

Civil Society Organizations' Response to Religious Discrimination in Myanmar: A  
Case Study of the 88 Generation Students Group and Paungku Consortium



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จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

CHULALONGKORN UNIVERSITY

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งานวิจัยนี้พบว่าความรู้สึกต่อต้านชาวมุสลิมทำให้เกิดความตึงเครียดเพิ่มขึ้นระหว่างชาวพุทธแ  
 ละชาวมุสลิมซึ่งจะนำไปสู่ความรุนแรงทางศาสนา  
 ผลของความรุนแรงทางศาสนาทำให้ทั้งสองกลุ่มได้รับความสูญเสียทั้งชีวิตและทรัพย์สินจำนวนมาก  
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 ที่ไ ต่ ร้ บ ผล ก ร ร ะ ท บ จ า ก ค ว า ม ขั ด แ ย้ ง นี  
 แต่บทบาทขององค์กรภาคประชาสังคมดังกล่าวยังไม่สามารถแก้ไขต้นเหตุของความขัดแย้งที่ตั้งอยู่บนพ  
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VIOLENCE

KHIN SAN WAI: CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS' RESPONSE TO RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION IN MYANMAR: A CASE STUDY OF THE 88 GENERATION STUDENTS GROUP AND PAUNGKU CONSORTIUM. ADVISOR: ASST. PROF. NARUEMON THABCHUMPON, Ph.D., MICHAEL GEORGE HAYES, Ph.D., 133 pp.

After 2010 general election in Myanmar, newly civilian government has ruled the country and performed a series of democratic reforms such as political, economic and administrative reforms. Simultaneously, tensions between majority and minority population and religion have been increasing. Resulting from religious discrimination problems, anti-Muslims violence spread across the country since 2012. These violent conflicts had produced challenge to the country's stability and democratization process. They become threats to political stability of the country and obstacles towards Myanmar's transition to democracy.

This research looks at the responses of civil society organizations in coping with religious discrimination and violence conflicts. It applies a qualitative study including a case study's analysis of civil society organizations, namely the 88 Generation Students Group and the Paungku Consortium, in Yangon, Myanmar. In order to collect data and information for analysis, in-depth interviews and semi-structured interviews with key persons in selected organizations as well as relevant stakeholders are conducted during field study. Diverse perceptions were gathered from the fields of media, academic, non-governmental organizations to examine how civil society organizations response to religious violence and foster non-discrimination values.

The study found that anti-Muslims sentiments make more tensions between people from both societies of Buddhists and Muslims and lead to religious violence. As a result of sectarian violence, numbers of households of Buddhists and Muslims were demolished and a thousand of lives were executed. Civil society organizations during the time contributed necessary assistances to affected people but could not fully address the root causes of conflict mainly based on religious discrimination. Moreover, it is found out that civil society organizations are not entirely able to cope with discrimination problems. This study, therefore, propose that issues of discrimination against minority religion and race are needed to take more consideration and civil society organizations should make more effort to lessen discriminatory practices in society.

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## LIST OF ABBRIVATIONS

ASEAN:	Association of South East Asian Nations
BSPP:	Burma Socialist Program Party
CBO:	Community-Based Organizations
CEDAW:	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women
CSO:	Civil Society Organization
FBO:	Faith-Based Organization
ICCPR:	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICERD:	International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination
INGOs:	International Non-Governmental Organizations
NGOs:	Non-Governmental Organizations
NLD:	National League for Democracy
SPDC:	State Peace and Development Council
UDHR:	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN:	United Nations
UNDP:	United Nations Development Program
USDP:	Union Solidarity and Development Party
WB:	World Bank
WFP:	World Food Program

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Statement of Research Problem

In Myanmar, there are more than one hundred ethnic groups where majority ethnic group is Myanmar Buddhist while others are from minority ethnic groups. There are four major religions such as Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism and Christian. Among them, population who believe in Islam is the least population and Buddhists are the most one. Since Myanmar got the independence in 1948, conflicts between minority and majority groups happened in the country. Generally, these conflicts are focused on ethnic and religious discrimination.

Since 1962, the military government took ruled the country. Because of abusive actions by the military government, people have suffered torture, forced labor, arbitrary executions, and forced relocation for many years. Because of oppression by military and ethnic armed forces for decades, society in Myanmar has been divided. As a consequence, communication and interaction has been ended and hatred, fear and intolerances have been adopted. Later, mistrust and misunderstanding between various religious and ethnic groups become increased. Religious discrimination, Muslims people is the most vulnerable and they face negative stereotypes and exclusion from society. They have limited access to better

education and employment opportunities. As a result, negative perceptions to others have internalized in their mind.

After 2010 General Election, the newly civilian government led by President Thein Sein took the office and ruled the country starting from April 2011. Under his regime, a series of democratic reforms such as political, social, economic and administrative are happening. In reforming stages, Myanmar president met democracy leader including Daw Aung Sann Su Kyi and members of political parties. Then, hundreds of political prisoners were released in his regimes. As other democratic reforms, press and media censorship has been terminated and people have rights to peaceful assembly.

The new government has made relationships with Western and European countries which had been cut more than 20 years ago. As a result, Myanmar has new opportunities that will be a great help in the transition period. For instance, the European Union has lifted the sanctions on Myanmar because of positive changes and remarkable reforms. Moreover the Asian Development Bank and World Bank had recently resumed giving loans to Myanmar for development projects and building infrastructure. In addition, the government have made closer relationships than before with neighboring countries as well as ASEAN countries to work on economic cooperation within the region. Whilst trying to get back the good image of Myanmar all over the world, conflicts between minority ethnic and majority population have

erupted and violence between Buddhist and Muslim based on discrimination are becoming barriers on the way to democracy.

In transitional period starting from 2011, major changes which are positive and visible are performed by the new government. At the same time, conflicts based on issue of discrimination against minority religions and races are the challenges for the country. Starting from 2012, conflicts between Muslims and Buddhists occurred and spread across the country. Anti-Muslims violence particularly Rakhine in May 2012, Meikhtila in March, 2013 led by Buddhists make more tensions between both societies of Buddhist and Muslims. This threatens to political stability and becomes obstacles in Myanmar transition.

Concerning with the issue of religious discrimination, the role of civil society organizations is crucial and took actions to give aids the violence victims. Because of violence, lives of local people were lost and their properties were destroyed. This made them more desperate and vulnerable. The civil society organizations gave assistance to local people and their quick response eases the pain of victims. This thesis, therefore, studied the 88 Generation Students Group and Paungku Consortium as case studies to examine their role in promoting non-discrimination issue.

As one of Myanmar civil society organizations, the *88 Generation Students Group* will be used as a case study. This group can be called a social movement organization because it attempts to mobilize people to exercise their human rights



and also to promote democracy at a national level. The 88 Generation Students Group was founded in 2005 by the former students who participated in the 88 uprising and were released from prison in 2004-2005. The main aims of this group are to mobilize people through providing political awareness and allowing alternative voices to be heard. Moreover, it also attempts to persuade the government to make political changes and democratic reforms in Myanmar through nationwide demonstrations. They have used different strategies to restore and promote democracy. This group has activated and organized people to counter the tensions between government and people at the grassroots level. They stand for the average citizen to be treated fairly and equally regardless their race and religions. The demonstrations and campaigns led by this group aim for ensuring democratic values are known and used, as well as awareness of fundamental human rights. In guaranteeing basic freedoms, this group seems to empower the minority population so that they have their rights in term of freedom of religion and thought.

Paungku Consortium will also be used as a case study. It was founded in 2007 just one year before Nargis Cyclone hit Myanmar in May 2008. Three years after its establishment, Paungku has now worked with more than 500 local groups and its initiative has affected over five hundred thousand beneficiaries. Moreover, Paungku is able to support over one hundred local organizations with capacity building. The main purpose of this group is to strengthen Myanmar civil society organizations

through innovation(Paungku, 2011). Similar to the 88 Generation Students Group, Paungku Consortium is promoting and ensuring democratic values through strengthening local organizations and community based organizations. Paungku also mobilizes people from the bottom up and helps their voices be heard. It provides awareness of knowledge as well as skills and mentoring services to local people.

Whether Myanmar reaches its goals of creating democratic society depends on the competence of the newly civilian government, the political parties, the participating role of civil society organizations and the people themselves. Until now there is no specific study about how civil societies ensure non-discrimination values are promoted within society under the new civilian government. To gap this knowledge, the paper reviewed whether the activities by selected organizations and their awareness to issues of discrimination are adequate and effective to cope with religious violence and promote non-discrimination especially religious tolerance within the diverse societies of Myanmar during this transitional period.

## 1.2 Research Questions

1. How do civil society organizations respond to religious discrimination in Myanmar?
2. How effective are civil society organizations' response to religious discrimination in Myanmar's transitional period?

## 1.3 Research Objectives

1. To explore the response of civil society organizations toward religious discrimination in Myanmar.
2. To examine the effectiveness of response by civil society organizations to religious discrimination in Myanmar's transitional period.

## 1.4 Research Hypotheses

In the case of issue of discrimination, if civil society organizations in Myanmar including the selected organizations are strong and robust enough, they can cope with conflicts and violence based on religious discrimination. They can solve the root causes of sectarian violence and make people relieve if they have awareness of discrimination problems against minority religion.

## 1.5 Research Methodology

This research is a qualitative method and conducted through a documentary research method approach and field work which is done in Yangon, Myanmar. As

documentary study, this research used both primary and secondary data and organizational reports to assess. As the fieldwork, the researcher did in-depth interviews and semi-structured interviews with leaders and members of the selected organizations and others from civil society organizations, Muslims and Buddhists societies in order to explore the perceptions of selected organizations regarding the discrimination issue.

### **1.5.1 Documentary Research**

For documentation, secondary data about the civil society organizations which are promoting values of democracy and internal reports by organizations related to the research are collected through; library documents, Chula online database, workshops, seminars, conferences, internet, media and civil society networks. The sources of secondary data are come in the form of books, academic and policy research papers, journal and newspaper articles, electronic data and a variety of reports and documents of governmental, non-governmental organizations, United Nations (UN) agencies and external and internal reports by civil society organizations regarding ensuring democratic values and the concept of fundamental human rights. The documentary research assessed both progress and annual reports published and not been published about selected civil society organizations and their involvement in political activities under the dictatorship regime and the new civilian government in Myanmar. In addition internal reports, newspaper articles and

news clippings of the two selected organizations in Myanmar language were used. Speeches of the founders and leaders of the selected organizations and Myanmar civil societies have also been used for documentation.

### **1.5.2 Field Research (Case Study)**

For this research, the 88 Generation Students Group and Paungku Consortium have been selected as case studies of civil society organizations with activities of mobilizing and empowering people, and improving the capacity of communities for promoting democratic values.

The reason why the 88 Generation Students Group and Paungku Consortium were chosen as a case study is mentioned below. The 88 generation students group is a well-known civil society organization, not only in Myanmar but all over the world. This organization was created by the former students who participated in the 1988 democracy protest. Apart from '88 protests, they carried out a number of other protests ranging from advocacy campaigns to organizing huge marches against government. Their actions aim to create political reforms leading to democracy and political development in Myanmar. Similarly, members of the Paungku consortium are also from the generation of the '88 uprising. Paungku was established in 2007 by a consortium of international and local agencies in Myanmar including some former members of '88 generation group. It aims to create democratic space through the

capacity building of Myanmar's civil society groups, facilitating networking within CSOs and enhancing advocacy between civil society and policy actors.

These two organizations are prominent figures among civil societies in Myanmar in term of their enthusiasm and involvement in the democratization and democratic reforms. Actually, they mainly focus on political and economic democracy and social and environmental justice rather than cultural democracy. On the other hand, conflicts based on tensions between diverse societies took place in Myanmar and led to violence which affected the whole society. Thus, the researcher chose them to find out their contributions to release the violence affected people and mechanisms to resolve the problems in the case of violence against minorities.

For the case study, selected organizations are explored more concerning the issue of non-discrimination. The attitudes and actions of the organization regarding the religious conflicts and anti-Muslim violence were investigated intensely. In the case study, in-depth interviews and semi-structured interviews based on structured questions were conducted with the leaders and members of these two organizations to answer the central research questions and to reach the objectives of research.

### **1.5.3 Data Analysis**

This research was conducted by using primary and secondary data through reviewing literature, doing in-depth interviews and semi-structured interviews and

non-participants observation on the study of civil societies involved in democratic process. Resource triangulation was used in analysis of collecting data.

#### 1.5.4 Data Collecting Techniques

##### *i) In-depth Interview*

The researcher conducted in-depth interviews to get more important data from key informant persons. Through in-depth interviews, significant activities and events done by selected organizations which are not mentioned in secondary data could be added. The researcher did in-depth interviews with two leaders from the 88 Generation Students Group and one leader from Paungku Consortium. Due to in-depth interviews, more detail information related to research as well as personal perceptions on topic were collected.

##### *ii) Semi-structured Interview*

For semi-structured interviews, the researcher conducted interviews with people from civil societies and both main religious groups; Muslims and Buddhists. Semi-structured interviews were also carried out with eight members from each selected organization. In addition, a number of interviews were done with two journalists from media, ten people from main

religions in particular Muslims, Buddhist and four from academic field in Myanmar.

### *iii) Non- Participant Observation*

The researcher conducted non-participant observation during fieldwork to collect primary data of selected civil society organizations. The researcher listened and observed the activities and events being done by selected groups during field visits. By doing non- participant observation, the researcher can learn and get more information about the topic and activities that may not have been included in interviews.

#### **1.5.5 Analyzing Technique**

To analyze the data, the researcher undertook four steps. Firstly, data and information related to research topic were collected through literature and documentation and by in-depth and semi-structured interviews. Secondly, data that address the research questions were selected. Then, the researcher analyzed data with the concept and research framework. Finally, analyze data was presented in the forms of analysis review.

#### **1.5.6 Validity and Reliability**

In this research, triangulation method is used to make sure that the data collected is valid and reliable. *“Triangulation method is a data checking method, by*



*using several data collecting methods in one research.” (Baker, 1992:24)* When conducting this research, the following steps have been taken for ensuring validity and reliability with triangulation method;

- Compare data from observation with that from interviews.
- Compare data obtained from primary and secondary sources.
- Compare the perspective of the key persons from selected organizations with different opinions of professionals and ordinary citizens.

*Table 1: Means of data collecting and list of interviewees*

Technique	Data collected	Resource/ Interviewees
<b>Documentary Research</b>	Secondary data of the selected civil society organizations which are promoting values of democracy and internal reports by organizations related to the research	Books, academic and policy research paper, journal and annual reports, progress reports, internal reports, newspaper articles and news clipping of two selected organizations.
<b>Field Research (Case Study)</b>	A comprehensive description and explanation on the various aspects of an organization focusing on non-discrimination	Two selected organization (the 88 Generation Students Group and Paungku Consortium)

<p><b>In-depth Interviews</b></p>	<p>First hand data from key persons of selected organization related to the topic.</p> <p>The attitudes and actions of selected organizations which are not included in secondary data upon discrimination issues.</p>	<p>Key persons of two selected organizations</p> <p>(2 leaders from the 88 Generation Students Group)</p> <p>(1 leader from Paungku Consortium )</p>
<p><b>Semi-structured Interviews</b></p>	<p>The outlook of opinion on the role of civil society organizations in fostering core values of non-discrimination, views about the activities of selected civil society organizations in responding to religious violence, and perceptions against minority religions and races.</p>	<p>(4 members from 88 Generation Students Group)</p> <p>(4 members from Paungku Network Group)</p> <p>(4 people from academic field)</p> <p>(2 people from media)</p> <p>(4 people from Buddhist group)</p> <p>(4 people from Muslims group)</p> <p>(2 people from other religions)</p>
<p><b>Non-Participant Observation</b></p>	<p>Primary data of selected civil society organizations</p>	<p>Meetings and activities organized by selected organizations.</p>

## 1.6 Limitations

There are many civil society organizations in Myanmar including international and local non-governmental organizations. The researcher chose the two selected organizations, the 88 Generation Students Group and Paungku Consortium, for case studies primarily because both are involved with promotion of non-discrimination between religions. There were time constraints during fieldwork but both organizations head offices are situated in Yangon which made it possible to conduct a number of interviews in same area within a short amount of time for field study. In this study, the researcher analyzed only the attitudes of non-discrimination values by selected organizations and how their activities responded to the issues of religious violence even though the organizations' range of activities is larger.

## 1.7 Significance of Research

The overall purpose of this study is to find out the way of responding to religious discrimination and effectiveness of their response to the people. The findings of this study can contribute to the understanding of the space and ability of civil societies to assist communities, organizations and the new government body.

In the issue of conflicts based on diverse religions, the ability and resources of civil society organizations are the most useful device to address the major problems. It is natural that conflicts can be broke out at any time in the place where diverse

people are living with suspension in same place. However, if Myanmar civil society organizations are strong and wise enough to build a bridge between diverse society, CSOs could be a mechanism to reduce hatred and make much more interaction between them so that discrimination against minority will be lessen.

A previous study of civil society organizations about democratization and civil society organizations in Myanmar has been recently done by researchers to examine how civil society organizations create democratic space under authoritarian regime. But this study is significant to civil society organizations particularly the 88 Generation Students Group and Paungku organizations as a case study which they have similar focuses on democratization and country reforms through different ways as well as members and founders participated in the 1988 uprising. This study analyzed the responses of civil society organizations to the issue of discrimination and promoting values of non-discrimination.

Recommendations made by this study can be used to empower and develop the space of civil societies in a political setting, as well as enhance the capacity of their actions and expand their reach. Because of constraints by the government, previous studies were conducted under controlled environments and it is difficult to critique or publicize the findings during the time of dictatorship. However nowadays, in terms of economic, political and administrative reforms, the new government

body is more approachable and accessible to discuss and negotiate in order to make positive changes.

## **1.8 Ethical Issues**

Before and during this research, ethical issues must be carefully considered since this research is a political issue and still sensitive to some extent. Nowadays political issues are being discussed more openly in the public sphere in Myanmar but some people are still terrified to express their opinions concerning politics since they were under control of dictatorship over a decade. This research included the personal experience of leaders and their participation in democratic movements against by military government in the 1980s. In consideration of human security and dignity, the researcher informed interviewees before conducting interviews to get their consent and permission. Only when they agreed to take interviewees, the researcher arranged interview sessions with them. Due to security issues, some of the names of interviewees did not mention in the research unless they are willing to publicize their real names. Instead of their names, pseudonyms are used. Besides, the questions used in the interview sections have been carefully considered so that they were not affecting the self-image of interviewees. Security of data and sources would be kept in safe if needed.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Introduction

Upon a review of literature including book chapters, articles and reports, this chapter will summarize the concept of democracy, democratic values of non-discrimination and democratization. There are a number of democratic concepts highlighted through a range of literature review. To narrow down the research area, the researcher focuses on the relationship of the civil society and democratization. In order to frame the research, the values of democratic, particularly non-discrimination, values are emphasized and the institutions, particularly civil society organizations which are ensuring them, are discussed. By reviewing a variety of literature, guided theories and concepts from literature related to this study, a framework to support the development of research is created.

#### 2.2 Defining Democracy

The term democracy first appeared in the political thought of ancient Greece. Many differing definitions of democracy have been existence since the ancient Greek period. The word democracy originates from Greek. In the speech of Abraham Lincoln in 1863, he stated that “*democracy is a government of the people, by the people, for the people*”(Hannan, 2013).

All the people can create their fortune, they can make decisions for their lives. They have rights to personal freedom and no one can control them. They also have rights to vote without restrictions in free and fair elections. They are allowed to raise their voice and exercise their rights to direct participation or indirect participation by electing representatives in the policy making process.

According to Pogge (2002),

*“Democracy means that political power is authorized and controlled by the people over whom it is exercised and this in such a way as to give these people roughly equal political influence”*(Pogge, 2002, p. 146).

As Pogge says, the concept of democracy that is understood is that people have power in the political process and this power is equally allocated among all people. All people should have equal participation in election and voting; all should be involved in administration, legislation, judiciary and decision making process; all should possess freedom and liberty in a democratic system.

### **2.3 A Core Value of Democracy**

In discussion of democratization, democratic values have to be considered. There are a number of democratic values, specifically free and fair elections, equality of citizenship, diversity and plurality, and guaranteeing basic freedoms (fundamental



human rights). In this study the core value of fundamental human rights in democracy is discussed.

### 2.3.1 Guaranteeing Basic Freedoms (Fundamental Human Rights)

At the world conference on Human Rights, the relations between human rights and democracy were said to be *“interdependent and mutually reinforcing”*(Beetham & Boyle, 1996, p. 84). According to this concept, we cannot separate democracy and human rights because they are intertwined. To ensure democracy and for it to function properly, fundamental human rights and basic freedoms are necessary. According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article 21, *“the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government”* (Assembly UN General, 1948). And according to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,

*“Every citizen should have the right to take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or indirectly through chosen representatives, to vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections and to have access on general terms of equality to public office”*(OHCHR, 2012b) .

As mentioned above, democracy assures the basic freedoms or fundamental human rights such as freedom of thought and conscience, freedom of speech and expression, freedom of information and freedom of assembly and association. In

terms of freedom of thought and conscience, every individual from both majority and minority communities have equal rights and can hold different beliefs and religions. In a democratic system, every citizen has the freedom of speech meaning that individuals have a right of equal say. It was also echoed by Beetham and Boyle (1996) that every individual should have the right to get access to unlimited information via media and to express their view and have the right to get access to unlimited information via media and to express their view. In a democracy, every citizen has access to genuine information and documentation of the government actions through mass media. Moreover, people have rights to form associations and discuss public affairs and voice opinions in the democratic system.

*i) Values of Non-Discrimination*

Under the values of democracy, non-discrimination is one of the values that should be considered and promoted in a society during democratic transition. Generally, discrimination can be defined as an unequal treatment to individual or groups and it happens when a person is treated arbitrarily or differently. For example, someone who is treated worse than others for arbitrary reasons such as race, color, ethnicity, age, gender, religion and so on. Generally, discrimination can be categorized and there are a number of types; age discrimination, caste discrimination, disability discrimination, employment discrimination, language discrimination, racial or ethnic discrimination, religious discrimination and sex or gender discrimination.

According to United Nations (2013), *“Discriminatory behaviors take many forms, but they all involve some form of exclusion or rejection”* (United Nations, 2013).

In accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article 2,

*“Everyone is entitled to all rights and freedoms regardless of race, color, sex, religion language. No distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory”* (Assembly UN General, 1948).

Also, concerning with freedom of religion and against discrimination, as in International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights Article 26,

*“All persons are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law. The law shall be guarantee to all people’s equal and effective protection against discrimination on any ground such as race, color, sex, religion, etc”* (OHCHR, 2012b).

As article 27, *“even minorities shall have the rights to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion and use their own language”* (OHCHR, 2012b).

According to Article 1 of International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination,

*“Racial discrimination shall mean any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, color, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life”*(OHCHR, 2012a).

Furthermore, according to article 348, Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar (2008), *“The Union shall not discriminate any citizen of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, based on race, birth, religion, official position, status, culture, sex and wealth”*(Myanmar Constitution, 2008). As stated by International convention and Myanmar Constitution, it seems that non-discrimination values are being taken into consideration and promoted.

Among different forms of discriminatory types, discrimination on the basis of religion occurs when a person or group is treated differently based on their beliefs. In other words, religious discrimination is valuing people in a different way because of their feelings towards a given religion. Everyone should be entitled to freedom of religion. People should have religious freedom whether they hold certain beliefs or even none. Religious discrimination occurs when someone is treated unequally in education and employment in term of their religions. (Klenowski, 2011)

## 2.4 Discrimination and Types of Discriminatory Practices

Feagin (1989) stated that discrimination as

*“Actions carried out by members of dominant groups, or their representatives that have a differential and harmful impacts on members of subordinate groups” (Feagin, 1989, p. 14).*

Feagin suggests that discriminatory practice can be categorized as four types of intentional and unintentional actions such as *“isolated discrimination, small group discrimination, direct institutionalized discrimination and indirect institutionalized discrimination”* (Feagin, 1989).

## 2.5 Civil Society Organizations

Civil society is defined in many words by different people around the world. Paungku tends to draw on the standard international understanding of civil society as the space between government and private sectors; in other words, civil society as a *“third sector”* in society (Paungku, 2009). Salamon and Anheier (1999) see as civil society is *“the third sector”* while the government is the first and business the second (Salamon & Anheier, 1999) . Civil society as a third sector will serve for all citizens not being influenced by powerful political actors and wealthy businessmen in society.

When we discuss civil society, we have to include the value of civil society in our argument. *“The values of civil society are those of political participation, state accountability and publicity of politics”*(Chandhoke, 1995, p. 9). According to this statement, civil society is the only institution which can raise people’s participation in politics and is able to check the work of the state and government in order to publicize accountability to all citizens.

Civil society is the crucial arena in the process of democratization and creating a public sphere in which political dialogue is made and people voice can be heard.

*“A quiet and acquiescent civil society gives rise to an authoritarian state, and an active and vibrant civil society ensures a responsive and democratic state”*(Chandhoke, 1995, p. 75).

It means that the more strong and active civil society agents within the state, the faster the political reforms develop and a democratic state emerges.

## 2.6 Democratization and Political Reform in Myanmar

A process in which everyone is equally involved and helps to make decisions is democratic process. According to Wright (1996), *“democratization is the transition to a more democratic political regime”* (Wright, 1996, p. 9). Civil society, NGOs and political parties are important for democratization because they empower the

people to participate in politics. Moreover, civil society creates social networks that build peoples trust and trust is a must in democratic institutions.

Civil society organizations are organizations outside the governmental or business sphere who work to make changes to society, in the case of Myanmar assist in the change from an authoritarian regime to democratic government by way of debate, demonstration and campaigns. Involvement of civil society in the democratic process began in Eastern Europe and Latin America in the 1980s. Civil society contributed actively to change the dictatorship regime in Eastern and Central Europe in late 1980s and early 1990s. On the whole, civil society plays an important role in strengthening people's capacity, improving the quality of governance, organizing democratization and fostering democracy.

### **2.6.1 The Role of Civil Society Organizations in Myanmar Democratic Reforms**

There has been a dramatic expansion in the size, scope, and capacity of civil society around the globe over the past decade, aided by the process of globalization and the expansion of democratic governance, telecommunications, and economic integration. In Myanmar history, civil society organizations have existed as the form of traditional organizations. The role of monasteries cannot be ignored when talking about the civil society. Since there are monasteries in villages all around country, and the majority of people are Buddhist, they gather in the monastery not only to do meritorious deeds and religious activities but also to support the monastery and

discuss village welfare activities. Small groups have been founded to undertake different kinds of social activities led by monks. However, social and religious groups are limited in their activities and they are somewhat under the control of the monarchy system. Moreover, in colonial time the British government controlled and restrained civil society and there were controls on freedom of association and movement showing that the British wanted to control and halt the growth of civil society.

After independence many civil society organizations emerged in urban areas, such as students unions and professional associations. In that period, a number of civil society organizations were forming at a faster rate than before. When the country was ruled by socialist government in 1962, there was little existence of civil society because of government control since the 1988 uprising. Despite being under military government civil society organizations started to emerge, although the government had tried to control over them for more than two decades.

After Nargis Cyclone hit in Myanmar in 2008, the amount of new NGOs doing humanitarian projects in the cyclone affected areas is remarkable. Their activities were approved by the government but they were still being monitored and restricted. Civil society organizations were allowed to implement their humanitarian work and development projects in the permitted areas, but political campaigns and democratic movements led by political parties and opposition groups were



restrained. Anyway, civil society organizations in Myanmar could have been developed in term of quantity and quality. As of Fukuyama (2012), *“the resilience of civil society in Myanmar is remarkable, despite all the years of political repression”*(Fukuyama, 2012). Nonetheless, when looking at established civil society organizations today, the role of civil society organizations and scope of their actions have been significant. Since 2008 Nargis cyclone hit Myanmar, the role of civil society become vital in developmental sector.

The president met with many Myanmar civil society groups and community based organizations in 2012 and made plans to cooperate with civil society in development projects. Civic and peace education programs can now be provided to citizens all around country. Pro-democracy movements by using peaceful strategies are no longer fully controlled or banned under the regime of government. Civil societies are now likely to have more opportunity to participate in the political development tasks in transition period. There are more reforms and openness within the period of the current government.

Political reforms are only one part of democratic reforms, along with economic and administrative reforms. In Myanmar, a series of political reforms started in November 2010 when a military-backed civilian government took the place of the dictatorship rulers. The main military backed party, called the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), won the first election in 20 years. The leader of

USDP, U Thein Sein became president in the newly civilian government when the military juntas transferred full power to a new government. This was the transition period in Myanmar's political sphere. Five days after holding a general election on 7 November 2010, the leader of the National League for Democracy (NLD), Aung San Su Kyi was released from house detention of more than 20 years. After her release, there was a series of consecutive and successive political dialogues with President Thein Sein. On May 2011, thousands of prisoners were set free but among them only a few political prisoners. However in October, a second round of releases occurred under a general amnesty freeing more than 200 political prisoners.

According to the election law, ex-prisoners cannot be members of registered political parties. However in January 2012, as one of remarkable reforms, the government erased the clause in a parliamentary section and amended political party registration law and election law. After this amendment, the National League for Democracy led by Daw Aung Su Kyi registered for the by-election. As another remarkable reform, the government released the most prominent political prisoners including the activists of 88 generation students and also those from ethnic groups and monks who participated in the 2007 saffron revolution. In the by-election of April 2012, NLD won by a landslide 41 out of 44 of the contested seats. As a result of the reforms, ASEAN approved Myanmar's submission for the chairmanship in 2014;

Japan restarted sending aid; US-Myanmar ties were restored at the diplomatic level after a visit from the US president and secretary of State.

For democratic reforms including political, social and economic to be able to take place, civil society groups are needed to engage with government. Without the initiative and efforts of the civil society groups, series of reforms mentioned above could not have been occurring.

### **2.6.2 The Role of Myanmar CSOs in Promoting Non-Discrimination Value of Religion**

Civil society organizations in Myanmar have been actors in the democratization process during different regimes. They have been promoting values of democracy including free and fair elections, equality of citizenship, and pluralism under different periods of rule and through institutions like them many human rights violations in society could have been prevented. Through their technical support and assistance to communities, the voice of individuals and minority populations can be heard and people are able to participate in the process of electoral and policy making.

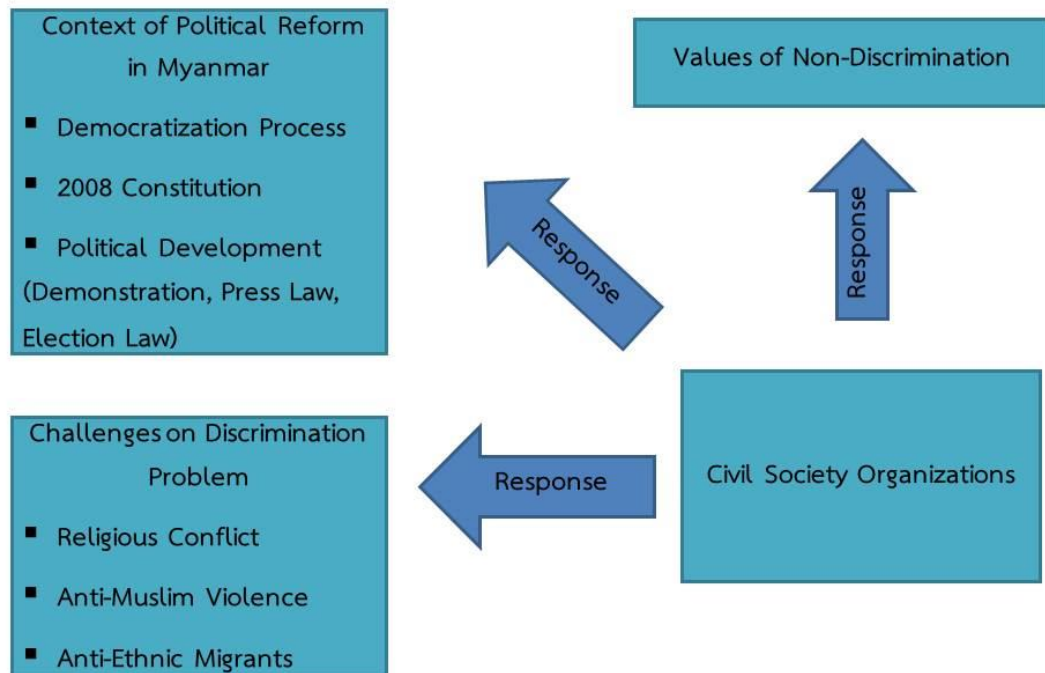
Civil society organizations condemn any forms of discrimination against religion, race, ethnic and nationality etc. In the Myanmar context, they not only provide humanitarian assistance to the victims of natural disasters but also help the

vulnerable people who have been affected by the violence between different ethnic groups. In the case of Meiktila and Arakan in recent years, civil society organizations have delivered food, clothing and housing material to victims of the anti-Muslim violence regardless of race or religion.

Moreover, in attempt to avoid ethnic and religious clashes, civil society organizations have made plans and conducted activities such as trainings and interfaith dialogues in which people from diverse ethnic groups and religion participated. Due to these activities, traditional thought, hatred and stigmas between majority and minority of religious groups have been changed or lessened and people can work toward a more peaceful community. Civil society organizations are able to cope with issues of discrimination regarding race or religion within their capacities. In this study, the 88 Generation Group and Paungku Consortium are being used as case studies for promoting non-discrimination values particularly in religion.

## 2.7 Conceptual Framework

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



After a literature review, and based on theories and concepts of different scholars regarding the values of democracy, this framework was structured using democratic core values such as free and fair election, pluralism, equality of citizenship and fundamental human rights. In the democratization process and transition to democracy, the above values are taken into consideration, perceived and promoted by civil society organizations. Among these core values, guaranteeing fundamental human rights main focus in this framework. Under fundamental human rights, non-discrimination is a core value to be considered in the process of

democratization. In this framework, the notion of non-discrimination based on human rights is used in the Myanmar context of discrimination issues.

Currently, the main visible challenges of Myanmar's transition period are the conflicts between majority and minority ethnic groups of Buddhists and Muslims population. In the case of Myanmar, the main drivers of ethnic conflict and religious violence are hatred and bitterness and feelings deeply rooted in peoples outlooks for many years. In terms of racial and religious intolerance and unequal treatment to people of different religions, tensions between majority and minority populations have been increasing in Myanmar and discrimination problems are becoming more common in Myanmar.

Anti-Muslim campaigns and 969 propaganda organized by Buddhist monks and civilians have inflamed religious conflicts and increased anti-Muslim violence across the country. A number of violence events broke out in the western part of Myanmar and spread across the country. The violence toward Muslims can be categorized as a form of ethnic cleansing and is a serious threat in Myanmar's transitional period towards democracy that needs to be addressed immediately in order to continue the democratic process.

Pro-democracy civil society groups have participated and assisted the democratization process in Myanmar. They have also promoted the values of democracy (such as free and fair election, people participation in politics, alternative

voices of people, and basic freedoms for all people) and undertaken pro-democracy movements and fundamental human rights. They have attempted to show that basic freedoms should be guaranteed for all citizens no matter which religion they believe or what ethnicity they are. In this study, the researcher investigated pro-democracy civil society groups who supported the democratic reforms in Myanmar and considered values of non-discrimination as one of key democratic issues. This study analyzed the responses of two selected civil society groups in ensuring non-discrimination values based on effectiveness of their activities to the issues of religious discrimination of Myanmar. It aims to find out that the selected civil society organizations take account in the anti-Muslim violence and discrimination on the minority Muslim population and promote non-discrimination values in the case of the recent religious conflicts in Myanmar.

## CHAPTER III

### RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS AND DISCRIMINATION IN MYANMAR'S TRANSITION

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses a series of recent conflicts occurring in Myanmar arising from religious tension and tolerance. The causes and effect of religious conflicts and violence are also investigated. In this study the issue of discrimination by the military regime and newly civilian government against minority races and religion are reviewed. In second section of this chapter the perceptions of discrimination against minority religions are looked at. Civil society organizations including international and local NGOs, individuals from Buddhist and Muslim societies, academic scholars and commentators are recorded to analyze civil society's response to discrimination problems and what action they take. To collect further data and make an analysis on the perceptions of the public on the issue of discrimination, a number of interviews with people and key-informants from general civil societies, media and academic fields were conducted in June 2013 during field research in Myanmar.

#### 3.2 Conflicts between Buddhists and Muslims in Myanmar

Alongside the positive changes in Myanmar, conflicts among diverse groups have also been taking place. Some recent conflicts have proved to be deep rooted and difficult to resolve by local authorities and they have turned into violence and



spread across the country. The recent violence is religion driven between Muslims and Buddhists and is proving hard to solve.

First, the violent conflicts broke out in Rakhine state (Western Myanmar) in 2012. The ethnic groups living in Rakhine state are Rakhine, Thet, Daing-Net, Mro, Khamee, Kaman and Mramargyi. There is also an ethnic group called Rohingya but the government claims that they are not ethnical Burmese and so has renamed them “Bengali”(Physicians for Human Rights, 2013b). The religion, culture and traditional practices between the majority Rakhine ethnic group and minority Muslim Rohingya are very different. It is proving very difficult for people to accept the customs and religion of others and so there is a divide between religions, bitterness and imbedded thought that has been passed down from older generations. Many years on, it's causing conflicts and tension between them. Two serious incidents regarding religious conflict took place in Rakhine state in June and October 2012 (see below map of conflict areas). As a result, 192 people were killed, 265 got injured, over 8,000 houses were destroyed and an estimated 100,000 people have become internally displaced people (The Rakhine Inquiry Commission, 2013).

Second, in March 2013, violence occurred again this time in Meikhtila, (which is situated in central Myanmar, Mandalay division) after an argument at a gold shop and the murder of a Buddhist monk in town. It spread to other parts of Mandalay division as well as Bago division (see below map of conflict areas). Buddhist people

in the area set fire to around 1,500 houses, more than a dozen of mosques were destroyed and over 100 Muslims were killed. The violence displaced more than 12000 people and about 8400 affected people by violence were still in camp until April 2013 (Physicians for Human Rights, 2013a). Religious violence started from these areas has been spread to throughout the country in term of anti-Muslim propaganda by Buddhist monks and Buddhist population.

Third, in April, only a month later, another violent conflict broke out in Oakkan, Bago division (see below map of conflict areas) starting with an accident after a Muslim girl on a bicycle hit a Buddhist monk and knocked over his alms bowl. Some Buddhists were outraged and in return around 400 people armed with bricks and sticks attacked mosques and burnt down more than 100 houses and shops in town. Another 77 houses from nearby villages were destroyed. Because of the riots, two people were killed and about ten people injured.

Fourth, on 29th May, another violence conflict broke out in Lashio, Shan State near the border of China (see below map of conflict areas). A group of older Muslim men poured petrol and set fire to a young Buddhist woman over an argument. People saw this as a religious attack which led to Buddhist mobs attacking Muslims and setting mosques on fire. Violence continued with fights resulting in another Muslim person died. Muslims became afraid and approximately 1,400 people took shelter from the riots in a Buddhist monastery. The last conflict discussed took

place in August 2013 in Kantbalu, Sagaing Division due to an attempted rape of Buddhist woman by Muslim men. It outraged the Buddhist population and they turned aggressive against the Muslim population in the area, burning down mosques and businesses owned by Muslims. About 44 houses and 15 shops were destroyed during the riots and two people were injured.

Fifth, very recently, in the first week of October 2013, another clash occurred in Thabyuchaing, only 20 kilometers from Thandwe, Rakhine state. This was on the second day of the President's visit to Rakhine state. According to news reports, Rakhine Buddhists armed with swords took to the streets and destroyed the properties of Muslims in that area and affected Muslim's local livelihood. According to the case report, a Muslim woman aged 94 was died from stab wounds by the Buddhist mob while four Muslims people died in the conflicts and around 80 houses were burned down. All of the violent conflicts can be seen from conflict map below.

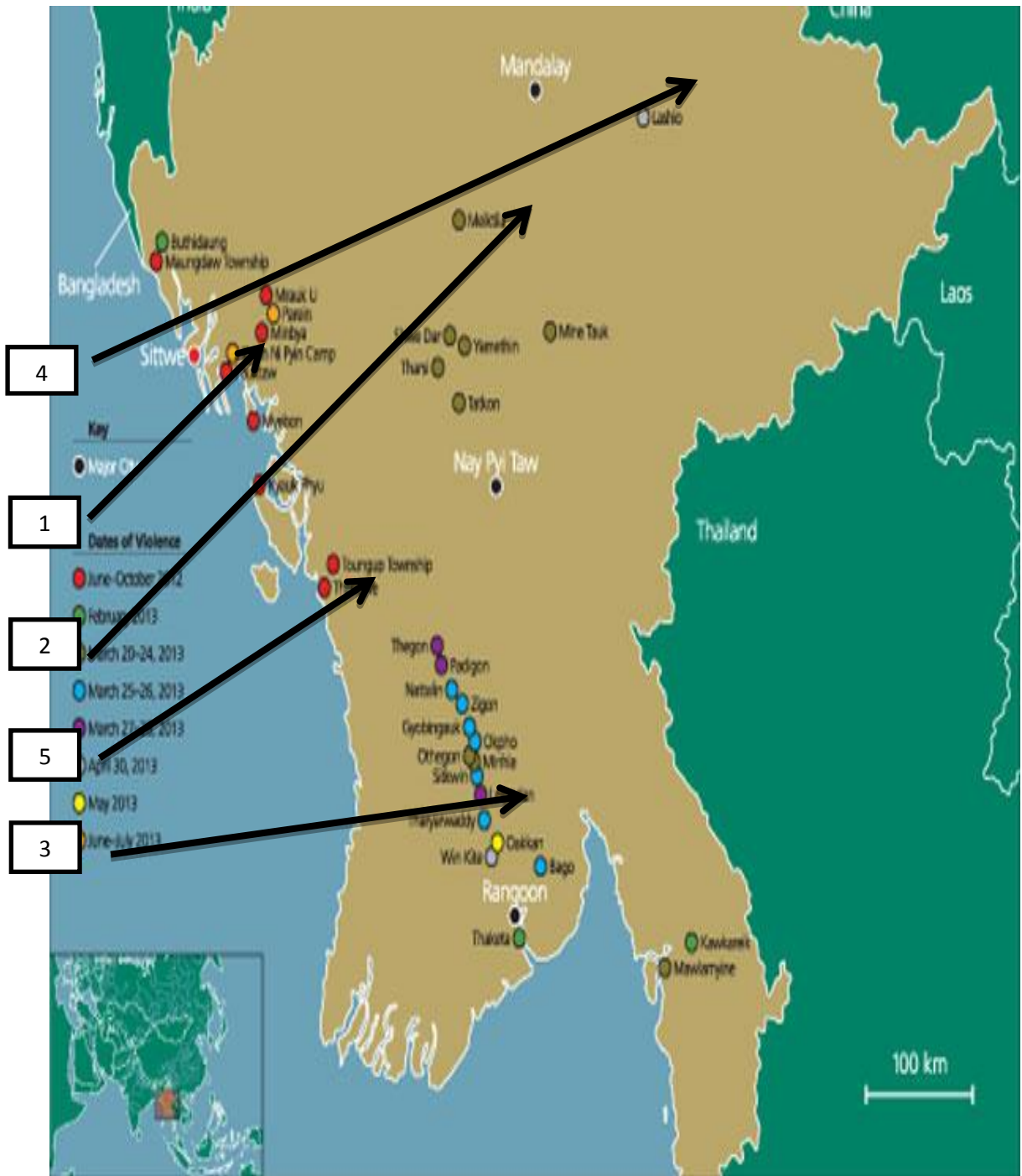


Figure 2: Map of conflicts areas in Myanmar (2012-2013)

Source

from:

[https://s3.amazonaws.com/PHR\\_other/PHR\\_Burma\\_Violence\\_Map\\_Aug%202013.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/PHR_other/PHR_Burma_Violence_Map_Aug%202013.pdf)

### 3.3 Causes and Effects of Religious Conflicts and Violence

Through the analysis of data and information from literature and research interviews, the researcher explores causes and effects of religious violence happening in Myanmar. From a number of interviews with key informants and stakeholders related to the research topic, the study found the following factors that caused religious violence.

#### 3.3.1 Animosity

According to my interview subjects, one of the causes that create conflict is animosity, and it is usually passed down through generations or embedded in different ethnic groups thought. “During the colonial period, the British intentionally used a “divide and rule” strategy in Myanmar so that majority and minority ethnicities lived separately with little or no interaction between them. Since that time, communication and collaboration between minority from upland and majority from inland had been broken because of divide and rule of British. It made suspicion and mistrust between diverse people.

*“In World War II, the British tried to defend their territory in Burma from the advancing Japanese army by recruiting local people and Muslims immigrants from Bangladesh giving them arms and founded vanguard forces” (Interviewee, June 2013).*

Actually, Muslims settled down in Myanmar since 13 century. They served as bodyguards for Myanmar kings and soldiers for army. Under King Anawrahta (1014-

1077) and King Bayinnaung (1516-1581) had Muslims guards (Zaw, 2012). Under King Mindon (1853-1878), he allowed Muslims and Christians to build their religious buildings of mosques and churches (Zaw, 2012). Muslims were recruited and preferred over Buddhists to assist the British army because of fears that Buddhists might cooperate with Japan and rebel against the British in their country. However, at this time the Muslim immigrants also drove out the indigenous Rakhine from Northern Rakhine state and border areas and destroyed their buildings. At the time most Rakhine people from the border area relocated to Sittwe, but to this day there is still animosity between the two religions.

### **3.3.2 Extremist Muslims and Buddhists**

If religion held such extreme views of other types of religion there would be a lot of trouble in the world. However religious tension in Myanmar is increasing because of the actions of some extremist Muslim and Buddhist people. Some Muslims in Myanmar are isolated and have no contact with non-muslim people, even in their own villages. Others wearing traditional outfits are as holding strong, or even extreme beliefs by local Buddhists.

In Buddhist society, some laymen and monks are also seen as having strong beliefs toward their religion that they even go against the fundamental beliefs of Buddhism by delivering hate speech. They try to maintain Buddha's teachings and practices through controversial ways. They organized 969 propaganda campaigns to

counteract a growing Muslim society. The number 969 represents the Three Gems (Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha) that are in the hearts of all Buddhists. 969 means 9 attributes of Lord Buddha's holy personality, 6 attributes of his teaching and 9 attributes of his disciples holy order of Monks. 969 movement is non-violent movement led by Myanmar Buddhists against Islamization in Myanmar.

Since the beginning of 2012, 969 movements were started and aim to protect and promote Buddhism. The Buddhists assume that Islam is threatening to Buddhism and life of Buddhists. Thus, it is a time to counteract Islam by unity of Buddhists. Buddhists boycotted business owned by Muslims and encouraged among Buddhists to do shopping only in the shops where 969 logos are displayed. Because of this logo and movement, suspension and mistrust are emerged between Muslims and Buddhists.

As of interviews mentioned in the article of the 969 movement and Burmese Anti-Muslim Nationalism in Context written by Nathan G. Thompon (Thompon, 2013), one of interviewee expressed that Buddhist and Muslims should not have interaction in doing business and they should be live separately.

A 969 leader and monk called Myanan Sayadaw U Thaddhamma explained the reason behind the 969 campaign during an interview by Irrawaddy Magazine. He stated that 969 logo is used for promoting the Buddhism among Buddhists. When

asked about encouraging Buddhists to only shop at Buddhist-owned business which seems like act of discrimination against Muslims, he replied that it is not discrimination against Muslims and just reminds Buddhists to give a help each other (Tha, 2013).

Because the 969 campaigns were led by a group of Buddhist monks it created much more tension between the two religions, and due to propaganda the tensions and conflicts between the two eventually lead to violence. One of the prominent leaders of this campaign is U Wirathu who promoted Buddhism as a form of nationalism. In Time Magazine, he was mentioned as a “Burmese Bin laden (terrorist)” because he is getting famous for delivering hate speeches to Buddhist society. He said that Myanmar Buddhists must be careful and unity because Muslims are evil (Beech, 2013).

These words were used in a speech in central Myanmar in 2013 during the time of religious conflicts across the country. Speeches and campaigns like this by ultra-fundamental Buddhist monks promoting Buddhism can be said to fan the flames of conflict and violence.

### **3.3.3 Weakness of Rule of Law’s Implementation**

It is not enough that law is written by a legislative body in parliament on paper; it is vital to enforce it on the ground also. Based on interviews and observations throughout this research study, to analyse why conflicts and violence



are occurring in Myanmar, the research found that rule of law is not strong enough to cope with the issues of immigration policy. Therefore, people who are living in neighbouring countries migrated to the western part of Myanmar a long time ago with most coming illegally. According to interview, illegal migrants paid bribes to government officials to allow them to settle and so a number of migrants have been increased significantly. Later, these migrants also moved to different areas of Myanmar including capital cities such as Yangon and Mandalay. From the perspective of Burmese Buddhists, they are illegal immigrants who may involve in unlawful business and should not be considered as citizens of Myanmar.

During the period of violence, it is assumed that Muslims had no assistance or protection from the authorities while they were vulnerable from the Buddhist mobs. In regards to the violence, the government is silent and has not provided any satisfactory response. Critics argue that the government has neglected to address the sectarian violence and affairs regarding the anti-Muslim movements. A report from Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) which conducted research in IDP camps of conflicts areas in 2013 includes an interview from a local community leader. According to interviewees, they did not get any help from the government and any protection from the police (Physicians for Human Rights, 2013b).

In comparison, a Buddhist monk named U Pantavunsa, a leader of the Saffron Monks Network rejected the 969 anti-Muslims movement. He complained about the different way of the government's officers in response to the rioters who destroyed

lives of Muslims comparing to the protestors who contested against Letpadaung copper mine project (Tha, 2013). In recent violence in Thandwe, Rakhine state, witnesses claimed that there are no attempts by armed forces in conflicts area to prevent the violence.

The above statements are evidence of the failure of government to take necessary actions to prevent or stop violence, as well as a weakness in the rule of law.

#### 3.3.4 Abuse of Social Media

Under the new government, as press and media censorship have been relaxed, news can be published freely. A higher percentage of the population also now has access to internet and online media, which is popular nowadays. Because of this, news and events around the country spread all over the world in a few minutes. Some interviewees of this study were disappointed that social media sites were abused and used to spread rumours, suspicion and hatred between Muslims and Buddhists which exaggerating the problems. One interviewee from the media field said that *“tensions and hatred are spread through social media (facebook) across the country and make religious intolerance”* (interviewee, June 2013). However another interviewee believed that the use of the internet has even more serious consequences:

*“The causes of spreading rumour are people who believe in everything easily and are narrow-minded. Also there are rumour*

*monger and fear spreaders. In some cases, it is said that strangers were initiated but some local villagers were joined with the groups for making conflicts. These conflicts are increased and spread because of threats”(Interviewee, June 2013).*

According to article named as *The Face of Buddhist Terror in* Time magazine issued in July 2013, it states that tensions and intolerance increased through post of facebook and conflicts and violence spread across region because of internet access even though it was happened within a particular area in Myanmar (Beech, 2013). As evidence of the above statement, a number of Buddhist Burmese working in Malaysia were killed by Muslims in 2013. This could be religious revenge by Malaysian Muslims attacks from Buddhist mobs earlier in Myanmar.

According to interviewees, the religious conflicts in Myanmar were spread not only by social media but also by national and international press.

*“Reporters and journalists can draw more attention of people rather than other ordinary people. Moreover, country can be destroyed with writings of reporters. So they must be careful. As journalists, they should be neutral and avoid extremism and write article/news exactly with no added information and exclude their private. As authors, they can offer own opinion but they should be careful not to provoke society” (Zeya Thu, The Voice Weekly, June 2013).*

In the age of technology, news are spread through press and online websites particularly social media (facebook) which people might have access to it easily today. In the case of anti-Muslims movement in Myanmar, people used facebook as a tool to spread news including rumors through online across country and even the world. This enhances hatred between two groups and makes more conflicts within society.

### **3.3.5 Human Insecurity and Vulnerability**

In the areas of conflict and violence human security is not guaranteed and recent religious clashes are a threat to human livelihood. In times of hardship because of violence, the most vulnerable victims are women and children since they are not as strong as men and cannot resist. Violence impacts on livelihood of people and so it makes human insecurity. Because of the riots in Rakhine state and Meikhtila, people from these areas, as well as other areas, no longer feel safe and live with fear and anxiety. There is no longer trust between people of different religions. Indirectly it has impacted on business and trading between people because of suspicion. Victims have suffered physical and mental pain.

According to The Rakhine Inquiry Commission (2013), all families from Rakhine and “Bengali” communities have suffered from fear, anxiety and feel unsafe starting from the outbreaks in violence. Attacks and communal violence increases parents’ level of concern about their children. Even people who are Kaman, an ethnic Rakhine indigenous group, who are Muslims also felt anxiety and vulnerability.

### 3.3.6 Trauma and Mental Pain

As a consequence of communal violence between the two religions, materials and property such as houses and religious buildings were destroyed but the violence also affected the attitude of younger generations from both sides.

According to interviewees from the Muslim side of society:

*“Muslims’ children might consider that they have been oppressed by Buddhist society. On the other side, Buddhist children were being moulded by elderly people that Muslims are those who should be far away from them. Moreover, they will think that Muslims should be died and mosques should be destroyed. Suspicion and doubt between two societies is growing and hatred will likely to continue generation by generation” (Dr. Hnin Aye Ko, Treasure Land Development Association, July 2013).*

In terms of sectarian violence, it is visible that Muslims lost their lives and property. But from the side of the Buddhists groups, they lost their dignity and the essence of Buddha’s teaching and doctrine with their actions. One interviewee who is

Muslim said:

*“Buddhism is noble and Buddhists have not being taught to maintain their religion in a way of destroying others’ religious buildings and killing people who are non-Buddhists. But the acts of Buddhists during religious violence made me amazed and irritated as Muslims. As a*

*result of spreading hate speech, no more trust between Buddhists and Muslims and interaction with each other and trading between two groups is almost ended” (Interviewee, June 2013).*

To conclude this section, the causes of conflicts and violence are coming from the factors discussed above. As long as the authorities and those responsible are not willing to address the root causes of problem, it seems difficult to diffuse the situation and end sectarian violence occurring in Myanmar.

### **3.4 Discrimination Problems in Myanmar**

#### **3.4.1 Discrimination against people by the Government**

Myanmar ruled by authoritarian regimes for over two decades. Throughout, all citizens were influenced and suppressed by the regimes. Regardless of ethnicity or group majority, all citizens were suffering the same problems and under the control of the regime. To maintain power the authorities at both national and local levels controlled the lives of all citizens in society. The only thing the regime was concerned about was maintaining their power and amassing wealth.

The interview sessions with leader and members of Paungku Consortium and Pray for Myanmar back up these new targets for discrimination and one member attributes the discriminatory practices to the government. He mentions that:

*“In regime of military, there was discrimination and suppression by authoritarian and put everything under their power. Currently,*

*Religion and ethnicity are the most common discrimination. As a Burmese, when visiting to ethnic groups; they think that Burmese are such people who discriminate against minority groups. No trust between Burmese and minority ethnic because of discrimination in term of religion and race by government and majority groups” (Dr. Kyaw Thu, Paungku Consortium, June 2013).*

It's complicated and the government's actions of issuing temporary national ID card to Rohingya to vote before election is questionable since there are still constraints for Muslim and Rohingya citizens regarding movement. One interviewee shared his own experience being Muslim:

*“As a Muslim, it is big difficult to get a Myanmar citizen card. Without this card, I faced challenges to attend graduation ceremony and receive certificate of my degree while I was graduated. Also, my aunt who had completed Bachelor of Commerce for many years did not get her certificate yet since she is a Muslims and has no identity card. I can speak Myanmar Language and have lived in Myanmar since I was born. Why is it hard to issue Myanmar identity card to Myanmar Muslim?” (Aung Naing Soe, Pray for Myanmar, June 2013)*

Lack of identity cards and a number of restrictions upon issuing them to Myanmar Muslims make it more difficult to continue their education at university and

in their daily lives. An interviewee points out that this type of discrimination is coming from the government.

The authoritarian regimes in Myanmar gave no special consideration to human rights, therefore human rights violations can be seen around country. Individual and opposition parties were punished and sent to prison if they criticised the regime. Under their rule there were many political prisoners who had commented on politics, the regime and its cruelty. The voice of people was suppressed by the dictators. Under the authoritarian regime the principle of non-discrimination was ignored and all people treated unequally and unfairly. In this case discrimination can be seen between the powerful and the powerless people in society. One interviewee said that:

*“There is discrimination against religion and race but actually discrimination on position (ranking) especially the ruler and the citizens are more. Discrimination is existence between rulers/ authorities/ soldiers and ordinary citizens especially from minority groups. Bullying by dictators or soldiers to citizens was existence for decades”*(Interviewee, June 2013).

According to interviewee during research interviews, he stated that *“Christian churches in Chin state had been destroyed with forces by the authorities in the early 1990s”* (interviewee, June 2013). This is one example how the government



used its power against minority groups and religions. In addition, discrimination against certain ethnicities also exists in the army. It is really difficult to reach a high rank in the Myanmar army for those from minority ethnic groups, even if they are qualified. The same discrimination toward minority ethnicities was also present in government offices.

During the military regime all citizens, no matter ethnicity or religion were facing the same situation. They encountered discrimination by the dominant groups especially the military government and powerful people with close relationships to the governing bodies. However the level of discrimination against minority ethnicities and religions (and especially so for the Rohingya) were higher in terms of more restrictions on their lives and livelihoods.

In the 2010 election the Union Solidarity and Development Council (USDP), also called the military backup party, won the election and a civilian government took the place of the former military regime. Whilst it looked like the dictatorship regime has turned civilian, the majority of the new governing body, including the president, were former military officials in the armed forces and part of the powerful dominant group under the former regime. However unlike the authoritarian regime, this new government is relaxing control on the country and no longer suppressing its citizens.

A series of political reforms were conducted and peace talks with ethnic armed groups were held to reduce social unrest. The repeated conflicts between

majority and minority religious groups and outbreaks of violence created a politically unstable situation. Although democratic changes are happening, it is questionable whether the new government will take non-discrimination values into account. As of yet the new government have largely ignored the conflicts and made no effort to stop the clashes or address the root causes. In the case of the Rohingya the government are openly discriminating against them with restrictions on travel, education, employment and family life. As of interviewee during reasearch interview session,

*“Muslims from outside Rakhine could not enter in area in Rakhine state where Muslims live and Muslims inside Rakhine cannot go beyond Rakhine. Moreover, a two-child policy is set up to control increasing rate of population.” (Khin Maryar Htwe, June 2013)*

Although Rohingya are not accepted as Myanmar citizens, temporary identity cards of “white cards”, were issued to Rohingya Muslims in the west of the country before the 2010 general election which allowed temporary cardholders to vote in the general election. Their votes were wanted to secure the Union Solidarity and Development Party win but their rights of citizenship are still denied under the new civilian government.

Under the regime of newly civilian government, conflicts between Buddhists and Muslims have been common. As a consequence, the Muslim minority is being discriminated against as the Buddhist majority are avoiding interactions and trades

with them. In accordance with the 2008 Myanmar Constitution no citizens should be discriminated in regardless of their religion, race, culture, or status but in reality, despite a newly civilian government, there has been no change to the discrimination faced by minority groups. Discrimination is still visible especially after the conflicts between Buddhist and Muslims. The government itself used the word of “Kalar” which refers to Muslims in state-owned media while broadcasting news about a rape case committed by a group of Muslim men. In the time of conflict, security for the victims of violence and Muslim households is not guaranteed and their lives are marginalised. In an article of Myanmar Times Certo (2013) , a Rohingya Muslim stated that his brothers were lost in violence but there was no investigation by the police.

Discriminatory practices are the most visible in the army with ethnic minorities and religion (usually Muslims and Christians) unlikely to ever rise past the rank of Captain. It also shows that the government has no trust on minority ethnic and religious group members and believes they might be spies for the opposition. The most discriminated against minority group are the Rohingya in Northern Rakhine state. They are persecuted through restriction of movement, on marriage and births and rights to education by the government. Even if they want to go to nearby villages for work or trade permission is needed. Unless permission is granted, they are not allowed to leave their own village. To obtain a pass or permission, they usually need to pay but most people cannot afford it. This restriction prevents them to find work in another villages or towns for their livelihood. It is also impossible for Rohingya

(especially from Maungdaw and Buthidaung) to visit Sittwe or other big cities for further education, better employment and access to health care. Since Rohingya are restricted on marriage and birth they have to inform the authorities and ask permission for marriage by paying a bribe. Similarly, pregnant women have to register and Rohingya families have to pay money for new children. In 2004, over one hundred Rohingya university students could not take exams in capital, Sittwe because local authorities did not issue documents for travelling<sup>1</sup>.

To conclude, under the new civilian government the level of oppression to citizens is reducing but discrimination against minority populations and religions still exist. Anti-Muslim campaigns and religious violence are evidence that there is a still high level of discrimination in Myanmar society today.

### **3.4.2 Discrimination against Minority by the Society**

In Myanmar, non-Buddhists and non-Burmese ethnicities were discriminated against by the society. From the results of the interviews, there is discrimination toward religions other than Buddhism; for example, Muslims and Christians face discrimination in terms of education and employment in the country. It is also more difficult for people who hold the belief of Islam or Christianity to get identity cards, which is needed for university admission and applying for jobs.

*“According to my sister’s experience, when she applied for Myanmar citizenship identity card, she faced difficult because she*

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.thestateless.com/p/rohingya.html> (Retrieved 21 December, 2013)

*looks Muslim but actually she and her ancestors themselves are Myanmar (Burmese) Buddhists. Although she has submitted evidence and documents to township immigration officer and taken an oath, it took her several months to get citizenship card which is really needed to attend university for taking higher education” (Interviewee, June 2013).*

In terms of promotions at work, non-Buddhists and minority religions and ethnicities are almost never considered even if they are qualified:

“According to an interviewee during my research interview, she expressed that there is some companies in Myanmar which have decided not to appoint people who believe in Islam” (Khin Maryar Htwe, June 2013).

Discrimination against religion affects minority groups all the way through life, starting with education and continuing at work, especially in government employment.

As Muslims they also encounter difficulties to be promoted in work place particularly serving for country as army and civilian staffs. It is one of the significant discrimination practices which can be seen in Myanmar society. In accordance with another interviewee who is Muslim, he had suffered and discriminated in term of minority population among majority. He stated that

*“Buddhists have more opportunities in comparison with Muslims in term of discrimination. Also there is discrimination against ethnic minority. In government office, Muslims or Christian are unlikely to being promoted. If they want to get promotion, need to change their religions. At government school in Myanmar, Muslims students have being discriminated by classmates and teachers in competing with students who are Buddhists”*(Kyaw Nyi Soe, June 2013).

Overall, Muslims are discriminated against by majority group in taking education and workplace. They seem from subordinate group and are being treated as inferior. Generally, the perception of majority group is negative view to Muslims minority. The majority of Buddhists likely to avoid dealing with Muslims and later, relationship between two diverse societies become cold.

### **3.5 Civil Society Organizations’ Response to Religious Discrimination**

According to field study research, a number of people from Myanmar civil society organizations including individuals, people from media, academics and NGO staff were interviewed. The following sections will discuss how civil society organizations respond to religious discrimination. They will include civil society organizations’ perception, opinions and activities as follows.

### 3.5.1 Perceptions of Discrimination against Minority Religion from Civil Society's Perspectives

In Myanmar, minority religions, especially Muslims, are the most discriminated against groups and have been throughout history. They are discriminated against in education, work and day to day life but accept this as part of living in a Buddhist society. One Interviewee talks about her experience in childhood:

*“In 1961, the Prime Minister U Nu tried Buddhism as national religion of country. At that time, religious leaders and ethnic leaders opposed it and claimed that people must have right to believe in any religion freely and right to practice their culture. Actually, people are not only Buddhists but also those who believe in different religions such as Christians, Hindus, and Muslims and others in Myanmar. According to my own experience in school, I am the last as being Muslim whenever teachers make roll call of the students list in class. From the time on, I feel myself vulnerable for being Muslim. It is a kind of stereotype or prejudice”(May Pearl Thwe, June 2013).*

As well as discrimination in education and work, applying for national identity cards is also a problem. Non-Buddhists and people who do not fit the standard Burmese appearance face troubles when applying and need to show proof of Burmese ancestry .

The following statement is from university lecturer who believes in Islam, and feels that Muslims are facing difficulties in education and employment:

*“There is discrimination against minority in term of religion and race. All human is the same. If so, the government should not discriminate in making identity card because of being Muslim. One more thing is that there is discrimination against Muslims in taking education. Moreover, people who believe in Islam are difficult in applying an entrance for army officer training school in the regime of socialist. In my childhood, discrimination had been experienced in school. In the school celebrations, students are selected in term of their appearance and face. For instance, Muslims children are never chosen as representatives of class for the school fun fair or other school activities. There is discrimination not only in basic schools but in university as well” (Dr. Than Min Htike (Ph.D), Lecturer, University of West Yangon, June 2013).*

Similarly, Muslim children feel inferior to Buddhist children when attending government schools. One interviewee, who is Muslim, shares her experience of a public school:

*“I was discriminated against in government school when I was young. Even though I had registered at the beginning of school year, I am the*



*one from the last of student list because of Muslim. In the roll call of the class, the Buddhist students are first, then Christian, Hindu and Muslim in turn.” (English Language Teacher, June 2013)*

In this transition period, people are able to discuss human rights, discrimination issues in public that was not possible before. However there is still a lack of tolerance among Myanmar diverse society and discrimination is still occurring and not being addressed. An economist interviewed said the following:

*“Discrimination is very common because of democratic changes. In the military regime, no one dares to discuss and express but now it is open to discuss. There is discrimination in Myanmar society because of no tolerance, no democratic maturity and no appreciation on diversity” (Saya Khin Maung Nyo, June 2013).*

According to another interviewee during the field research, discrimination against minorities is not a new issue and has been in existence for decades:

*“In some society, women are more discriminated and so is minority ethnic and religion. Myanmar has been under dictatorship regimes in different names like Socialist Party, Communist Party and Military and central administration. In dictatorship regime, diversity is being under control and not favored. Under socialist system, equality is being*

*initiated but in reality inequality is still being seen. Under the military government, there is inequality and disaffection but no one dares to express their feelings because of all are under control and suppressed by dictators”(Saya Aung Naing Oo, June 2013).*

Although there is discrimination against almost all minority groups in Myanmar, the level of discrimination varies depending on which minority groups they belong to. An interviewee from Myanmar Peace Center stated that:

*“Burmese think that minority ethnics are not intelligent and strong because of stereotype; but they are considered so called brothers and sisters. Even they are minorities but they are not discriminated at same level. For example, Indian Muslims are subjected to more severe discrimination than those are from Shan Buddhist minority. It also depends on where certain people live and interaction. Discriminatory bias becomes less because of interaction between majority and minority ethnic and religion. But discrimination will be more apparent in isolated community because of lack of interaction. For instance, in Rakhine, there are more discriminatory practices and animosity than other places”(Dr. Min Zaw Oo, June 2013).*

In Myanmar, people who are dark skinned or look an Indian are discriminated against, even if they belong to the majority Buddhist group because people don't

know their origins. Some people do not want to have relationships with them and families forbid marriage because of their appearance.

The following statement about discrimination is from a research interview with a journalist:

*“Discrimination has negative sense. For example, the elderly is considered as useless one in term of their ability and energy. It is because of discrimination. But discrimination will be existence in offering job in term of quality of candidate. If someone is not qualified enough for a position, it is sure that he/she is not able to get it. About discrimination in Myanmar, some do not want to make relationship with people whose skin is black and look like Indian”*  
(Zeya Thu, *The Voice Weekly*, June 2013).

To summarize the main points of the interviews, it is apparent that all citizens face potential discrimination due to ethnicity, religion and even appearance. But for Myanmar Muslims they face more extreme discrimination and constraints than regular citizens.

### **3.5.2 Civil Society Organizations and their Activities in Responding to Religious Discrimination Problems**

Generally, non-governmental organizations provide humanitarian assistance to people who are living in poverty and are in desperate need of assistance. In Rakhine

state the most people struggle daily in their lives, finding it hard to make a living. People in Rakhine state who are Muslims are suffering even harder conditions, suffering from famine and starving, in part because of rising populations in households but also due to discrimination against them by Buddhists who don't want to hire Muslims for jobs. A high unemployment rate and increasing population is pushing the Muslim population into greater than average poverty.

Natural disasters often affect Rakhine state and they make the situation for local people even worse. In attempts to provide humanitarian assistance to Rakhine state, UN agencies and some international NGOs distribute aid to people when disasters hit. They attempt to allocate benefits in equal ratio to all those in need, regardless of religion or race but in practice this has proven difficult and because the Rohingya Muslims are in the worst situation they tend to receive more aids. This can be seen after national disasters and after the 2012 violence.

In 2008, Cyclone Nargis hit Myanmar, killed many thousands of people and affected many households and livelihoods. Many lost their families, their property and belongings. Myanmar's civil society including local NGOs, self-help groups and even individuals sympathized to those affected by the cyclone and voluntarily distributed humanitarian assistance and necessities (food, water and shelter) to those in need. In the aftermath of Nargis new civil society organizations emerged in Myanmar and carried out humanitarian and recovery programs in affected areas for many years after. Apart from local NGOs, international organizations and UN agencies

also provided emergency aid to people from cyclone affected areas and carried out recovery programs. It is obvious that all organizations and individuals provided assistance and aid to those in need and attempted to do so without discrimination of race or religion.

However, in regards to the assistance of victims after the religious violence, offering help and aid became a controversial issue. After the violent clashes in Rakhine state, many people, particularly Muslims, were killed and their houses destroyed and many Buddhists did not want to provide aid to Muslim victims. This made them more vulnerable since were already living under the poverty line before the violence. The interviews and field research shows that civil society's response to Nargis was different to their response after the violence. In both instances Rakhine Muslims and people of Rohingya ethnicity were affected worse than the Buddhist population. However, whilst NGO's attempted to provide aid to everyone without discrimination, individuals and Buddhist civil society groups were not willing to provide necessary help or assistance to Muslim victims, especially after the violent clashes, and were angered when International NGOs or UN agencies helped them.

From the view of human rights standard, there are human rights violations that can be seen in the case of anti-Muslims violence. During sectarian violence, people from Muslims society are more vulnerable and desperate rather than those who are Buddhists. No protection from arm forces was offered to defend property owned by Muslims and save their lives in violence affected areas because they all

are presumed as non-Myanmar citizens and driven out to leave country. In this issue, any responses of Myanmar civil societies in term of supporting the rights of being citizens for those who are not illegal migrants could have not been seen.

Lessons should be learnt from past experience and non-discriminatory norms should be practiced in times of conflict between different sectors of society. Non-discriminative practices should also be considered when implementing developmental projects around country by civil society organizations. They should be aware of potential conflicts when implementing projects in multi-race and multi-religion areas and attempt to allocate aid equally to all. Otherwise they may potentially cause more problems instead of providing assistance. All types of actors in civil society should be addressing and helping to solve the problems, as well as being aware of their actions so as not to create more problems in society.

Another way of promoting non-discrimination values by civil society organizations is through engaging with people belonging to multi-race and multi-religion areas and ensures that representatives of each race or religion all participate in projects. Since civil society groups operate across Myanmar in diverse areas, they have the ability to bring various groups and religions closer, allow them to interact, communicate and work together to integrate society and improve relations. It is the role of civil society to improve relations between different sectors of society.

From the research and analysis, UN agencies and other INGOs should be aware of the tensions and hatred within the Rakhine community toward Rohingya as

this problem has been around for decades. Other civil society organizations should learn from the above case and also the organizations selected as case study - the 88 Generation Students Group and Paungku Consortium – should have been using non-discriminatory practices.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

The root causes of sectarian violence in Myanmar are varied but historical tension and hatred between the two ethnicities are a principal cause. This hatred is inherited in the heart of both sides for decades and passed from generation to generation. Also Muslims from northern part of Rakhine state are being constrained by local authorities in terms of movement beyond their homeland, as well as for education, employment, health and restrictions on marriage and birth.

In the transition period to democracy, people are beginning to have more freedoms and the right to express their feelings, but at the same time, due to the violence, their freedoms are once again being suppressed. Tensions between different sectors of society are increasing and hatred is spreading through social media. The recent conflicts and violence are removing people's freedom and people all over Myanmar start to fear for their security and livelihood.

Discrimination against minority ethnicities and religions is common in Myanmar and occurs from the government to local level of society. However the role of civil society and its organizations is to reduce animosity between different groups and promote non-discriminatory values, especially when implementing

projects in conflict areas. The role of civil society organizations is vital in reducing tensions or more conflicts but due to the aforementioned events face more difficulties engaging in society. They, along with International NGOs should set a clear mandate before starting projects, promote non-discrimination and engage with all sectors of the community. Otherwise their engagement and involvement in conflicts and natural disaster may cause even more tensions between different people in communities.





## CHAPTER IV

### THE ROLES OF 88 GENERATION STUDENTS GROUP AND PAUNGKU CONSORTIUM FOR SUPPORTING NON-DISCRIMINATION VALUES

#### 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the role of the selected case study organizations, the 88 Generation Students Group and Paungku Consortium is discussed. The study focuses on how they engage with diverse communities and promote non-discrimination values within society. Firstly, the history of the 88 Generation Students Group is reviewed, as well as perception, responses and effectiveness of the 88 Generation Students Group's activities during the time of the religious conflicts. Secondly, the history of Paungku Consortium is examined, as well as perceptions, responses and effectiveness of the organization while engaging with conflict communities. Thirdly, analysis of the responses of both organizations to religious discrimination especially Muslims, and effectiveness of these two organizations are examined.

#### 4.2 The 88 Generation Students Group

##### 4.2.1 Historical Background

The 88 Generation Students Group is a social movement organization and attempts to mobilize people to claim their human rights and promote democracy at national level. In 1988, university students were against General Ne Win's military government. They staged a demonstration which spread around country, with a

diverse range of people participating including workers, engineers, doctors and even women. When it became a nationwide demonstration the government decided to stop the movement and with a show of force send almost 1,000 protesters to prison for anti-state crimes.

In 2004-2005, most of the student activists in prison were released. The prominent leaders of 88 uprising, Min Ko Naing and Ko Ko Gyi, were also released from a long imprisonment around the same time. The 88 generation group was founded in 2005 by former students who were recently released. The leaders, Min Ko Naing and Ko Ko Gyi are the prominent students who were active in the 88 demonstrations. It is not a political party and is an informal organization but almost as well-known as the National League for Democracy (NLD) in their struggle for freedom democracy. They aim to mobilize people through providing political awareness to people and raising the alternative voices of people. Moreover, they also engage with the government in an attempt to make political changes and democratic reforms in Myanmar through nationwide demonstrations.

The 88 Generation Students Group is famous for creating a democratic space in Myanmar. They attempted to create an establishment and survive under a dictatorship regime and have used different strategies in restoring and promoting democracy. This group has used soft strategies such as White Expression Campaign, Signature Campaign, Open Heart Campaign and Prayer Campaign. The members of

the 88 Generation Students called for the release of over a thousand political prisoners, dressed in white and traveled around the country. By October 2006, they had collected 535,580 signatures which were sent to State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) and UN organizations.

One month later, the 88 Generation Students Group started a prayer campaign in which participants - Buddhist, Christian, Hindu and Muslim - held a candlelight vigil and said prayers for freedom for all the political prisoners and prayers for the victims of recent floods. The following year, the 88 Generation Students Group launched their Open Heart Campaign. A letter writing campaign, it encouraged citizens to write about their complaints and grievances with the military rule. These letters were sent to SPDC chairman Senior General Than Shwe. In the above campaigns, the 88 generation group mobilized people to express their feelings freely regarding public concerns with the military rule and made the alternative voices of people heard.

In August 2007, the 88 Generation Students Group also joined and organized the protest named as the saffron revolution because Buddhist monks participated in this protest together with one hundred thousands of protesters complaining about rising fuel and commodity prices. Then, after this protest, leaders and members of the 88 Generation Students Group were arrested and sentenced for 65 years. During their imprisonment, they were unable to do activities until their release at time of

newly civilian government. In 2011 after taking ruling power by new government, they were released. Then, they reorganized the 88 Generation Students Group and changed their symbol of peacock fighting into the symbol of peacock dancing. According to explanation of leaders from this group, *“it is not a time in the transitional period against the government; actually different societies are needed to cooperate with the government in democratic reform process”*(Interviewee, March 2013). In 2012-2013, this group also coped with the conflicts between diverse groups in providing humanitarian assistances to violence affected areas and served as being mediators to release anger of local people.

The demonstrations and campaigns led by this group is basically aim for ensuring democratic values specifically pluralism and compromise and fundamental human rights. In ensuring basic rights, this group seems to empower population from grass root level. In the case of Rohingya, Ko Ko Gyi who is a prominent leader of the 88 Generation Students Group, argued in the interview with Irrawaddy magazine (7 August 2013) that a UN human rights envoy, Quintana emphasized on dimension of the human rights of the issue of Rohingya. However, the root cause of religious violence in Rakhine state is based on “ethnic conflict”(Naing, 2012).

In summarize, the 88 Generation Students Group always organized soft campaigns along with participation by citizens concerning with issue of democracy in particular political and economic justice and also fundamental human rights. In

olden days, this group fight for democracy and against military government for ages but now, they cooperate with the newly civilian government. They have been discussing among members whether the 88 Generation Students Group named as political party to be elected in upcoming general election.

#### **4.2.2 Perception of the 88 Generation Students Group on Religious Discrimination against Minority Religion**

According to a review of documents, a variety of discrimination has been in existence for many years in Myanmar. The most common type of discrimination is against minority ethnicities and religion. The following statements are perceptions of discrimination from the 88 Generation Students Group members interviewed during field research. The interviews show various members of the 88 Generation Students Group's perception of discrimination against minority race and religion. Their personal views about discrimination in Myanmar are different from each other despite coming from the same organization. In their respective point of views, the majority of interviewees believed that there was only discrimination from authorities and the wealthy toward the ordinary citizens but did not realize that there is discrimination against minority ethnicities and religion also. A leader of the 88 Generation Students Group stated that:

*“Actually, there is no discrimination in Myanmar context but some may have attitude to resist their nationalism and racism. According to*

*my personal experience, I have never being discriminated because of ethnic. However, the authorities are discriminated against ordinary people by using their power. They are superiors and things are under their control” (Min Ko Naing, the 88 Generation Students Group, July 2013).*

Under the past dictatorship regime all citizens regardless of religion, ethnicity or majority or minority group were discriminated against in terms of restrictions on freedom of speech, opposition to government and state policies.

*“There is little or no discrimination in term of belonging to minority race and religion. But, in Myanmar army and government office, there is discrimination against non-Burmese Buddhists on higher position and promotion by higher officials. Actually, dictatorship regimes oppressed every citizen no matter who is from minority or majority group” (Marky, the 88 Generation Students Group, June 2013).*

According to other interviewees in same organization, being discriminated against by the government and dominant groups for religion or ethnicity is one of the most significant issues currently in society. Muslim citizens are one minority group facing discrimination when applying for national identity cards, in employment, education, marriage, health care and travel outside their villages. The following

statements from 88 Generation Students Group's members highlight some discrimination issues. The first statement is from a Female Muslim member:

*“In Myanmar, law is enacted not to discriminate on people who believe in other religions or non-Buddhist. But, in reality, law is not fully applied so it can be found out that there is still discrimination. Muslims working in government offices cannot get promotion even they are enough qualified. In army, moreover, highest position which can get by Muslims people is at most title Major. Moreover, someone who holds ID card mentioned Islamic Religion is not allowed to go to Rakhine state” (Khin Maryar Htwe, the 88 Generation Students Group, June 2013).*

According to Interviewee, there is no discrimination against Muslims children attending schools in Yangon but it is said that students belonging to Kaman ethnic group from Rakhine state have being discriminated in schools. Regarding employment, there is some discrimination on Muslims in government office and private company but not in International companies owned by foreigners. Surprisingly, some companies owned by Buddhist Burmese mention not to appoint people who are non-Buddhists especially Islam in their manual. From the side of Islam, they suffered trauma because of non-institutionalized discrimination and they think themselves that they are second citizens in Myanmar. Because of believing in

Islam, the interviewee herself is discriminated in some extent especially in work place. According to her, it is sure that there is religious discrimination in Myanmar and suffered herself as religious discriminate victim.

Another Muslim member and prominent leader of the 88 Generation Students Group was interviewed about the level of discrimination in Myanmar.

According to him:

*“People are being discriminated in term of religion for 50 years under dictatorship regime. They also tried to hold their power particularly in term of nationalism. There are racial and religious discrimination in Myanmar. No ethnic have chance to rule in their own area. While broadcasting National Athens on television, only Buddhist religion buildings and symbols are showed on TV” (Ko Mya Aye, the 88 Generation Students Group, June 2013).*

Another interviewee underlined that non-Buddhists are unlikely to get promotions or high ranking positions in government offices or the military due to religion:

*“Gender discrimination is not much taken into consideration but religious discrimination is common since 1962. As there is discrimination against minority religion in society, non-Buddhists are*



*not reached at higher positions in government office” (Arkar Bo, the 88 Generation Students Group, June 2013).*

Overall, despite some members being unaware of ethnic or religious discrimination the actions of the 88 Generation Students Group during the period of conflict and violence shows that they focus on fairness and justice throughout the country. Their non-discrimination values and fast response in mobilizing and providing aid shows that they were acting for Myanmar citizens regardless of majority or minority grouping. The 88 Generation Students Group has been promoting a democratic and social movement since 1988 and their recent actions during the violence shows how members attempted to offer assistance to victims despite challenges and barriers from local authorities, cross country traveling and extremist views. From the research interviews it shows that the 88 Generation Students Group is more likely to focus on political and economic discrimination than on cultural discrimination which include religious discrimination discussed in this thesis. Although some members admit there is discrimination against minority races and religions, they are still mainly focused on political system from the country’s dominant and powerful elite group that has been in power for decades.

#### 4.2.3 Activities' Response to Religious Violence and Discrimination of the 88 Generation Students Group

The 88 Generation Students Group is not only involved with political affairs and promoting democracy but also in preventing social unrest, promoting reconciliation and making ties within communities. According to the members' responses during interviews, the group always stands on the side of vulnerable people who are being suppressed by authorities or dominant groups. For example, they provide assistance to farmers so they can raise issues in Parliament about land confiscation by force by local authorities for state-owned projects and private business.

According to interviewees with members of the 88 generation Students Group, they were active during the recent conflicts in Rahkine state and Meikhtila and set about solving some of the social problems of people in those areas. It was risky for members to visit the conflict areas without any government authorization or real protection; however they ignored the risk to their personal safety in an attempt to assist in conflict resolution. Even though they could merely have done philanthropic as providing humanitarian aids to violence affected people, it is already risky enough for them because it is a dangerous area in where conflict and severe violence broke out then. No other organizations like the 88 Generation Students Group are highly enthusiastic and take risk going to conflict zones and doing humanitarian works in that place (interviewee, June 2013).

The violence in Rakhine state started in June, 2012. The conflict, which started as a dispute between two sections of society (Buddhist and Muslim) became violent quickly. The level of violence increased day by day due to weakness of the rule of law. Local people property from both side were destroyed and some lost their lives. Many survivors became homeless and helpless as they also lost their livelihoods. A female member of the 88 Generation Students Group who visited the conflict areas said: *“Among others in conflict areas, the most vulnerability people are children and women because they suffered more than men”* (interviewee, the 88 Generation Students Group, June 2013). According to this, it is shown that the 88 Generation Students Group did not neglect women and children because they considered women and children as the most vulnerable victims, not conflict partners. Therefore, they take into account women and children as their targeted audience and helped them to survive in time of violence.

During the period of conflict, other members of the 88 Generation Students Group also went to Rakhine state and provided humanitarian assistance to victims - whether Rakhine or Buddhist or Muslim. They don't discriminate against minority groups when distributing aid such as food, medicine and clothes and aim to help everyone.

The 88 Generation Students Group also helped and organized assistance from well-wishers and individual donors from Yangon especially from the Muslim

communities in Yangon since these groups are not allowed to go to Rakhine state to affected Muslim areas. The reason for not allowing Muslim outside Rakhine state to enter in town was based on security reason since the military regime. This restriction is still continued even under the new government. Therefore, we assumed that the newly government does not pay attention on freedom of human rights and freedom to move within country.

Members of the 88 Generation Students Group collected donations and as well as their own contribution and took relief items to violence affected areas. As one member said:

*“The 88 group itself consist of members who belong to diverse races and believe in different religions. So they sympathized with the violence victims and equal aids had provided to all victims. There is no discriminated against minority religions and races” (Arkar Bo, the 88 generation group, June, 2013).*

In the same year another conflict happened in Meikhtila after a dispute in gold shop. The riots spread around the city and level of violence increased over time. As before the 88 Generation Students Group went to assist the victims and attempt to stop the conflict and violence. A group of members, along with prominent leader Min Ko Naing, went to Meikhtila the same night as they didn't want to see the same after effects as in Rakhine state and they managed to persuade a

group of aggressive people to control their anger without success. They, therefore, concluded that they could not completely take the role of moderator for next time.

In the following days they carried items such as clothes, food, and medicine for victims by trucks from Yangon to Meikhtila and provided these aids together with donations from other local NGOs to violence-affected people in Meikhtila. One of the 88 group members who was there said:

*“All houses belonging to Buddhists and Muslims were destroyed and families from both societies moved to camps for violence victims. The 88 group went to the camps and distributed materials what they need to all victims whoever Muslims and Buddhists households”*

*(Marky, member of the 88 Generation Students Group, June 2013)*

Finally, they revisited to violence-affected areas in Meikhtila with a group of celebrities. Buddhist monks also joined the 88 Generation Students group and delivered peace speeches and consulting local people from both sides to be tolerant to one another and explaining this event is not based on religion but hatred.

The 88 Generation Students Group has no authority to actually command the people to stop the violence, but instead requested cooperation with other organizations and celebrities so that their actions could be effective. The 88 Generation Students Group did more visits conflict areas to stop the conflicts and tried to moderate local people from diverse group to live in peaceful existence.

Although, they were challenged as a moderator role and did not reach the goal, they should not stop being as a moderator between diverse group.

A group of women of the 88 Generation Students Group went to every conflict areas around the country in particular Rakhine, Meikhtila, Lashio and Bago and provided various assistances to conflicts victims. The women group went to Oakkan in Yangon when conflicts occurred there. They collected contributions from donors who could not go to conflict areas themselves and delivered assistance and aid to the victims on behalf of donors. In addition, a womens network from different non-governmental organizations including women from the 88 group was founded in 2013. As said by Khin Maryar Htwe in interview:

*“To help victims and stop future violence, multi-religion unity and violence prevention network was founded by members of CSOs especially women with the help of everyone from different organizations” (Khin Maryar Htwe, the 88 Generation Students Group, June 2013).*

Based on interviews, women group in the 88 Generation Students Group is active and energetic and joined with other women network groups to help the victims and relive their sufferings by expanding their network. This enlarges the role of the 88 Generation Students Group because even women from the 88 Generation Students Group participated in coping with violence and resolving causes of conflicts.

Throughout the conflicts, the 88 Generation Students Group was trying to stop violence, assist and console people from both sides, Buddhist and Muslims, in the ways of distributing aids. These humanitarian assistances were done by themselves and with the cooperation of different stakeholders and organizations. However, these activities discussed above may not sufficient enough and far away to stop religious violence against minority. Just providing philanthropic aids to those who are suffered by violence could not cure their mental pain and address the root causes of violence. On the other hand, the 88 Generation Students Group did moderating and networking with other organizations in coping with conflicts. Somehow, the ways of moderating and cooperating with other organizations are better than providing humanitarian aids.

#### **4.2.4 Effectiveness and Challenges of the 88 Generation Students Group in Responding to Religious Violence and Discrimination**

The 88 Generation Students Group has a reputation within Myanmar society and outside the country, and is struggling for long term stability and to partake in politics. Nevertheless, this group supported the victims of violence and assisted in the resolution of the conflicts that took place around Myanmar in 2012 - 2013.

From the start of violence the 88 Generation Students Group has been present in the conflict areas, consoling, consulting and assisting victims. As prominent members of Myanmar society the 88 Generation Students Group hold moral ideals for citizens and people follow their guidance. For instance, throughout

democratization process, people have been following with them and participating in their soft strategies campaigns such as signature campaign and prayer campaign. Leaders and members of the 88 Generation Students Group have been prominent political icons and supported by citizens. In recent conflicts, members of the group have tried to relieve the anger and hatred of people from the two different sides through negotiation and consolation despite it being a difficult situation.

While distributing humanitarian aid from donors and individuals to help the affected people in the conflict areas, the 88 Generation Students Group was restrained by local authorities. As one member explains during a research interview, local authorities forced them to hand over the items and aid for them to distribute. Despite the 88 Generation Students Group resisting and wishing to deliver aid directly to ensure it reaches the people needed, they had to comply with the authorities for the sake of the vulnerable people. Another interviewee stated:

*“In the time of delivering materials, the 88 group was not allowed to move to next towns in where there are violence victims by authorities in conflicts areas in Bago division. The women leaders of this group negotiated to local authorities but they could not move to neighboring towns because of proclaiming the act of 144 as emergency areas. The local authorities said that they will accept and delivered materials to victims on behalf of the 88 Generation*



*Students Group. But it is not acceptable for the group as we are worried not to reach things to real victims” (Khin Maryar Htwe, The 88 Generation Students Group, June 2013).*

A group of women from the 88 Generation Students Group experienced a similar problem when they went to share humanitarian aid to an affected area in Oakkan Township, Bago Division. They received threats from local authorities instead of getting encouragement and cooperation. The 88 Generation Students Group had already informed to authorities at both division and state level before they started their donation trip but when the group arrived at Oakkan, township authorities prevented the members from distributing aid or meeting with local people since prior approval from the township level was not requested.

There are restricts by local authorities upon visiting to conflicts area for providing aids and cares. The 88 Generation Students Group also face that kind of challenges not because those who went there and distributed assistance are members of this group but because this is conflict areas and severe violence broke out there.

Another challenge tackled by the 88 Generation Students Group was discontent from Buddhist extremists who misinterpreted the actions of the 88 Generation Students Group. Aid and necessities were distributed to those in need without discrimination but the Buddhists saw this as supporting the Muslim minorities

and helping them become stronger. The 88 Generation Students Group tried to share aid to all households affected regardless of religion and gave encouragement to those suffering from anxiety and fear after the violence. During the research interviews, one member said:

*“Extremists from both societies firstly misinterpreted our assistance but we could organized them and guided them to find the truth themselves and be on the right track individually and in a group” (Mie Mie, the 88 Generation Students Group, June 2013).*

Another 88 Generation Students Group member said that:

*“In the case of Meikhtila which took place in March 2013, their group went to the conflict areas the same night and tried to stop the conflict. The Buddhists blamed the 88 group when they assumed that the 88 group distributed aids only to Muslims group. But, in fact, the 88 group did not neglect any victims whoever Buddhists or Muslims and provide physical and mental aids equally to all victims” (Arkar Bo, The 88 Generation Students Group, June 2013).*

According to this, the 88 Generation Students Group did not discriminate against minority religion and ethnic. They considered all people who affected

violence as victims and marginalized regardless of their status in term of their beliefs in religion as interview below:

*“The 88 Generation Students Group provided food and materials to victims of violence directly in Meikhtila. Also in Rakhine case, this group helped to contribute materials donated by others to the hands of victims of Muslims. Buddhists group misunderstood and condemned their group while they helped to Muslims victims but the 88 kept going aids to both groups and still stand in the middle no matter who condemned them” (Marky, The 88 Generation Students Group, June 2013).*

In responding to the recent religious violence, the 88 Generation Students Group managed to help those in need and their contribution and charitable support gave to the victims of violence even they faced challenges. Moreover, they performed being as a moderator between irritated groups of Buddhist and Muslim. Their response to religious discrimination problems in the way of distributing aids could save lives of victims but could not heal their pain and bitterness. With the lack of awareness of the issues involved, they were not able to solve the root causes of the religious violence between two strong diverse communities and so more conflicts and violence occurred beyond their capacity.

In summary, the study found out that the 88 Generation Students Group focus on fighting for democracy uses soft strategy campaigns and movements to get their message across. Regarding to issue of discrimination, they perceive that discrimination against subordinate group by powerful and dominant individuals are in worse condition under the regimes rather than discrimination against minority religion by majority.

### **4.3 Paungku Consortium**

#### **4.3.1 Historical Background**

In this study, Paungku Consortium is used as a case study. It was founded in 2007 just one year before Nargis Cyclone affected in Myanmar, May 2008. After three years since its establishment, Paungku worked with more than 500 local groups and its initiative had been affected over five hundred thousand beneficiaries. Moreover, Paungku was able to support capacity building to more than 100 local organizations. Paungku consortium is consists of eleven organizations; “Save the Children, Swissaid, Norwegian People’s Aid, World Concern Myanmar, International HIV & AIDS Alliance, Burnet Institute, Metta Foundation, Knowledge and Dedication for Nation-building (KDN), Oxfam GB, CARE Myanmar and GRET” and two organizations named as Metta Foundation and Knowledge and Dedication for Nation-building (KDN) are local agencies. The main purpose of Paungku Consortium is to strengthen Myanmar civil society organizations through innovation.

Paungku Consortium is for strengthening and building the capacity of local organizations and community based organizations. While building capacity of local groups, Paungku uses action learning reflection and considers variety of experiences and skills. As another objective, Paungku aims to improve practice working with Myanmar civil societies through learning and sharing between organizations, experimenting new approaches and reflecting critically. Besides, this group supports civil society networks and extends the link for wider change. According to its last objective, Paungku also makes policy influencing and enhance advocacy between policy actors and civil society groups.

Sustainability of the project is the first priority of Paungku Consortium. Hence, Paungku Consortium lets local groups to make their own design by themselves and give them financial and technical support to be able to implement their goals. Paungku Consortium has supported a variety of micro projects in “*natural resource management, early childhood and non-formal education, water and sanitation, primary health care and income generation*”(Paungku, 2012). Moreover, Paungku Consortium also supports local groups in other sectors such as project management, organizational development, advocacy and peace building. However, activities related to issue of discrimination are not included in their primary focus.

Similarity to the 88 Generation Students Group, Paungku consortium is ensuring and promoting democratic values through strengthening local organizations

and community based organizations. This group also mobilizes people from bottom and helps their voice be heard. It provides awareness of knowledge and skills and mentoring services to local people. In the case of religious violence in Myanmar, Paungku consortium had been involved in preventing conflicts and raising awareness of making friendship with people from diverse religions and ethnics.

#### **4.3.2 Perception of Paungku Consortium and Networks on Religious Discrimination against Minority Religion**

According to documents and literature, a variety of discriminations have been in existence for many years in Myanmar. In reality, the most common types of discrimination are against ethnicity and religion. In Myanmar a country of many ethnicities and religions major discrimination in the past was from the authorities and their regime. But now, during the transition period toward democracy more discriminatory practices are emerging and aimed at minority ethnicities and religious groups. The following are perceptions of discrimination by interviewees from the Paungku Consortium during the interview session during the field work.

Lack of identity cards and a number of restrictions upon issuing them to Myanmar Muslims make it more difficult to continue their education at university and in their daily lives. An interviewee points out that this type of discrimination is coming from the government:

*“In fact, minority group have not being discriminated by majority Buddhist, only by authoritarian regime. Concerning with issuing citizenship card, students who are qualified enough to take medical study are not able to attend institutes since they are belong to Muslims and have no Myanmar citizenship card which has not been issued to a high number of Muslims. According to my friend’s experience, he did not get Myanmar citizenship card while these cards are issued in government school to all students except him being Muslims. After religious conflicts, moreover, Muslims are difficult in hiring accommodation owned by Myanmar Buddhists in Yangon”*

*(Thitsar Nyi Nyi, Pray for Myanmar, June 2013)*

Generally, this discrimination against minorities is not only coming from the government but also extremist Buddhists are spreading anti-Muslim sentiments across the country which segregates Muslims from society. The Buddhist extremists claim that they just maintaining and promoting Buddhism but in reality it is leading to increased distrust and hatred between different religions. During the research interview period, a following interview was done with a Myanmar Buddhist about recent anti-Muslim violence. His view on it is as follows:

*“In the past, disabilities have being discriminated in Myanmar. In recent years, it is common discrimination against religion in term of*

*extremists from diverse religious groups who think that their respective religions and practices are the best. As a consequence of conflicts, Buddhists are discriminated against Muslims by mean of avoiding shopping in stalls owned by Muslims and no interaction with them. It seems discrimination but Myanmar Buddhists named as nationalism”(Thet Swe Win, Pray for Myanmar, June 2013).*

Based on research interviews, members and networks of Paungku Consortium argued that discrimination against minority ethnic and religion is existence in Myanmar society because of the government and elite groups. People from minority groups are restricted in being citizens. They cannot take better education and get job opportunities as well as being promoted in employment based on their beliefs in minority religion and belong to minority ethnics.

#### **4.3.3 Activities’ Response to Religious Violence and Discrimination**

Civil society organizations including Paungku consortium have tried to solve violence and prevent following conflicts in different ways. While other organizations provided humanitarian assistances, Paungku had supported community based organization and self-help groups financially and technically in coping with religious violence as they have a wide range of network. Whereas Paungku itself organized sticker and T-shirt campaigns anti-religious violence, this organization also facilitated interfaith dialogues at the same time. Paungku organized and assisted a number of



small groups under its network to be able to carry out contribution to stop religious violence. Paungku performed some activities which can reduce conflicts and relieve tensions between aggressive crowded people.

As response to conflicts by Paungku, sticker campaign was once started in Yangon after five days later of violence in Meikhtila. Stickers on which “there shall be no racial and religious conflicts because of me” is mentioned were distributed and stacked on cars in road of Yangon. Later, second campaign which can be called T-shirt campaign was conducted. Paungku Consortium prepared T-shirt on which the same word as on the sticker saying that “there shall be no racial and religious conflicts because of me” is typed and delivered to the whole society. As said by interviewee:

*“Our group, Paungku, has done campaigns called T-shirt campaign and sticker campaign in period of the violence occurrence so that these campaigns raised people awareness not to create and participate in conflicts” (Kyaw Thu, Paungku Consortium, June 2013).*

Through this campaign, people from both sides of Buddhists and Muslims in Yangon get awareness of being conflicts and violence and of drawbacks that hit whole societies due to sectarian violence. Basically, the aim of this campaign is to make a peaceful society where multi-ethnics and multi-religions is coexistence. It,

however, had not been fully achieved because more conflicts broke out after the campaigns.

Apart from conducting campaigns, Paungku also went to Meikhtila during the conflicts there and founded a mixed-religion so that this group would be able to prevent future violence in their areas. Furthermore, they aim to build trust again in the conflict areas and work together to make peace within diverse societies. As said by Dr. Kyaw Thu in a research interview:

*“As Paungku, although material assistance had not been provided to affected people, we supported and facilitated local stakeholders to found a group of multi-religion to share essence of their respective religions and their insights” (Dr. Kyaw Thu, Paungku Consortium, June 2013).*

Paungku also provided financial support and technical assistance to a group called Pray for Myanmar in coping with conflicts. Pray for Myanmar was founded on 26 March, 2013 the beginning of the religious conflicts in Myanmar and consists of small self-help groups. Most of the members of Pray for Myanmar are Muslims and Buddhists youths who do not want to any more conflicts and want peace and harmony between two societies. The aim of Pray for Myanmar is to stop conflicts, prevent anti-Muslims violence and to make peace and harmony. Their actions were quite effective in a way of making peace and created chances two diverse

communities to share their insights upon their religions. Whilst Pangku is trying, they cannot totally prevent the sectarian violence from occurring again through sticker and T-shirt campaigns alone immediately since the root cause of conflicts is hatred and tension which embedded in local people for decades.

Pray for Myanmar organized interfaith dialogues in Yangon since it is founded in March, 2013 in the height of the conflict time. Thus, they could bring people from different religions together and share their religious practices, doctrines and teachings with each other. Their activities hoped to highlight the basic essence of each religion and make a close ties and relationships again between diverse religious groups. As one interviewee said:

*“In March, one of the first interfaith dialogues was done by Pray For Myanmar in mosque in Botahtaung township, Yangon in which Buddhist monk, Muslims religious leaders, media and interesting people were attended. The participants had also a chance to visit inside Mosques that they have never been and Muslims religious leaders explained what the participants asked” (Aung Naing Soe, a member of Pray For Myanmar, June 2013).*

At the time of organizing interfaith dialogues by Pray for Myanmar, the sticker was also launched and distributed in downtown areas of Yangon and circulated to other districts outside Yangon. As distinguish activity by pray for Myanmar, a member

said that they have a plan of documentary film which counters hate speech will be probably to distribute to the hands of local people.

During the research period in June, Pray for Myanmar organized mosque visits once a week on every Sunday and led seminars on learning from diverse religion's custom and peace for transparency in mosques in Yangon. In the session of seminars, respected religious leaders and lay men from various religions came to discuss the customs of other religions openly. This was a very useful activity that can eliminate negative perceptions toward Muslims since non-Muslims have an opportunity to enter into mosque and learn about Islam. Apart from visiting mosques, a tour group stopped at Hindu temples and learned about the basics of Hinduism and testimonials inside their buildings.

A prayer ceremony and a press conference including multi-religious leaders were held. In the conference, a culture performance was included with the description of peace. These activities were operated with financial support and technical advice by Paungku consortium:

*“We group, Pray for Myanmar conducted some movements particularly press conference, sticker and T-shirt campaigns with assistance from Paungku and done prayer ceremony and visiting mosque” (Thet Swe Win, Pray for Myanmar, June 2013).*

As well as Pray for Myanmar, funded by Paungku Consortium, other civil society organizations carried out events to reduce tensions between the Muslim and Buddhist communities. During field work, a workshop called 'multi-religion relationships and peaceful coexistence' was run by a local NGO called Treasure Land Development Association. In this workshop, people from the four main religions - Buddhism, Islam, Christian and Hindu - participated and religious leaders led open discussions. During the time of conflict, conducting seminars and workshops designed toward peaceful coexistence were somewhat effective in reducing and preventing communal violence.

#### **4.3.4 Effectiveness and Challenges of Paungku Consortium in Responding to Religious Violence and Discrimination**

When responding and coping with the conflicts by Paungku Consortium and Pray for Myanmar (funded by Paungku), there are some challenges to face. Although these organizations have no authorized power to end the violence or halt it, unlike the government or authorities with power and command, the organizations still tried to find a way to stop the violence and address the root causes. Their way of preventing future conflicts and violence is dealing by with them in delicate way such as campaigns and interfaith dialogues.

When conducting the sticker campaigns by Pray for Myanmar, members distributed stickers on the road and asked permission from car owners to stick them

on their cars. Some pedestrians made a critic to members regarding Buddhists and Muslims carrying out this campaign together, as well as working for the same organization. However there was some confusion, as one member of Pray for Myanmar explains:

*“Because of leading sticker campaign and participating in it with Muslims friends, some Buddhist campaigners were blamed by Buddhist society since they misunderstood and considered Buddhist campaigners as Muslims supporters while majority of Buddhists are anti-Muslims” (Aung Naing Soe, Pray for Myanmar, June 2013).*

In organizing interfaith dialogues, there are also some challenges that Pray for Myanmar encountered. During the period of violence, interfaith dialogues were undertaken to highlight extremes from both societies but it was risky. The level of tensions has not yet decreased and suspicion was still in the minds of both sides. At first, people from both societies were concerned about arguments in the interfaith dialogues. Nevertheless Pray for Myanmar managed to carry out a number of interfaith activities successfully and dealt with religious leaders and followers carefully.

As a consequence of the conflicts and violence, development projects from Paungku Consortium have been affected. Since Paungku has a wide network in Myanmar its projects and small organizations funded by Paungku are working around

the country. Due to threats of violence, the capability of Paungku in implementing and operating their projects was affected. Instead of focusing only on development projects, Paungku used its capacity and funding to assist the victims and end the conflicts.

To summarize, Paungku Consortium is one of the organizations who responded to the religious conflicts and violence that took place in Myanmar. This group primarily aims to strengthen Myanmar's civil society but it did not hesitate to respond to the sectarian violence based on religious discrimination. Financial and technical assistance were provided to its network so that other groups could conduct campaigns and interfaith dialogues which allowed participation by leaders and laymen from a variety of ethnicities and religions. It is no doubt that these activities hindered conflict spreading in the bigger cities and offered a challenge to conventional discriminatory thoughts. However, Paungku is primarily focused on economic discrimination and so currently does not have the capacity to solve the causes of conflict and violence based on religious intolerance among a diverse society.

#### 4.4 Analysis of the 88 Generation Students Group and Paungku Consortium on Religious Discrimination Problems

##### 4.4.1 The 88 Generation Students Group

The 88 Generation Students Group is known as pro-democracy movement organization since this group led the 1988 uprising which asked for democratic changes. Although their demonstration was not successful and their demands not fulfilled, their attempt and sacrifice are notable and started the support toward democratization. As an organization promoting democratic values, discriminatory practices have been condemned and non-discrimination values are promoted within their organization and society.

Since their organization has no discrimination practices, people from all religions and races join this group as members. According to members of the 88 Generation Students group:

*“All people who have desire to promote democratic value and participate in democratization process are invited and allowed to join this group no matter whether they are from minority ethnic and minority religion”(Interviewee, the 88 Generation Students Group, June 2013).*



In this group it can be seen that a diverse set of people have same mission are working together toward the same goal. Muslims and minority ethnicities are working as members alongside Buddhists and ethnic Burmese citizens.

During the time of conflicts, a group from the 88 Generation Students Group visited the conflict areas immediately to serve as moderators between the two opposing groups. The prominent leaders together with other group members headed to affected areas overnight to calm local people. Nevertheless, their group is also unable to solve the problems easily because the issues are based on historical hatred between differing communities.

While doing humanitarian activities, this organization has been distributing and providing aid and assistance to diverse sections of society. From the interview sessions, all members from the 88 Generation Students Group believe *“their organization had distributed equal aids to violence victims regardless of their religion, ethnicity, and culture.”* Members of this group managed to direct aid to the hands of Muslims who were affected by violence despite authorities’ restrictive attempts. As a result initially there was a misunderstanding from Buddhist society, but later this disappeared when they realized that the 88 generation group’s actions were fair to both sides of society.

As well as distributing humanitarian assistance to affected households in conflicts areas, the 88 Generation Students Group also organized a peace concert in

Yangon. It aimed to show that all people from diverse sections of society are able to make ties together and live harmoniously and peacefully. Activities by this organization have been done; however animosity and hatred between some Muslims and Buddhists has not been eradicated yet though. But this group has cooperated with other NGOs and communities to contribute to making a peaceful and harmonious society.

In the past, the 88 Generation Students Group focused on the democratization process and democratic changes. However, this group also believes that conflicts and violence are barriers in transition to democracy. The leader and members of the group take into consideration how to eliminate discrimination which is one of the causes of conflict between diverse societies. As the 88 Generation Students Group is not a ruling party and run their activities within limited funding, there are limitations in operating activities of promoting non-discriminatory norms and principles. According to a leader of the 88 Generation Students Group:

*“Our group could have done some activities within our limitation in the case of recent conflicts like organizing celebrities and community leaders to deliver peace talks in affected community” (Interviewee, The 88 Generation Students Group, June 2013)*

Their activities helped reduce the suffering of the victims of the riots but not stop communal violence or prevent it from reoccurring again.

In regards to promoting non-discrimination values, the 88 Generation Group has no particular experience of non-discriminatory practices except when providing aid to recent violence affected people. The 88 Generation Students Group which is known as a social movement organization for democracy has been attempting to create democratic space and force the government to make democratic changes. Leaders and members of this group believe that there was suppression upon people by military government in the regime of dictatorship for decades.

The 88 Generation Students group finds it difficult to carry out principle and practices of non-discrimination alone. They have a long term plan to cooperate with other organizations and organize public talks about peace and coexistence by celebrities and community leaders in society.

*“It is important that other religions should not be insulted through promoting own one. Apart from CSOs, talks and speech about peace and coexist could be done by authors, peace makers, celebrities. This can reduce hatred between two sensitive societies and live in peace and harmony. Promoting non-discrimination values will take time and support is needed from both government and community” (Min Ko Naing, The 88 Generation Students Group, June 2013).*

To make a critical analysis upon the 88 Generation Students Groups led by prominent leaders who sacrifice their lives for democratization, their responses such

as charity or humanitarian assistances to victims affected by religious violence are not totally applicable. Only distribution humanitarian aids to local people could not relieve their pains and reduce hatred that had been rooted in their mind for decades. Even individual or charity group could do such kinds of aids. As an organization that has been involved in democratization process and promoted democratic values, they could do much more activities rather than humanitarian aids, such as conducting interfaith dialogues in which people from Muslims and Buddhists societies can join and exchange their perception on others. Through these activities, diverse people have more chance to make interaction between them and understand their tradition norms and principles of religions. This will help to eradicate the mistrust and misperception between them.

#### **4.4.2 Paungku Consortium**

Among a number of NGOs in Myanmar, Paungku Consortium was selected as a case study and examined to see whether this organization is seeking to promote non-discrimination values and in what way. Paungku Consortium aims to strengthen local civil society and community self-help groups by building their capacity through innovation. Moreover, Paungku Consortium has supported local self-help groups and provided financial and technical assistance to them. Its network is wide enough to touch a large number of local communities. This organization is also likely to take the role of facilitator to be able to form more local groups.

In time of the conflicts, Paungku Consortium facilitated meetings and gatherings of multi-religion groups which are included Buddhists, Muslims, Hindu and Christian. In these gatherings, religious leaders and laymen openly discussed their insights of respective religions so that superstitions (especially between Muslim and Buddhist communities) could be lessened and removed. A leader of Paungku Consortium explained activities done by the organization:

*“In Meikhtila after conflicts were taken place, Paungku Consortium supported local people who want to found a group of multi-region. The aim of this action is to make an end conflicts and tensions which sparks to be violence and prevent future violence as well. Finally, it can make a peaceful and harmonious society”*(Leader of Paungku Consortium, June, 2013).

In addition, interfaith dialogues in Yangon by a group called Pray for Myanmar supported by Paungku Consortium and organized people from multi-religions and invited leaders of Buddhist and Muslim communities to discuss the conflict issues and ways to solve them. They also visited religious buildings of Buddhist, Muslims, Hindus and Christians so that participants of this event have a chance to learn the essence other religions and how they interact within their religious buildings. Nonetheless, these activities could only be done in Yangon not in the conflict areas. When making an analysis, it's still difficult to reach the root causes of the conflicts

but their actions definitely addressed them, lessened concerns and brought the different religions closer to friendship through understanding.

Based on the activities that Paungku Consortium have done so far, this organization is not one which only offers financial and technical aid to communities. They want civil society in Myanmar's diverse community to be robust and powerful. While this organization is implementing its projects and activities, conflict and violence have hindered the process of development projects in target areas. Instead of focusing on their primary projects, they spent their time and budget to resolve the violence by their own means.

Actually, their activities and contribution helped diminish some suspicion and tension between Buddhist and Muslim society but it is still far from reaching the goal of eliminating all perceptions of discrimination against minority groups. The leader of Paungku Consortium argued that:

*“It will take more time and have much more difficulties to lessen discrimination and promote and foster non-discrimination value without cooperation and participation by other civil societies”*

(Interviewee, Paungku Consortium, June 2013).

For both selected organizations, the 88 Generation Students Group and Paungku Consortium have done activities in taking different roles of aid distributor to violence-affected people, moderator between hostile communities and supporter to network groups to conduct peace campaigns, interfaith dialogues and workshops.

While taking these different actions and response to religious violence and discrimination, they have challenges in term of limited resources and capacity. Their material aids could not able to cover large scale numbers of violence victims and recover the misery of local people and eliminate disgust between diverse groups. However, all people from both sides had no matter who they are received humanitarian assistances from the 88 Generation Students Group. Violence campaigns and interfaith dialogues and workshops by Paungku and its network groups could have been conducted only in big cities not in conflict zones but diverse people in cities have awareness of intolerance, prejudice and racism that make religious discrimination.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

As civil societies responded and provided assistance to victims of religious violence, the selected organizations - the 88 Generation Students Group and Paungku Consortium - did what they could to help out. They encountered challenges but followed through with their actions even amidst restrictions by authorities.

To analyze their activities, they were not quite effective for society though they can raise awareness and assist toward the reconciliation of peace between minority Muslims and majority Buddhists. However, the target of a peaceful coexisting society is still far away and the causes of the conflict are deeply rooted in historical perceptions and hatred arising from each individual community.

Another challenge is that the organizations capacity and abilities are limited. The selected organizations are not paying full attention to promoting non-discrimination values in current conflict period, but they are considering them for the long term. Both organizations believe that ending the violence and conflicts can occur with cooperation and assistance by civil society organizations working together and as well as support by the government.





## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 Conclusion

This thesis is about civil society organizations' response to religious discrimination in Myanmar: a case study of the 88 Generation Students Group and Paungku Consortium. This research aims to examine the role of civil society in promoting non-discrimination values and to understand the actions of civil society organizations in Myanmar transition period under the newly civilian government. Findings and recommendations of this research will be beneficial for Myanmar civil societies in the cultivating and promoting the spirit of democracy.

Based on findings and analyses, the thesis used four types of discriminatory practices "*isolated discrimination, small group discrimination, direct institutionalized discrimination and indirect institutionalise discrimination*" (Feagin, 1989) as the framework. As discussed in chapter 2, the study found out that there is discrimination against subordinate groups at different levels in Myanmar society. Sometimes discrimination is minor but harmful to others unintentionally. The first level of discriminatory practices in particular isolated discrimination that is harmful action taken by members of dominant groups in terms of power or weapons against members of subordinate groups. This can be seen as the major type of discrimination in Myanmar. It is clear that in time of the military regime, political prisoners were being discriminated against more than other non-political prisoners. Whether in

prisons or under house arrest, political prisoners faced severe punishments with long sentences or penalties and suffered both physical and mental pain by authorities, restricting family visits or sending them prisons far away.

As of the second type of discriminatory practice, specifically small-group discrimination, it is also in Myanmar society since the majority population dominates the minority groups. Small-group discrimination can be defined as harmful action by a dominant group to members of a subordinate group without the norms and rules of an organisational and community context. In the period of recent violence in 2012-2013 this kind of discrimination was significant in society since the Buddhist majority avoided interactions with minority Muslims, regardless if those Muslims had been part of the conflicts or not. This small-group discrimination escalated to the point of religious buildings being burnt, homes destroyed and lives lost simply because they were Muslim. The discrimination is especially strong for the younger generation as they are second generation citizens and are being unfairly suppressed and discriminated against.

The third type of discriminatory practice, direct institutionalised discrimination, means that actions by an organisation or community intentionally have negative impacts on members of subordinate groups. These actions are carried out by a number of people guided by the norms of a large-scale organisation or community. For instance, there is very prominent discrimination against minority Muslims in Rakhine state in terms of travel restriction by local and state authorities. It means

that they are not allowed to travel outside the state where they live in and also other Muslims from different parts of the country have no permission to go Rakhine state where a large population of Muslims are dwelling.

Feagin's fourth type of discriminatory practice is indirect institutional discrimination. It a practice which produces negative effects and impacts on subordinate groups unintentionally even though the norms and regulations are not proposed to be harmful to members of that group. When looking at the responses and perceptions of majority Buddhists to the minority Muslims, there are some visible cases of indirect institutional discrimination in Myanmar society. A noticeable example is Muslims in Rakhine state having limited access to good education and health care because of their race and religion. Not only in Rakhine state but also in Yangon and other cities in Myanmar, Muslims still face harassment in public schools because of their belief and color. Moreover, graduates who are Muslim have problems attending graduation to receive their degree certificates without Myanmar citizenship cards, even though they meet criteria of being a citizen, it is still hard to get an identity card due to strong restrictions by local authorities. It is hard for Muslims without education to make a living as blue collar workers. There is also discrimination against non-Buddhists, especially Muslims in employment, getting promotions or obtaining a higher position although they are qualified enough.

Concerning the response of civil society organizations to religious discrimination addressed in chapter 3, there are some points to review. In the case of

recent religious violence, it is likely that most of Myanmar civil society organizations have not actively participated in the issue of religious discrimination. Firstly, the majority of civil society organizations in Myanmar are very active and robust especially in providing humanitarian aid rather than engaging with political issues. It is evident in time of Nargis cyclone how established and emerging civil societies devoted their time and budget in emergency response, recovery and resilience for the future. Secondly, civil society organizations including local and international organizations also mainly focus on development projects as Myanmar is a developing country and the majority of population is still live under poverty line. They are actively involved in education and health sectors and carry out projects to improve sectors where the government does not act or has no capacity like civil society does. But it is rare to see a civil society organization against the politics of government especially in time of military reign because they did not want government and authorities to see them as an enemy or opponent. From analysis, the third reason why civil society organizations are reluctant to address issues of discrimination on minority religions is because its related to nationalism and they do not want to go against the attitude of majority Buddhists to tackle a complicated issue of Rohingya people and their status of citizenship. Moreover, a dispute between minority groups and majority Buddhists are very fragile issues to solve carefully even by state or government.

On the other hand, according to research findings, among Myanmar civil society organizations, certain local non-governmental organizations in particular Treasure Land Development Association had been organized workshops in which people from multi-religions participated and discussed about unity and peaceful co-existence. As of their activities, participants who joined this workshop also had a chance to do visit to religious buildings of multi-religions in Yangon and exchanged their insights. Basically, these activities aim to reduce suspects, tensions and hatred between multi-religious groups. Hate speech and humors spread across country and even within region through social media because of extremists Buddhists monk and laymen who led by 969 movements. Later on, however, state own and private own media were encountered hate speech by broadcasting news along with evidence.

Based on key findings of the selected organizations; the 88 Generation Students Group and Paungku Consortium addressed in chapter 4, the study found out that activities done by the selected organizations are needed to progress. In time of violence, the 88 Generation Students Group initially provided materials to violence affected people in conflict zone. It is acknowledgement but this is questionable whether it is effective enough to relieve the pain of local people and stop future conflicts and violence. While other civil society organizations in particular Treasure Land Development Organizations had organized and facilitated interfaith dialogues in and outside Yangon. The 88 Generation Students Group had been only involved in distributing aids and doing charity to victims, they could do beyond those activities

though. As activities by Paungku Consortium and its network group, campaigns, interfaith dialogues and seminars attended by multi-religions had been conducting in Yangon to encounter hate speeches in time of conflicts. It aims not to spread anti-Muslims sentiments to other areas especially big cities like Yangon where conflicts are not out broken yet. It is achieved their goals because there would not have any more conflicts in Yangon. But conflicts in Rakhine state could not be completely ended.

According to research findings, the selected organizations could not completely address issues of discrimination based on religion and race in terms of mixing other issues, such as human rights abuse and democratic issues. The conflict and violence based on historical hatred and tensions between Buddhist and Muslim communities happening is the first serious arising issue faced by both organizations. It means that they don't have experience in solving such kinds of violence and do not have enough mechanisms to solve this issue directly. According to interviews with leaders of both organizations, they stated that they had been carrying out some activities including paying visits to conflict areas as moderators between angered crowds of people, distributing humanitarian aid to violence victims and organizing interfaith dialogues in big cities out of the conflict zones. Yet they confessed that their actions and responses worked well to some extent but their capacity and resources are not able to stop the violence.

Second, recent violence in Myanmar is ambiguous whether human rights standards are being abused by the government. In the case of Latpadaung Copper Mine project, the riots were subdued and protestors beaten directly by armed forces. The protestors got serious injuries and some were killed. In this case, a human rights violation can be seen because of the amount of force used to reduce the protest by using deadly weapons. In that case, civil society organizations and individuals including multi-religions and multi-ethnicities stood for the protestors and asked for their rights. However in the case of the religious conflict and violence it is hard to say if individuals will stand for the victims of the violence, especially if they are Muslim. Certain individuals and civil societies who supported and provided aid in this case were criticized by conservative groups of people and extremists from both sides. Currently it is disputable within civil society as to whether to provide aid to those who suffered in violence areas.

To analyze democratic issues, the selected organizations seem to contribute and get involved in the protests of democracy movements more than ethnic conflicts. These two organizations are actually engaged in tackling economic and political problems on discrimination. The 88 Generation Group mainly focuses on issues of political discrimination, particularly freedom of association and freedom of expression and economic discrimination such as land confiscation. This group stands for vulnerable farmers who have been facing seizures of their land since their ancestors in terms of state led projects and business elite. In the 88 generation

groups office sessions for issues of farmers are open and given help in submitting petitions to parliament with the guidelines of lawyers hired by the 88 group. As of the Paungku Consortium, economic discrimination such as issues of land confiscation within the country by elite for their business is mostly focused on fair compensation. Pangku helps particularly when there could be impacts of social and environmental injustice because of state led or privately own projects. However, on the issue of discrimination based on religion and race, their participation is not so high since it is a complicated issue of ethnic rights and citizenship rights. Moreover, the selected organizations are not familiar with discrimination issues and also they do not consider that the root causes of recent conflict are only based on discrimination problems.

The study also found that the role of government is very important in controlling tempo of conflicts and violence based on religious discrimination. In recent case of violence in Myanmar, according to research interviews by members of the selected organizations and people form society, rule of law has been weaken and government security forces could not be able to regulate violence stimulus in time. Lack of effective rule of law, a number of losses of lives and properties owned by local people were increased.

To conclude, discrimination against minority race and religions is noticeable throughout the entire society of Myanmar controlled by government and dominated groups. In the past decades, Myanmar had been under dictatorship regime and was centralized by military government. People were suppressed by the government and



abused their rights and fundamental freedoms. After a newly civilian government taking power, suppression and control reduced. However non-discrimination norms and principles are not emphasized and practiced in reality. Even civil society organizations in Myanmar which initiated democratic and social movements and empowered local people are not robust and vigorous enough to be able to prevent conflicts at the time and eliminate all types of discriminatory practices within societies.

## **5.2 Recommendations**

The researcher gives the following recommendations to be implemented in order to end ongoing violence in Myanmar and to promote the principle of non-discrimination values so that anti-Muslim sentiment will be reduced and discriminatory practices will lessen.

### **5.2.1 To Government Authorities**

First point is strengthening the rule of law and implementation process. As one of the causes of conflicts, this study found out that rule of law is weakly reinforced upon in immigration. Thus, it let people from neighboring countries enter in the country illegally and later they are mixing with those who have already settled down in Myanmar for decades. In this case, the government should examine strong regulations upon immigration law. Also, there would be check and balance and transparency within local authorities. The government should review again the

citizenship status for those who are eligible to be citizens as of Myanmar citizenship law. Moreover, the study also found out that rule of law is weak in maintaining stability in time of violence. Even the security forces with arms are existence in conflicts areas, sectarian violence could not been hindered in time. Thus, the government should set up well-trained security forces who can control conflicts and mobs in time.

Secondly, it is about accurate information and elimination hate speech. In the age of technology, majority of people have access to internet and news are spread in a minute across the world. In the recent conflicts, the rumors and hate speech were circulated on the internet by instigators from both sides. Thus, the government should release updated news and information about riots in Rakhine state without delay, otherwise the spoilers from both sides have chance to spread rumors across the country and even to international agencies and individuals through online media which can fuel further violence.

Third point is that following international human rights standard and promoting non-discrimination values. International human rights agencies accused of the government that there is human rights violations to minority ethnic and religion. Thus, the government should also take into account international human rights standards and make sure that basic human rights of all people regardless of their citizenship status are met to eliminate all forms of discriminatory practices against

minority ethnic and religious groups. The government, therefore, should screen the curriculum used at religious schools to see whether there are religious prejudices and extremists' points to other religions and should establish a civic education to children in all schools to promote better mutual understanding between diverse communities.

### **5.2.2 To Civil Society Organizations Including Selected Organizations**

First point is reducing hate speech and support interfaith dialogue. One of the main causes of conflicts is hatred and animosity that rooted in the heart of diverse people in Rakhine state. This had been enlarged when there was a dispute between these groups and finally led to severe violence. As civil society organizations, they should counter hate-speech by extremists Buddhists and anti-Muslim 969 movements against Rohingya, Muslims, minority ethnic and other religions which increase tensions.

Civil society organizations should also conduct more interfaith dialogues and peace talks occasionally in which religious leaders and followers from multi-religions, Buddhists, Muslims, Christians and Hindus are involved and organize special education programs to eliminate racial injustices and religious prejudices, change the mindset of majority groups toward minority ethnicities and religions and promote mutual understanding.

Second view is promotion non-discriminatory practices within organizations and communities. In multi-ethnic and multi-religions communities, aids distribution and offering job opportunities are unequal. Then, people feel jealous to those who get more beneficiaries. So civil society organizations should promote non-discriminatory practices within their organizations and also apply principles and values of non-discrimination in the diverse communities where their projects are implemented. As the 88 Generation Students Group, they should do white shirt campaigns and prayer campaigns. They should visit to households in violence-affected areas and should console victims of violence as they did for family of political prisoners.

Third point is inclusive developmental project with participation from diverse communities. Communication and cooperation between diverse communities should be developed. Civil society organizations, therefore, should conduct developmental projects in which participation of local people from Muslims and ethnic Rakhine communities are invited so that there will have closer communication and cooperation between them. Also they should create more job opportunities by implementing more projects in the areas and hiring local people in equal ratio of not only Rohingya but also ethnic Rakhine so that there won't be further unrest in terms of poverty and discontent and equal access for all local people from diverse communities in Rakhine state to avoid envy and jealousy between them. To address

another problem that make poverty for Rohingya families, civil society organizations should also deliver family planning education to Rohingya families so that the growth of population rate can be controlled without discriminating against their freedoms or abuse their human rights.

In conclusion, this thesis argues that civil society organizations need to increase their capacity and awareness of non-discrimination values in order to stop religious discrimination, address root causes of religious violence and cease discrimination against minority religions. The ways of responding to religious discrimination and effectiveness of civil society's responses can contribute to the expanding civil society's space to promote non-discrimination values in Myanmar society.

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APPENDIX

จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย  
**CHULALONGKORN UNIVERSITY**



## APPENDIX A

## List of Interviewees

No	Name	Religion	Role/Position	Organization	Place	Date
1	Male	Buddhist	Retired/ Author	-	Yangon	12.6.2013
2	Male	Buddhist	Member	The 88 Generation Students Group	Yangon	13.6.2013
3	Male	Muslim	Officer	Oxfam International	Yangon	13. 6. 2013
4	Female	Buddhist	Author	-	Yangon	13.6.2013
5	Female	Buddhist	Member	The 88 Generation Students Group	Yangon	14.6.213
6	Male	Buddhist	Member	The 88 Generation Students Group	Yangon	14.6.2013
7	Male	Muslim	Tutor	University of West Yangon	Yangon	15.6.2013
8	Female	Muslim	English Teacher	-	Yangon	16.6.2013
9	Male	Buddhist	Researcher	-	Yangon	17.6.2013
10	Male	Buddhist	Leader	Paungku Consortium	Yangon	18.6.2013
11	Male	Buddhist	Tutor	Yangon University	Yangon	19.6.2013
12	Male	Buddhist	Officer	Oxfam International	Yangon	21.6.2013

13	Female	Muslim	Member	The 88 Generation Students Group	Yangon	24.6.2013
14	Male	Muslim	Member	Pray for Myanmar/ Myitzima	Yangon	25.6.2013
15	Male	Buddhist	Member	Pray for Myanmar/ YEP	Yangon	25.6.2013
16	Male	Buddhist	Member	Pray for Myanmar, Community Respond Group	Yangon	26.6.2013
17	Male	Muslim	Member	Pray for Myanmar/Modern Youth	Yangon	26.6.2013
18	Male	Buddhist	Editor/Author/ Journalist	The Voice Weekly Journal	Yangon	28.6.2013
19	Male	Buddhist	Director	Myanmar Peace Center	Yangon	29.6.2013
20	Male	Buddhist	Officer	Myanmar Peace Center	Yangon	29.6.2013
21	Female	Muslim	Teacher Trainer	-	Yangon	29.6.2013
22	Male	Muslim	Leader	The 88 Generation Students Group	Yangon	30.6.2013
23	Male	Buddhist	Director	Myanmar Peace	Yangon	1.7.2013

				Center		
24	Male	Buddhist	Leader	The 88 Generation Students Group	Yangon	1.7.2013
25	Female	Muslim	Leader	Treasure Land Development Association	Yangon	4.7.2013
26	Male	Christian	Leader	Myanmar Council of Churches	Yangon	4.7.2013
27	Male	Hindu	Leader	Interfaith Group Myanmar	Yangon	4.7.2013

## APPENDIX B

## QUESTIONNAIRE SAMPLE FORM

## Questions for Interviews

Research Main Question	Sub-question	Note
1) How do civil society organizations respond to religious discrimination in Myanmar?	<p><b>Closed Qs</b></p> <p>1) What are the main types of discrimination in Myanmar?</p> <p>2) What is the most common discrimination can you see within two years under newly civilian government?</p> <p>Ethnicity/Religion/Disability/Race/Nationality...</p> <p>3) Have you ever seen discrimination? Can you give me example?</p> <p>4) Do you think religious issues/conflicts can be affected badly in the society? Please give me examples and your own experience (case study).</p> <p>5) Is discrimination more or less after</p>	For leaders and members of the selected organizations

	<p>democratic changes?</p> <p>6) What is the main cause of discrimination in Myanmar?</p> <p><b>Open Qs</b></p> <p>7) Why does discrimination occur in Myanmar?</p> <p>8) How does it occur and spread across the country?</p> <p>9) What is your own idea about people of another religion?</p> <p>10) Why is religious violence increasing in Myanmar? Transition to Democracy/ Buddhism/ Military Impact on society.</p>	
<p>2) What activities do civil society organizations perform to</p>	<p><b>Closed Qs</b></p> <p>1) Have your organization ever promoted non-discrimination value in Myanmar? Can you give me example how to promote it?</p>	

<p>support non-discrimination in Myanmar's transition period?</p>	<p>2) How does your organization foster values of non-discrimination within diverse society?</p> <p>3) In the case of religious violence between Buddhists and Muslims, what does your organization do?</p> <p>4) What kinds of assistance does your organization provide to the victims of religious rebellion?</p> <p><b>Open Qs</b></p> <p>5) What challenges does your organization encounter in the way of promoting non-discrimination value of religion?</p> <p>6) How does your organization overcome them?</p> <p>7) What difficulties does your organization face to respond to religious violence?</p> <p>8) How does your organization pass them?</p> <p>9) In what way does religious violence make disorder Myanmar's transition to</p>	
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	<p>Democracy?</p> <p>10) Is there anything you want to add?</p>	
<p>1) How do civil society organizations respond to religious discrimination in Myanmar?</p>	<p><b>Closed Qs</b></p> <p>1) What are the main types of discrimination in Myanmar?</p> <p>2) What is the most common discrimination can you see within two years under newly civilian government? Ethnicity/Religion/Disability/Race/Nationality...</p> <p>3) Have you ever seen discrimination? Can you give me example?</p> <p>4) Do you think religious issues/conflicts can be affected badly in the society? Please give me examples and your own experience (case study).</p> <p>5) Is discrimination more or less after democratic changes?</p> <p>6) What is the main cause of discrimination</p>	<p>For people from civil society, media and academic fields</p>

	<p>in Myanmar?</p> <p><b>Open Qs</b></p> <p>7) Why does discrimination occur in Myanmar?</p> <p>8) How does it occur and spread across the country?</p> <p>9) What is your own idea about people of another religion?</p> <p>Why is religious violence increasing in Myanmar? Transition to Democracy/ Buddhism/ Military Impact on society.</p>	
<p>2) What activities do civil society organizations perform to support non-discrimination in Myanmar's transition</p>	<p><b>Closed Qs</b></p> <p>1) Have you ever seen 88 Generation Group provided humanitarian assistances to the victims of religious riots regardless religion and race?</p> <p>2) Do you agree 88 Generation Group has considered Muslim as same status of Buddhists in real situation?</p> <p>3) Have you ever seen Paungku Consortium</p>	



<p>period?</p>	<p>provided humanitarian assistance to the victims of religious riots regardless religion and race?</p> <p>4) Do you agree Paungku Consortium has considered Muslims as same status of Buddhists in practice?</p> <p><b>Open Qs</b></p> <p>5) Do you think civil society organization contribute to peace in religious violence?</p> <p>6) What role selected organization play in responding to religious violence?</p> <p>7) What role civil society organizations play in discrimination issue?</p> <p>8) What do they do? What should they do? What could they do for responding to religious discrimination?</p> <p>Is there anything you want to add?</p>	
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## VITA

Ms. Khin San Wai holds a bachelor degree in International Relations from University of East Yangon (2004). She also holds a certificate of “Teaching Knowledge Test” from Cambridge University (2009) and has completed a “Foundational Cycle Training of Trainers” course by American Center in Yangon (2011). Moreover, she also attended “Community Development and Civic Empowerment Program” at Chiang Mai University in 2011. She has many years professional experience working with private organizations and non-governmental organizations related to the field of education. She worked for International School of Total Learning Academy as a primary teacher from 2008 to 2009. She then joined Career Development and Enhancement Center and worked as a teacher and trainer implementing Peace Education and Peace and Solidarity Projects from 2009 to 2012. She then moved to Capacity Building Initiative and has been working as a trainer/consultant until August 2012. In the midst of her advanced degree of International Development Studies, she spent 4 months working for Church World Service (Asia/Pacific) at their Regional Office in Bangkok as an intern Research and Program Assistant.

Regarding volunteer experience, she has been devoting her time and energy in volunteering as an English teacher and trainer for her community. She offered free education to children and provided teacher training sessions to teachers from orphanage and monastic education schools. She was also actively involved in providing emergency aid to victims of natural disasters, and humanitarian assistance to those in need in collaboration with self-help groups and CDCE alumni network group in the past years.

She is very interested in public relations, public policy, leadership, community development, women empowerment and capacity building. Her passion is to become a leader in her community, be a good role model for young women and take an active role in policy making.