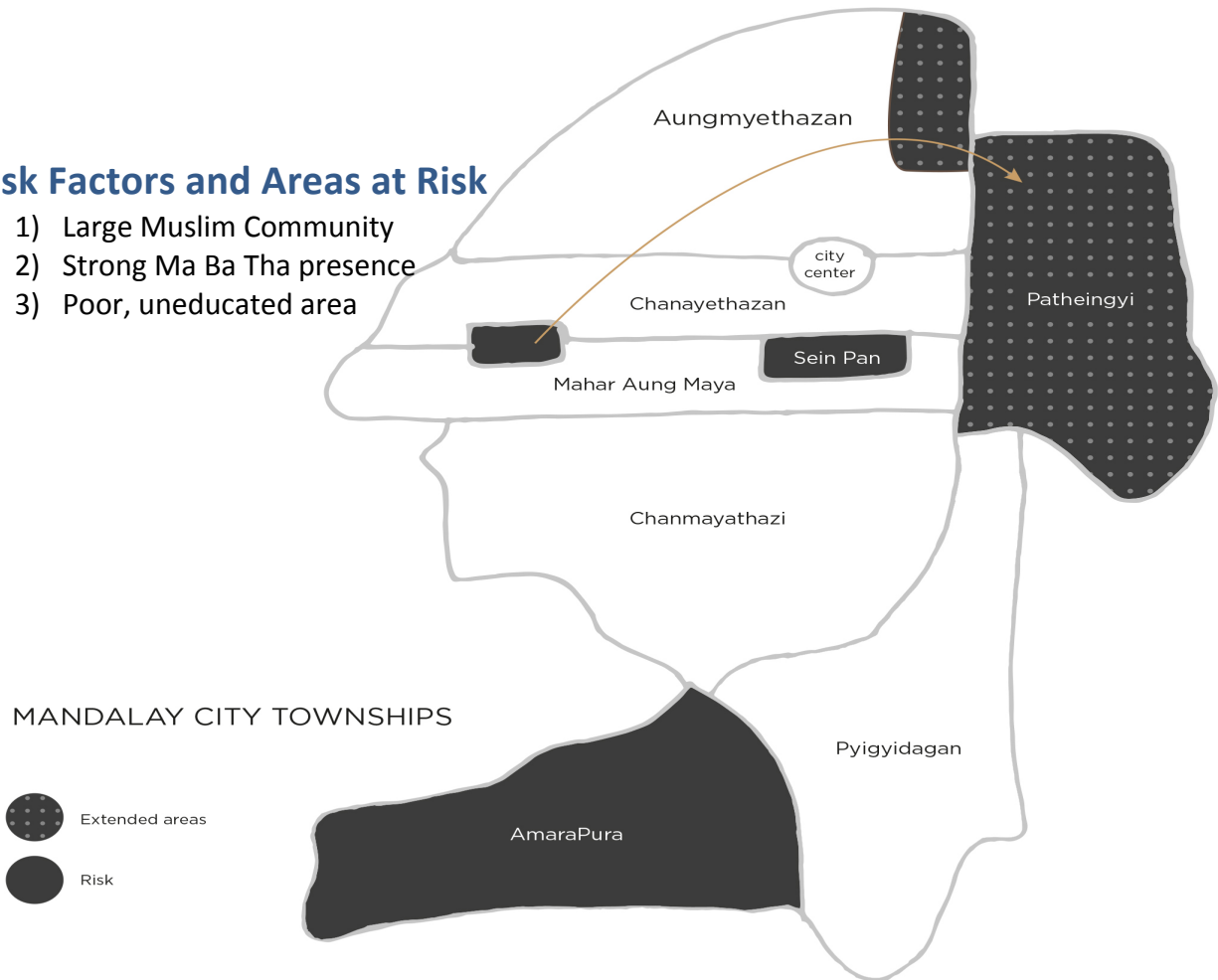
²⁵ A March 2015 report by Justice Trust, said it found evidence through a 6-month investigation that the violence in 2014 was caused by a group of outside thugs who operated with tacit support from authorities. (Ref: http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs21/Justice_Trust-2015-03-Hidden_Hands-en-to-rev1-red.pdf)

²⁶ Meiktila Interviews 12 May 2015; International Crisis Group 2013

Instead, interviewees in Meiktila emphasized the anxiety bred by now living once again as neighbors with people who took their homes or looted their shops during the violence. The violence also gave rise to a group of Buddhist “winners” who previously did not have any position of note in the Meiktila community. By leading violent efforts during 2013, these individuals gained either money or new social status, and now are an important, but dangerous force, in swaying the community towards violence or peace depending what serves their self-interest.²⁷

Risk Factors and Areas at Risk

- 1) Large Muslim Community
- 2) Strong Ma Ba Tha presence
- 3) Poor, uneducated area



Some interfaith leaders suggested that 10 km outside of city center is where the most tense geographies lie; some of our research bore this out (e.g. Amarapura is about 15 km outside of Mandalay city center, and Pa Thay Wa is about 20 km away from Meiktila city center).

²⁷ Meiktila Interfaith Committee, 12 May 2015

^{20a} Ward Administrator, 17 May 2015, Taunggyi

^{20b} Interfaith youth leader, Monk, 10 May 2015, Mandalay.

However, in addition to these peri-urban area that are 16 km away, Meiktila city center, rather than villages, arose as the place of most concern to communities in Meiktila. Using the criteria of risk, as well as current saturation by other actors, the following 5 geographic areas are identified as “at-risk” and recommended for targeting by the LRP program:

- **Meiktila:** strong Ma Ba Tha presence, large Muslim community. Though many actors have been engaged in intercommunal conflict with respect to humanitarian assistance after the 2013 violence, there are not many actors involved in conflict management and mitigation activities.
 - **Pa Thay Wa:** strong Ma Ba Tha presence, large Muslim community
 - **Amarapura** (Mandalay township): quasi-rural township of villages, large Muslim population, strong 969 presence, poor
 - **Patheingyi** (Mandalay township): also referred to as the “extended area” (villages from Chanayethazin and Ma Har Aung Myay have been relocated here; noted by arrows on the map) Patheingyi is mostly Buddhist with small Christian and Muslim populations. There has been both Buddhist-Muslim and Buddhist-Christian conflict here.
 - **Sein Pan** (Mandalay township): Sein Pan is within Ma Har Aung Myay township in Mandalay town. This small area is a Ma Ba Tha stronghold with a large Muslim community.
- **Chanayethazin:** The assessment does not propose selecting Chanayethazin as a target location. Even though it was where violence began in 2014, interfaith activities have since concentrated strongly on this township as a result.
- **Meiktila Villages:** There are few Muslims living in the villages of Meiktila, but the villages are strongly influenced by Ma Ba Tha. Though they are not likely to be a hotspot for conflict, the beliefs of individuals who live there may ultimately be relevant to conflict dynamics in Meiktila, as in some villages, community members have daily access to the center of Meiktila town through their market activities. As such, these villages should not be seen as separate from Meiktila, but rather as part of the Meiktila ecosystem.

Local Interfaith and Dispute Resolution Actors

In Mandalay there is some crossover between groups working on resolving individual disputes and more general interfaith activities such as dialogue and public service; in Meiktila, no groups appear willing to work on individual dispute resolution. It is a small town where everyone knows each other, and the security concerns are too great.²⁸ There do not appear to be any actors working in both Mandalay city and Meiktila, though some groups in Mandalay cited the violence in Meiktila as the reason they established their own activities in Mandalay.

Government Interfaith Committee: In the national government’s efforts to roll out interfaith committees in each region, a Government Interfaith Committee formed in Mandalay. It is

²⁸ Meiktila Interfaith Group and local CSO, 12 May 2015

comprised of Buddhist, Muslim, and Christian Leaders. It is unclear what this group's activities will be, and so far the majority of respondents do not respect it.

IYCAP (Interfaith Youth Cooperative Action for Peace): This is an interfaith youth organization (Hindus, Buddhist, Muslims, Christians) that engages in storytelling visits to schools, public works programs, and providing space for interfaith activities to occur. They have a successful track record of recruiting youth members who were initially resistant to the ideas of interfaith.

Ma Ba Tha monks: In Mandalay Ma Ba Tha has a very strong presence, and for the most part is involved with promoting hate speech and repressing other religions' freedom of expression. However, as previously discussed, Ma Ba Tha is not a monolithic group.

Mandalay Interfaith Group: This group focuses on reducing rumors, and calming the members' respective religious communities (Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu, Christian, Bahi) when there are rumors that might spark conflict. They do not get involved in resolving disputes or confrontational moments, and tend to only speak to their own community (not across communities other than with the leaders in the Group). They meet once per month.

Mandalay Peace Committee: Most members of the Mandalay Peace Committee are either famous monks or Generation 88 leaders. Women comprise 50% of the membership, but the women say they do not want to be involved in dispute resolution; they prefer supporting logistics and doing the office work. The committee has a central directorate and sub-committees in each township. There are also representatives at the village level, who liaise back to the township sub-committee level, but not across village level (e.g. in Amarapura, a Muslim leader in one village does not know who is the leader in the neighboring Buddhist village). The

What role do women have in conflict management?

Though women may not be involved directly in dispute resolution, this does not mean they do not have important roles to play in other stages of conflict.

As the main actors in market places, women are present in one of the main areas where religious symbols seem to be both misused and misunderstood. The market is also a place where information is exchanged and rumors can be spread or dampened.

Many teachers are also women. Throughout interviews, schools were cited as both places where hatred can be formed at a young age, as well as where the psychological after-effects of violence are seen. Teachers also interact with their students' parents, which in mixed schools, means across religious communities.

Though not a suggested target geography, in Meiktila villages, the wives of village administrators were cited as playing important roles in helping their villages resolve problems.

Peace Committee directly manages disputes between individuals (e.g. in an interfaith marriage dispute, both a Muslim and Buddhist leader from the Peace Committee will go to work with the couple). The Peace Committee is hesitant to work with youth, as they only want to work with people they are sure will continue to be engaged in the future. The Peace Committee appears respected, though their linkage with political parties through shared membership may be seen as a mark against their legitimacy by some.

Meiktila Interfaith Committee: After the 2013 violence, the head monk from Asia Light Monastery came to Meiktila and asked the members to form an interfaith committee to try to build dialogue and tolerance. The group is comprised of Muslims and Buddhists. It does interfaith activities, including trainings, but explicitly refuses to become involved in mediation and dispute resolution. The latter are seen as too dangerous. Even within the Committee there seems to be some unease between Muslim and Buddhist members (e.g. language used to talk about the others' religion)

Metta Campaign: The Metta Campaign was started by a Muslim member (U Nyi Nyi Kyaw) of the Mandalay Peace Committee, who is also a Generation 88 leader, and owner of a tea shop. The Metta Campaign believes that being able to react quickly at the local level is most important to avoiding/resolving disputes. The MPC is only moderately effective, because it

“There are some good interfaith practices [in Mandalay]. Before the July event, there was a Muslim cemetery and young people burned it down. They were caught by police and taken to court. The Muslim leaders went to the monastery and said to Buddhist parents that they forgive the young men for their actions. It was a court case and the youth were convicted and jailed for a year, but because we spoke to the parents, it did not escalate.”

-Muslim leader, Mandalay, May 2015

must meet before taking action. The Metta Campaign is switching to focusing on the elections.

Police: Mandalay CSOs do not have a history or experience working with police, and are very skeptical of

engaging. The one example of collaboration appeared to be when there was a dispute in Amarapura and the police called the Peace Committee for assistance. When police have been invited to meetings with CSOs, CSOs believe they spend the whole time taking notes on them and don't participate. CSOs also believe that the police don't feel empowered to act in disputes without directives from the top (e.g. did not stop the riots in Mandalay until someone from the President's office in Yangon came and took control of the force).

Seagull: This is a Mandalay-based CSO recently founded by Harry Myo Lin. It is currently assessing NGOs and CSOs to find what their niche should be, but Seagull will work in the interfaith space.

Harry is well respected in the interfaith community, and is one of the few youth with whom the Mandalay Peace Committee will work.

Teachers:

Teachers/schools emerged in many conversations as

an important place for demonstrating respect for diversity. Private tuition (tutoring) is another possibility.

“I have 28 years of teaching experience, teaching 5 to 15 year olds, and also tutoring. Before the violence, my Muslim students obeyed me perfectly. Since the violence, they started to be very disrespectful to me and other teachers. They used informal language to address us, or would sleep in class, especially with Buddhist teachers. In my classes I have explained about religion and peace, and they have gotten more respectful again. But parents are also less respectful; now they complain more to the government, through the formal complaint mechanism, when there is an issue, instead of coming to the teachers directly.

- Bahai teacher, Mandalay, May 2015

U Zin Paein: This monk provided refuge in his monastery during the 2013 violence for over 1,000 Buddhists and Muslims. He now allows his monastery space to be used as a venue for interfaith meetings and activities—it is the only location in Meiktila where that is possible. He and his monks try to incorporate messages of tolerance into speeches they give. His monastery is the only one in the area that tries to promote a message of tolerance and diversity.

Yadana Metta: This local CSO in Meiktila has been working with UNICEF to produce and distribute books that separately give a treatment of Buddhism and Islam, with a specific focus on the religions’ messages of tolerance, and non-violence. They give these to religious leaders and advocate for their use in speeches. They also have distributed to some schools, with several minutes worth of training to teachers.

Taunggyi

The situation in Taunggyi presents an excellent example of the “stages of conflict” methodology; while there is no current or recent violence in Taunggyi, there are many other manifestations of conflict. While most Muslims are quick to point to individual disputes, unfair treatment, or the need to accommodate Buddhist preferences, Christians and Buddhists for the most part say that Taunggyi does not have problems like in Mandalay and Meiktila. Christian leaders, while involved in both CSO and Government Interfaith groups, also do not believe

there are any religious tensions, disputes, etc. in Taunggyi. This may reflect a cultural preference in Taunggyi to resolve disputes in private; it may represent a very different experience for Muslims versus other religious groups; it may be due to sampling bias; or, it may be due to the difficulty of conveying in Myanmar language all the non-violent elements of conflict.

Since 2013, relationships between Muslims and Buddhists have eroded. Where friendships used to exist, there is now much doubt and a lack of trust. Many attribute this to the arrival of Ma Ba Tha in Taunggyi, and in recent weeks U Wirathu has been posting many statements about Taunggyi (such as that many handmade bombs were found in a lake near a monastery). Youth, in particular, seem to be falling along extremist lines in each religion.

In Taunggyi religious conflict rather than ethnic conflict is of greatest concern at the community level. Interfaith conflict arises organically out of community and social disputes, whereas ethnic conflict exists more as part of the ethno-political armed conflict/civil war in which different ethnic groups have different political goals.²⁹

The last violent intercommunal conflict in Taunggyi was in 1988. U Kay Mar, who has recently been released from jail and is now a leader in interfaith dispute resolution, was directly involved in supporting this violence. A young novice monk was insulted when asking for alms at a Muslim shop, and violence ensued. Since then there have been no episodes of violence, but there has been a long history of Muslims and Buddhists living together with resentments building.

“I used to have many close Muslim friends, but I have changed a lot since the crisis [in Mandalay] last year. I no longer trust Muslims, and I can tell in their heart they are also doubtful of me. We used to go on vacations together, but now there is a gap in trust that is growing bigger. It is growing bigger, because we see that the Muslims are trying to cause problems; for example, the bomb in their mosque last year, or in the villages where they are raping young children—I have heard this from the Ma Ba Tha monks.”

– Female, CSO leader, Taunggyi May 2015

²⁹ PNO, CSOs, Religious Leaders, Taunggyi 16-21 May 2015

As in Mandalay, in several years, a future study may want to examine the changing dynamics between the Chinese communities and those who have historically lived in Taunggyi; however, for now no overt tensions appear to exist.

Muslim communities in Taunggyi are currently experiencing high levels of accommodating behavior, often times with government involvement at either the district, local, or judicial level. This behavior suggests that these communities are, for the moment, prioritizing (or accepting) peace over justice and equality. When solving individual disputes between Muslims and Buddhists, the courts or religious leadership often pass strong judgments against male Muslims, with several cases involving sending Muslim youth who had relations with Buddhist women into exile for a year or more.³⁰

Access to Justice: a potential driver of future intercommunal conflict?

Across each location, but especially in Meiktila and Taunggyi, many examples were given of how Ma Ba Tha has managed to exert influence on the court system, to the express detriment of the Muslim community. While lack of access to justice is a problem for many reasons, in these cases the intercommunal resentment it breeds it could constitute the makings of a potential future driver of conflict.

One lawyer in Meiktila described how the public's faith in the court system has rapidly declined since the 2013 violence. Muslims now receive much harsher punishments than before (and when compared to Buddhists), often when Ma Ba Tha or 969 members appear at court for sentencing, or post-fact question the court's ruling and the punishment is extended or made more severe.

In Taunggyi, after receiving pressure from Ma Ba Tha monks, courts have increased sentences against Muslim offenders after a verdict has already been reached. In 2014, a homemade bomb used for fishing detonated in a Muslim's home, injuring only his own leg. The court sentenced him to six months, but after receiving complaints from Ma Ba Tha that an example needed to be set, lest the case turn into a larger religious dispute, the sentence was increased to two years.

This tendency towards accommodation also affects Muslim women, as it is hard for them to find jobs if they wear hijab. Even Muslim shop owners will ask them not to wear hijab, for fear that it will make them lose customers.³¹ See Appendix II for more examples.

In Taunggyi there are also many examples of behavior intended to limit interaction with other religions. Neighbors exert pressure on each other to only shop at stores owned by their respective religions, and in some cases lists of stores to boycott have been circulated.³² Last year a Burmese business razed part of a Muslim cemetery in Aye Thar Ya, in violation of the building permits it had been granted. Initially the Muslim community did not want to take action, lest it be construed as an attempt to spark religious conflict. It

was only when the Buddhist and Hindu sections of the cemetery were destroyed that the different communities joined together to submit complaints to the government and seek

³⁰ Muslim religious leader; Law and Order Group; Muslim youth, Taunggyi 16-21 May 2015

³¹ Muslim youth leader, Taunggyi 16 May 2015

³² Muslim business owner, Taunggyi 16 May 2015

compensation.³³ Though this is ultimately an example of how these different religious communities can productively work together when they find a mutual shared interest, the original decision of the Muslim community to avoid taking action for fear of being misunderstood speaks to a pervasive spirit of avoidance in the area.

There are a large number of actors working on intercommunal dispute resolution, ranging from religious leaders and lay religious leaders, to individual community members, ward administrators, and a Law and Order Group, which on occasion has been deputized by the police to provide security for public events. However, this collection of actors is very fragmented, with large power imbalances between entities responsible for negotiating disputes. While Buddhist mediators and community members are content with the outcomes, some Muslim leaders are not, and Muslim communities are in turn not pleased with their leaders' efforts. This set of actors is also separated from the actors working on softer interfaith activities such as storytelling and social service programs, a marked difference to the dynamics in Mandalay.

Drivers of Intercommunal Conflict

Inter-personal disputes are perceived as intercommunal disputes: In Taunggyi the most serious *trigger* of intercommunal conflict appears to be the tendency for inter-personal disputes between a Muslim and a Buddhist (e.g. having a motorbike accident) to be quickly seen as a religious dispute, drawing mobs that take sides according to religion. Many of these disputes are also then adjudicated by religious leaders, rather than in the courts or by police. This phenomenon is pervasive throughout the country, though seems to have been particularly prevalent during our interviews in Taunggyi.

Events that happen elsewhere (Mandalay, Meiktila, Iraq) have a huge impact on the psyche in Taunggyi: While the uptake of global, regional, and local anti-Islamic narratives in Myanmar is not limited to Taunggyi, they were particularly influential in this locality during the assessment period. Though no cases of intercommunal violent conflict have occurred in Taunggyi since 1988, episodes of religious-based violence that occur elsewhere have a strong impact on intercommunal relationships in Taunggyi. During this assessment, many Buddhists, including those involved in intercommunal dispute mediation or funeral services for Muslims made comments about the inherent violence of Islam, pointing not to examples in Taunggyi but in Meiktila or even in the Middle East.³⁴ The concern caused by these events appears directly related to the prevalence of accommodating and avoiding behaviors. Ma Ba Tha has also seized on these external events as a leverage point to demonstrate why the Muslim and Buddhist communities are inherently different and cannot co-exist.

³³ Ward administrator, Taunggyi 17 May 2015

³⁴ Law and Order Group, Social Service Group 20-21 May 2015

Symbolism: Both Muslim and Buddhist leaders believe that there is a lack of inter- and intra-religious understanding in each group. For example, many Buddhists believe that Islam is not transparent, as demonstrated by women wearing hijab and not being able to enter a mosque as one pleases (in contrast to being able to enter a temple without invitation).³⁵ For some individuals, these symbols (such as hijab) have become points of contention between friends since the violence in Meiktila. While they are comfortable spending time in each others' homes, Buddhists do not want to be seen in public with someone who is wearing hijab. Some Muslims believe that Buddhists intentionally use their flags and religious songs to anger the Muslim community, for example, pointing speakers towards a Muslim's market stall when playing a Buddhist song.³⁶

“Muslims can help the situation by changing what their religion says. They should not be allowed to marry many women. I once saw a man with 8 wives...and hijab when it covers the mouth? You cannot tell if it is a man or woman.”

– Youth leader, Taunggyi, May 2015

Risk Factors and Areas at Risk

- 1) Large Muslim Community
- 2) Strong Ma Ba Tha presence
- 3) Poor, uneducated area

Most areas of concern are in downtown Taunggyi. Using the criteria of risk and where most individual disputes have occurred that have required mediation, the following geographic areas are identified as “at-risk” and recommendation for programming:

- **Aye Thar Yar:** Is a poor area approximately 13 km downhill from the rest of Taunggyi town. It has a large Muslim community, comprised mainly of day laborers. Ma Ba Tha also has a strong presence here.
- **Shwe Taung:** Is a poor, primarily Muslim area within the town limits of Taunggyi.
- **Sein Pan:** Poor, primarily Burmese Buddhist area, within the town limits of Taunggyi.
- **Hsi Hseng:** is part of the PaOh Self-Administration Zone, approximately 100 km from Taunggyi town. Ethnic laws effectively prevent Muslims from owning land and therefore living in the township. However, neighboring Muslim community members spend time in Hsi Hseng for day labor jobs. This township may not be appropriate for the first year

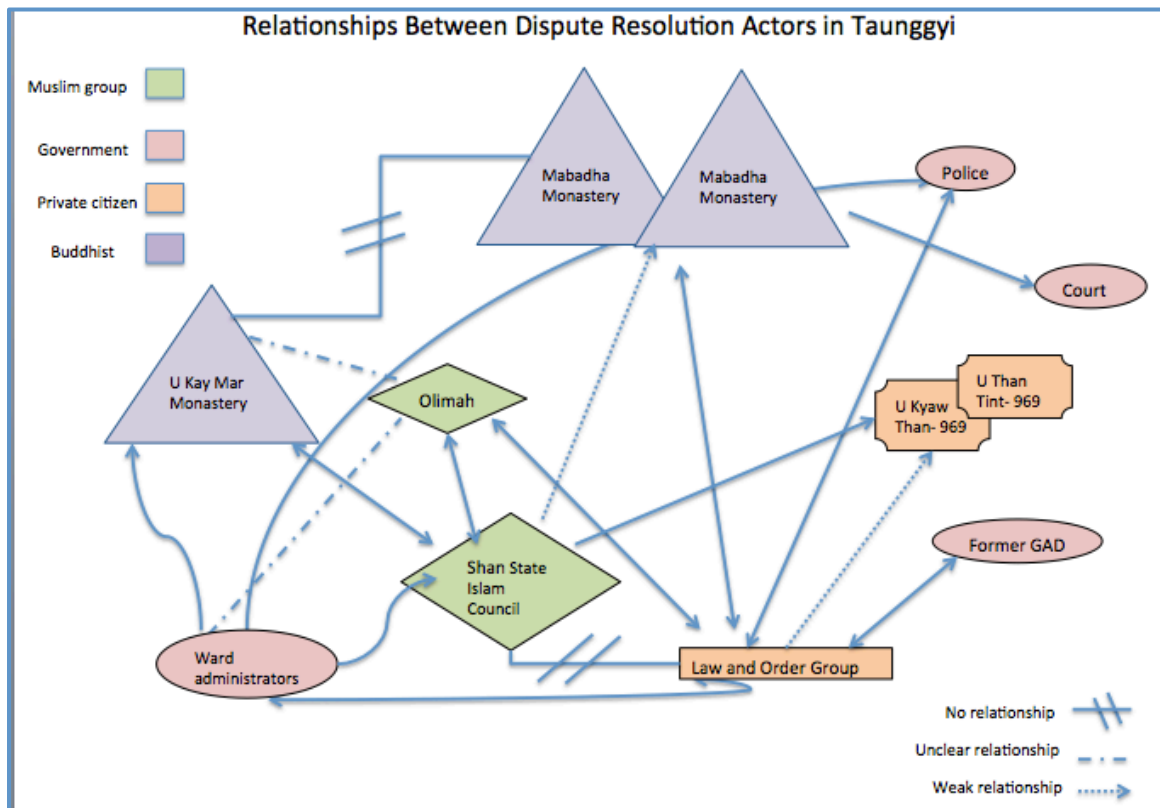
³⁵ Law and Order Group, Youth Leader, 16-21 May 2015

³⁶ Muslim business owner, 16 May 2015

of programming, but would bear further scrutiny to see how dynamics continue to develop.

Local Interfaith and Dispute Resolution Actors

In Taunggyi there are many actors working on intercommunal dispute resolution and few actors working on interfaith activities. The Actor Mapping combined with this Conflict Assessment revealed that the key actors involved in dispute resolution are strongly fragmented (see diagram below). Moreover, there are concerns about whether some of these actors are playing more of a suppression rather than resolution role. Many of those working on interfaith activities are displeased with the way that disputes have been resolved, and many who are working on dispute resolution do not believe that interfaith activities can accomplish much.



CSO Interfaith Group: The Group is composed of a committee, working group, and youth network (within the youth network are several organizations e.g. Young Muslim Women, Future Group) The activities of the Interfaith Group include storytelling, visiting each others' places of worship, street cleaning and public works activities. A sub-set of the Youth Network has a Viber group to update and report on possible disturbances and to act as an early warning system—not all members of the youth network are part of this Viber group.

Funeral Services: e.g. Namkon, Myittar Mon Funeral Services. These all work on funerals of both Buddhists and Muslims, but their membership is limited to one religion or the other, in some cases with leaders of the organization stating that they do not like the other religious group.

Government Interfaith Committee: established in Taunggyi 3 months ago. Buddhist, Muslim, and Christian members of it do not have faith that it will be a productive body. Some are worried that it is an attempt to overtake the CSO interfaith group in Taunggyi.

Individual Actors: U Kyaw Than and U Htun Tint are two members of Ma Ba Tha, seemingly unrelated to one of the organizations yet interfacing with all of them in some cases. It is unclear how they rose to this position.

Journalists: Some journalists have decided to try to combat the vicious cycle of rumors and tensions, by responding to inflammatory posts (especially by U Wirathu) on Facebook and stating facts or that full facts are not yet known. Even though most respondents pointed only to Facebook and a few online blogs as their sources of information, it is important to realize that journalists are also active in these fora. At least one journalist in Taunggyi with whom we spoke recently published an article about a rape case involving a monk.

Kaung Rai PaOh Youth: This local CSO focuses on a variety of issues in the PaOh zones and has many strong youth leaders. In the near future, they will be working with religious leaders for community development goals, as they recognize that the religious leaders (exclusively Buddhist in PaOh areas) have great influence in the community.

Law and Order Group: This Buddhist group is active in Taunggyi Township, Nyaungshwe, Hsi Hseng, and Shwe Nyaung, with the most active members in Taunggyi Township. This group is directly involved in dispute resolution between Buddhists and between Muslims and Buddhists. Since 2013, the Group has grown from 30 members to over 1,000 at present. The group works with police, Olimah leaders, and Ma Ba Tha.

Ma Ba Tha: Though not definitive, this assessment suggested more variety in Ma Ba Tha in Taunggyi than in Mandalay. For example, there are specific instances in which Ma Ba Tha monks have defended a Muslim against beatings from a Buddhist. However, there are also two main Ma Ba Tha monasteries at which many inter-religious disputes are mediated (Tain Taung Kyaung and Thi Da Gu), and which have been known on several occasions to send Muslim men into exile.

Non-Ma Ba Tha Monasteries: There appears to be only one strong non-Ma Ba Tha monastery in Taunggyi. This monastery is involved in dispute resolution with Muslim leaders, particularly in Kan Tan and Sein Pan, as it is located in that area. It also has a history of encouraging people to not go to Ma Ba Tha to solve their disputes. However, the monk who leads this monastery (U Kay Mar) was directly involved in the violence in 1988 and has only recently been released from jail. Some believe that Generation 88 leaders are

“Just a few days ago there was a motorbike accident at night between a Buddhist from a different ward and a Muslim from my ward...someone came and got me to help resolve it. When I arrived and tried to separate the two, the Buddhist punched me, and 969 started saying we needed to go to the monastery to settle the dispute. But, I am very close with the chief Ma Ba Tha monk from this ward, because I have always had a good relationship since we were little and since before he was Ma Ba Tha. He defended me.”

- Muslim, Male, Block Administrator, Aye Tar Yah, May 2015

using him as a mouthpiece for their own interfaith ends.

Olimah: Olimah represents one slice of the Muslim community in Taunggyi and is viewed as “extreme” by some community members. The Law and Order Group works exclusively with the Olimah as its Muslim interlocutor. Some youth members of Olimah are not pleased with the ways in which its leadership have negotiated disputes.

Police and Courts: There are varied reports on when the police and courts are involved in inter-religious disputes. Some say that if a law is broken, the police are always involved. Some say that there are instances of motorbike accidents, for example, when the police are not involved. There are also reports of the courts changing sentences (to be harsher to Muslims) when pressured by Ma Ba Tha to do so.

Religious teachers: both Islam and Buddhism have their own version of “Sunday School” in which students are taught by lay teachers about the tenets of their religion and good behavior.

Shan State Islam Religious Council: founded in 2013, is comprised mostly of Sunni and are involved in over 300 cases of dispute resolution since 2013. Mainly work with two Ma Ba Tha individuals, and sometimes U Ki Ma. The Religious Council does not believe that the Law and Order Group is truly solving problems and so does not choose to work with it.

Teachers: Teachers have an informal role in promoting tolerance and demonstrating equal treatment to those who are different

Appendices

Appendix I — Methodology Details

Key Informants: we primarily used a traditional interview approach and asked questions such as:

- What has caused incidents of intercommunal tension or violence in your area?
- Where has intercommunal violence or tension happened the most frequently or seriously in Taunggyi/Mandalay? What areas are you most worried about going forward?
- Who is leading local efforts to address violence? Who is involved in reducing tensions? Who is working on promoting unity and diversity?
- Where do most people receive their information?
- What have been the biggest changes in relationships in the last two years? Why do you think that change has occurred?

Storytelling Approach:

- “Has there been conflict between people of different religions and ethnicities in your area? What happened?”
- Ask prompting questions to get information we need in key areas outlined in the SOW for this assessment (e.g. Who helped resolve this conflict?)
- Tried to get personal stories (theirs or someone they know). These stories have more detail and fewer rumors.
- This approach often works best with “normal” people and not as well with experts or government officials. With experts and government officials, it was more effective

Qualitative Baseline Indicators and Questions:

- G.1: % Change in degree of intercommunal tensions, including religious tensions, reported by key stakeholders
 - “How have relationships between Muslims and Buddhists changed since the last violent conflict?”
 - Noting the use of language (formal, informal, respectful, dismissive, especially in interfaith meetings with individuals from different religions)
 - Observing the number of religious flags (some interviewees, especially in Meiktila, highlighted that people place religious flags on their homes when they are feeling intercommunal tensions; this likely also has a reinforcing effect of increasing those tensions)
- O1.1: Change in self-reported effectiveness of leaders in addressing intercommunal conflict, including inter-religious conflict
 - “How do you feel about how that dispute [that you were involved in] was resolved? Do you think it was fair?”

- “Do you think your community was happy with the outcome?”
- O2.1: % change of community members reporting they trust members of other religious and ethnic groups to a great or very great extent
 - “How have friendships between Muslims and Buddhists changed since the last violent conflict? Why do you think that is?”
 - “Do you shop at both Buddhist and Muslim stores?”
- O2.2: % of community members who report having had positive interactions with members of different ethnic and religious groups in past six months
 - This indicator appeared to yield less robust information than the others, possibly because the conflict dynamics in each location are nuanced enough that even when high levels of tension exist, there are still friendships or commercial relationships across religious lines that might be seen as “positive.” One positive relationship in the past six months would yield an answer of “yes,” without telling the degree or type or frequency of positive interactions. Conversely, in areas that are exclusively one religion or another, an answer of “no” does not necessarily indicate conflict or tensions, but just that there was no opportunity to interact. Care must be taken to ensure that the way questions are asked to provide information for this indicator can effectively capture these nuances.

Appendix II –Stories Collected

Buddhist, Male, Law and Order leader, Taunggyi

A Buddhist woman and Muslim man were living together, unmarried. The neighbors didn’t like it and threatened to burn their house down if it continued. The Law and Order Group asked the biggest monk and Olimah to resolve the issue, and they took the couple to the police for safety from the mob. The Olimah told the man he could not come back to the quarter for one year, unless he married the woman. He came back before the year was up, and started seeing the woman again but didn’t marry her. The Law and Order Group took him to the police; the law is that you can’t lie to gain sexual advantage.

Youth, Muslim, Female, Interfaith Youth Member, Taunggyi

Symbolism of faith in Taunggyi is a bigger problem than the faith itself. Many people don’t like seeing hijab, and once I started to wear it at the age of 18, many of my Buddhist friends no longer wanted to go out in public with me. They enjoyed spending time at our houses together, but they didn’t want other people to see us out in public together while I was wearing hijab. It is also a big problem for getting a job. Even Muslim shop owners will ask you not to wear hijab to work, because they worry that they will lose customers; some Buddhist shop owners simply won’t take your resume when they see your name is Muslim. I applied for a government job before I started wearing hijab, and I was offered the job. On my first day of work I arrived wearing hijab, because I had turned 18. They told me that I could either take

hijab off for work or that I could not work in the government. I told them it is not possible for me to remove hijab, and I was dismissed.

Youth, Muslim, Male, Electric Shop Owner, Shwe Taung (Taunggyi)

A young Muslim was working at my shop and had a Buddhist girlfriend. They ran away together, and 969 came to my house in Shwe Taung and said since I was the boy's employer I was responsible and had to get them back. A big mob formed outside my house and I felt very threatened, so I went to the block administrator, with whom my family has a good reputation. The block administrator and I went to talk to the girl's parents to calm them down, and I called my friend saying everything was fine and he should come back. I was worried if he didn't come back a bigger problem would happen. My friend returned, but the mob of 969 was still there and said we must go to the Tain Taung Kyaung (Ma Ba Tha Monastery) to resolve the problem. If things don't change, the Ma Ba Tha monasteries will become the courts of Taunggyi. We all went, and the monks asked the girl's parents what they wanted to do. They said they wanted it resolved according to the law, so we all went to the police station. At the police station they asked the girl's parents if they wanted to press charges; they said no, they had their daughter back and that was all they cared about. The mob outside was still angry, and when I went outside, I even saw some of my Buddhist employees were there—they were very surprised to see me because they did not know I was involved. The next day the police let the boy go secretly.

Muslim, Male, Block Administrator, Aye Tar Yak (Taunggyi)

Just a few days ago there was a motorbike accident at night between a Buddhist from a different ward and a Muslim from my ward. The Muslim was hit by the Buddhist, who should have apologized to resolve the dispute. But, he didn't and a mobbed formed; someone came and got me to help resolve it. When I arrived and tried to separate the two, the Buddhist punched me, and 969 started saying we needed to go to the monastery to settle the dispute. But, I am very close with the chief Ma Ba Tha monk from this ward, because I have always had a good relationship since we were little and since before he was Ma Ba Tha. He defended me.

Muslim, Male, Electrician, Aye Tar Ya (Taunggyi)

The hot issue in Aye Tar Ya right now is that we are waiting to hear about compensation for our cemetery that was destroyed by a business. The original business plans said that the excavation would stop just short of the cemetery, but the business went past the line, and first destroyed part of the Muslim cemetery. We did not say anything, because we thought 969 might use our complaint to start a bigger Buddhist-Muslim problem. But, then the company continued into the Hindu, Christian, and Buddhist parts of the cemetery. The Muslim, Buddhist, Christian funeral services group took photos and wrote a letter to the President, Prime Minister, etc., and discussed it with the interfaith committee in Taunggyi. The government was supposed to respond to us two days ago about compensation for where we can build a new cemetery.

Buddhist, Female, Cultural Leader, Taunggyi

I am very interested in these issues. I used to have many close Muslim friends, but I have changed a lot since the crisis last year. I no longer trust Muslims, and I can tell in their heart they are also doubtful of me. We used to go on vacations together, but now there is a gap in trust that is growing bigger. It is growing bigger, because we see that the Muslims are trying to cause problems; for example, the bomb in their mosque last year, or in the villages where they are raping young children—I have heard this from the Ma Ba Tha monks.

I am very interested in how disputes are resolved, and so sometimes I go to the monasteries to observe the resolutions; the Buddhists always seem happy. I am very close to the Ma Ba Tha monks, because I teach Damah school, but I am not a member of 969. I think religious issues can be solved outside of courts though and just between the people involved. The Ma Ba Tha monks also just want peace. There was a Buddhist girl working in a Muslim shop, and she owed the owner some money that she had borrowed, but she wanted to quit her job. The Ma Ba Tha monks came and repaid the shop owner, and found her a job in a Buddhist shop instead.

Buddhist, Male, Monk, Kan Tah (Taunggyi)

Each religious leader is different, but I try to focus on the humanity of people when I resolve disputes. One Buddhist and Muslim who were married for many years nearly divorced. They came to me and the Buddhist girl said that she wanted to go to the 969 monks to resolve their problems. I told her that their problems are not religious, they are human problems, and they need to resolve them without thinking about their religions. They now are living peacefully again. But, I was worried that if they went to the 969 monks it could have become a bigger problem.

Muslim, Male, Religious Community Leader (Taunggyi)

The Ma Ba Tha monks are reasonable in Taunggyi; they are not like in other places. In the Myo Ma quarter, where there are many Muslims, 969 posted a poster on a restaurant. People were getting upset, so I went to the Ma Ba Tha monks and negotiated taking it down. I have worked with them to settle 300 disputes since 2013.

In some cases the Ma Ba Tha will influence the court. A boy was expelled from Taunggyi for 3 months for falling in love with a Buddhist girl; he promised he would stay away for 3 months, but he came back sooner and started speaking with the girl. The monks went to the police and they put him in jail for one month because he had broken his promise, so it was sort of like breaking the law.

Last year right after the bomb was found in the mosque, a bomb went off in a Muslim's house in Myo Ma. His leg was injured but he was still sentenced to 6 months in jail. The monks were not happy with the punishment and the court extended the sentence to 2 years. We cannot get involved in something so direct, because it is too confrontational and people will start misunderstanding our motives.

Sometimes other people, like U Than Shwe, try to make issues into much bigger problems than they are. There was a motorbike accident and we went to the police station. Ma Ba Tha had already posted to Facebook that a Buddhist was hit by a Muslim boy, and by the time we got to the police station, U Than Shwe was already there. He said that to avoid a bigger problem, the boy needed to be sent to a jail 50 miles away.

Youth, Male, Buddhist, Community Organizer, Mandalay

Ma Ba Tha has a lot of influence on government here. For example, one spokesman of NLD was accused of insulting religion, and the monks went to court for the hearing to influence the judge. The police should have kept them from attending. In another case, they influenced the government to keep a famous Muslim writer who was against the interfaith marriage law from speaking at her own book launch.

Youth, Male, Monk, Mandalay

Facebook is a parallel universe for the religious problems of Mandalay. I have tried to promote peace on my Facebook page, and people report it as inappropriate, and so my account was closed. When we called to Facebook to ask why, they told us, and we explained the situation, so they gave me a new account. We urged them to get a Myanmar speaker on their staff to review these types of issues in detail. They did, but he has not been in the country for a long time, so we are not confident that he really understands the issues and the problems with hate speech.

Male, Monk, Meiktila

The dispute in Meiktila all started because a couple went to buy gold hair clips. One of them was broken so they wanted a cheaper price than the shop owner wanted. This shop was very close to the motorcycle taxi stand, who are all Burmese Buddhists, and they joined in the fight. They were poor, uneducated, and just a rough crowd looking for a fight.

(Jointly told) Male, Buddhist and Muslim, Lawyer and Doctor, Meiktila

Since the crisis, people have lost faith in the court, and even Buddhists will choose to use monks to settle disputes with each other instead of going to court. Court is expensive. In July, a civil disagreement between a Buddhist and a Muslim who owed him a debt should have gone to court. But instead, the Buddhist went to a monk who was involved in the interfaith committee. The Monk reported to us Muslim members that we needed to get the money from the Muslim, otherwise the Buddhists had threatened they would burn down houses. We told them that this is not the role of the interfaith committee and that they needed to go to court. We do not know what the outcome was.

Male, Buddhist, Doctor, Meiktila

There was one case of a Buddhist and Muslim couple fighting. The village elders helped to resolve it, as used to be done before the crisis. But, the 969 monks heard about it, and sued the husband, who is Muslim, and brought him to the police station. The domestic violence case went up to the court system, and 969 brought many people to court on the day that it was being heard. Instead of making them divorce, the court made the husband pay a fine to the court, and 969 protested the decision.

Female, Christian, CSO worker, Meiktila

A couple days ago, a Muslim killed a catholic (he stabbed him in a fight). Many people came running into the street with lots of emotions high, but the Catholic has the features that make him look like a Muslim, so people thought it was just two Muslims killing each other and left.

Female, Buddhist, CSO worker, Meiktila

Mixed marriages have become much more serious since the conflict. One month ago relatives showed anger towards a Muslim boy who had eloped with their Buddhist relative. They beat the Muslim boy and everyone went to the police station. Now the couple cannot be married.

Female, Bahi, school teacher at a mixed school and community leader, Mandalay

Before the violence last year, some of my friends told me that they'd heard the Muslim community was sharpening their swords. I am very interested and active in many religions, so I told my friends not to spread rumors, because maybe they were just sharpening them for a religious celebration like Eid. In June, the violence happened. ON that night, my relatives were at the Bahi center and they heard that many cycles were riding nearby with knives and shouting. Many Muslims from our neighborhood came to the Bahi center to feel safe. I called an important monk on the interfaith committee, who I know because my husband and he were in 88 together. The monk said that the Muslims should leave their homes and go stay in a different area for a few days. After the violence, I went to the family of Ko So, the Muslim who was killed. I had worked with Ko So and knew his family. I urged them to be calm. Together we went to Twin To's wife, he was the Buddhist who was killed. We all had a shared experience of being widows. Many Muslims also came to visit Twin To's wife, and I heard that the Mayor went, too.

I have 28 years of teaching experience, teaching 5 to 15 year olds, and also tutoring. Before the violence, my Muslim students obeyed me perfectly. Since the violence, they started to be very disrespectful to me and other teachers. They used informal language to address us, or would sleep in class, especially with Buddhist teachers. In my classes I have explained about religion and peace, and they have gotten more respectful again. But parents are also less respectful; now they complain more to the government, through the formal complaint mechanism, when there is an issue, instead of coming to the teachers directly.

Youth, Male, Hindu (Brahmin), university student and interfaith member, Mandalay

It is not easy for me to be involved in interfaith—the Hindu community does not understand, especially because I am a Brahmin and so should be focusing only on the study of Hinduism. I grew up in a Hindu community that is right next to a Muslim community and Buddhist community. I went to a school in a mosque, and I had a very bitter experience there, so as a kid I really hated Muslims. My parents realized that if I continued in that environment my education would not be successful, so they sent me to a school far away and I even got Muslim friends there who were from a better off background and light skinned. There are still many conflicts between the three communities; now that many of them have moved to the extended area, that is where the conflicts are now. They are very poor and uneducated.

According to religion, Buddhists and Hindus are okay because we are similar. But in terms of people (ethnicity) there is a clash because Buddhists are mostly Burmese and Hindus see themselves as being Burmese, but it was only my generation that we can say Burma-Hindu on our identity card. In older generations, the identity cards had to say Ponai-Hindus.

Male, Muslim, Village Administrator (AmaraPura), Mandalay

Last year when the violence happened, police came here and community elders went to the village administration office to find out what happened and to report back to the community to not worry and decrease rumors. I was staying at the administration office around the clock. Our relationship with the police was fine; the police were very happy because we treated them well and fed them good food. They said in other areas where they worked they were not treated well. There was a lot of harmony between Buddhist and Muslim villages before the conflict, but since then 969 and Ma Ba Tha have come into the Buddhist villages in AmaraPura and gave people food and speeches, so now it is tense. Now we have to be very careful what we say to Buddhists, and we can't just joke around.

Male, Muslim, Religious Leader, retired government official (Sein Pain) Mandalay

Hate speech is a big problem in Mandalay. Recently at a small mosque where religious studies are being taught, Ma Ba Tha came and told them to close the space. They informed the government, but the government said it is better to temporarily close it in order to prevent a bigger problem from happening. There was a similar issue at the YMCA. The YMCA had built a school and Ma Ba Tha told them to close it. They brought the issue to the interfaith committee, and the committee tried to negotiate with the Ma Ba Tha in that area, but without success.

There are some good interfaith practices. Before the July event, there was a Muslim cemetery and young people burned it down. They were caught by police and taken to court. The Muslim leaders went to the monastery and said to Buddhist parents that they forgive the young men for their actions. It was a court case and the youth were convicted and jailed for a year, but because we spoke to the parents, it did not escalate.

Appendix II—Interview consent form

The NGO Swe Tha Har, with funding support from Mercy Corps, is developing a project in Mandalay/Taunggyi to support local resilience for peace and cooperation between communities.

We are currently conducting interviews with a variety of stakeholders to learn more about the current relationships between communities in this region and their aspirations for the future. This information will help us design a program that supports the needs and goals of communities in your region. We would like to ask you some questions. Some of your answers may be included in a final written report, but your name will not be used without your permission.

If at any time you do not feel comfortable answering a question or would like the interview to end, please let us know.

Appendix III – Interviewees in May 2015

| Name | Affiliations |
|------------------------|---|
| Mandalay | |
| U Thein than | Mandalay Peace Committee |
| U Zarni Aung | Mandalay Peace Committee |
| U Than Nyunt | Mandalay Peace Committee |
| U Naythura | Mandalay Peace Committee |
| U Win Myint Htun | Mandalay Peace Committee |
| Shwe Sin Zaw Win (f) | Mandalay Peace Committee |
| Ko Nyen Chan | Mandalay Peace Committee |
| U Chit Htoo | Mandalay Peacekeeping Committee |
| U Mynt Thun | Ayerwaddy Youth Social Network and member of Mandalay Peace Committee |
| Cherry Thun (daughter) | Pyi Gyi Khin |
| Harry | Seagull, Mandalay Peace Committee |
| U Zin Zine | Monk (peace-loving) |
| U Nyi Nyi Kyaw (mr 88) | Mandalay Peace Committee; Metta Campaign |
| U Kan Kaung | Mandalay Interfaith Committee |
| Han Zar Chi | M&E Center |

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|---------------------------------|--|
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| U Zin Paein | Monestary (Meiktila) |
| Dr Khin Soe (buddhist) | Meiktila Interfaith Committee |
| Dr Tin Sein (buddhist) | Meiktila Interfaith Committee |
| Aung Thein (muslim lawyer) | Meiktila Interfaith Committee |
| U Min Aung (muslim businessman) | Meiktila Interfaith Committee |
| Daw Kyi Kyi Swe | Yadwna Metta (meiktila) |
| Khin Oo | Poet |
| Sithu Oo | businessman |
| Daw Wana Pa Pa | Teacher, Bahi Center |
| U MyoMyint Aung | Mandalay Peace Committee Sub-committee Amarapura |
| U San Kyaw Aye | Village leader in Bone O, Amarapura |
| Taunggyi | |
| Aung Aung (hindu) | IYCAP |
| U Khin Maung Thein | Islamic Religious Affairs Council |
| Malar Thaung (muslim) | Youth Interfaith Network, Muslim Youth Women |
| Aung Soe Min | Islam Youth Social Services (Future Youth) |
| Thu Yein Soe | Future Youth |
| U Tint Oo Luurin | M. Center |
| U Mi Lah | businessman |
| Daw Phyu Soe | Professor, Taunggyi Technical University |
| Daw So Hlaing | Lecturer, Taunggyi Technical University |
| U myo | Professor, Taunggyi Technical University |
| Daw Sinmar | |
| A Mi Kan (muslim) | electrician |
| Aung Min (muslim) | Block administrator, |

| | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| | Aye Thar Ya |
| Sian Za Mong | Baptist minister |
| U Saw Han | KMSS leader |
| Saw RayMond | CBI |
| KoNay Myo | Cherry Image, Generation 88 leader |
| Daw Nang Moo Moo Thida | CSO Network Chair, tutor |
| U Saw Kyaw Win | PaOh National office |
| U Tin Htut | PaOh National office |
| U M Yaw Na | Kachin Baptist Minister |
| Daw Nang Mya Shwe | NomKon, private shop owner |
| Nang Zar Ni Aye | Danu Literature and Culture Center, Damah teacher |
| Da War War Soe | Taung Yee Literature and Culture Center |
| Uzin Kaymar Nanda | Monestary (young monks association) |
| U Khin Mg Oo | Shan Islamic Religious Council, Government Interfaith Committee |
| Khun Saw Aung | Kaung Rawy PaOh Youth |
| Mya Wun Yan | Freelance journalist |
| U Than Shwe (leader) | Law and Order Group |
| U Kynaw Mynt Thu (1st Secretary) | Law and Order Group |
| U Thein Htun Aung (2nd secretary) | Law and Order Group |
| | |

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