

Statement of Women's Groups and CSOs on preparation of draft Interfaith Marriage Law¹

1. We believe that current faith-based political activities, including the arguments against interfaith marriage currently taking place in the country, are not in accordance with the objectives of the peaceful coexistence of all faiths and the prevention of extreme violence and conflict, but are instead events and ideas designed to distract the public before the 2015 election.
2. We view these events as delaying the momentum of transition to democracy, and as a hindrance to national peace processes and the Constitutional amendments desired by Myanmar's people.
3. Elements of the proposed law place restrictions upon women's equality and freedom do not meet international human rights standards, and do not comply with the Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) that the Government acceded to in 1997.
4. Rule of law and access to justice are the most effective measures to protect and provide security for women. Urgent action is required against those who carry out various kinds of violence towards women.
5. Article 364 of the Constitution clearly states that "The abuse of religion for political purposes is forbidden.". We need to be aware that the proposed Interfaith Marriage Act could be used by some for political gain at the 2015 Election, and because of potential unwanted consequences, great political caution should be taken.
6. Faith-based extremist nationalism can destroy state peace and incite conflict; we reject all political violence that causes people's physical and mental insecurity.
7. There are religious and ethnic differences among the nationals of Myanmar, and developing initiatives based on religion hinders the implementation of national solidarity and current peace building processes.
8. We will strive and endeavor in every non-violent way possible, to amend laws and regulations, including the Constitution, that discriminate against women, including the involvement of women in the political sphere.
9. The proposed Interfaith Marriage Act not only discriminates against Myanmar Buddhist women, women of other faiths residing in Myanmar, and indigenous people, but also places the responsibility of preserving race, religion, culture and traditions solely on women.
10. Moreover, the drafting of the Interfaith Marriage Act for the reason of preserving race, religion, culture and traditions, does not respect and acknowledge the reasoning abilities of Myanmar Buddhist women to think rationally and make decisions, and instead restricts and obstructs their freedom of choice to make decisions on issues directly concerned with their lives.
11. Women's organizations, women's networks and civil society organizations who are working actively to promote women's rights and equality, strongly reject the President's efforts to draft an Interfaith Marriage Act and to form a Commission, as the proposed law is based on discriminatory beliefs that women are generally physically and mentally weaker than men, and therefore need to be supervised and protected. This denies women the inherent rights of freedom of survival and freedom of choice.

¹ This statement is developed based on the Statement released on 2013, June 16 by women groups which expressed their concern on Draft Interfaith Marriage Law and added more recommendations.

We here by send the following suggestions for consideration and implementation in order to truly promote and protect the well being of Myanmar women's lives:

1. At present, the two national issues of amendments to the 2008 Constitution and the National Peace Process require immediate priority over the proposed Interfaith Marriage Law; the implementation of these issues should be taken seriously.
2. Instead of drafting and presenting the Interfaith Marriage Law, a highly contentious law inviting unnecessary negative outcomes, the State should work towards a law requiring the compulsory registration of all marriages regardless of race, religion and sex.
3. By law, there should be a specific age limit required for the registration of legal marriage of any man or woman.
4. The Government should: help and support the enforcement and effective implementation of existing public laws which are useful; make necessary amendments to laws regarding women (including the Constitution) which are directly or indirectly discriminatory to women; and upon its completion, pass the anti-violence against women law which is in the process of being drafted according to international standards.
5. Only when women are able to make decisions on their own that enable them to lead strong, healthy and successful lives, will the country realize genuine development. Therefore, in order for women to effectively serve their country and people in the most beneficial way, priority should be given to women's education, health, and business opportunities, to build, and promote their abilities and decision- making skills.
6. It is better to raise people (either men or women) in a way that nurtures them to value and respect heritage, religion, culture and traditions rather than imposing the responsibility of preserving race, religion, culture and traditions of a country entirely on women.
7. Myanmar's transition to democracy is being watched and supported internationally, and drafting laws which do not meet democratic ideals can damage Myanmar's image and dignity and hinder democracy building. Drafting the Interfaith Marriage Law, a law that directly discriminates against the inherent rights of women, at a time when the Government is submitting a report to CEDAW committee in August 2014, would demonstrate the Government's violation of both human rights and women's rights and would be a disgraceful act that would invite international ridicule. We are therefore requesting you to earnestly reconsider this proposal.

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List of organizations and networks which endorsed above statement

1. Akhaya
2. Colorful Girls

3. Phan Tee Eain (PTE)
4. Rainfall Gender Study Group
5. Kachin Women Peace Network (KWPN)
6. Triangle Women Group
7. Wimutti
8. Karen Women Empowerment Group (KWEG)
9. Women's League of Burma (made up of 13 member organizations)
10. Socio Economic and Gender Research Institute (SEFRI)
11. Equality Myanmar
12. Student Christian Movement (SCM)
13. NGO Gender Group (NGO GG)
14. ALTSEAN Burma
15. Gender and Development Initiative (GDI)
16. Good Sleep
17. Rainbow
18. Women Federation of World Peace (WFWP)
19. Color Rainbow
20. Kings and Queens
21. Paung Ku
22. Burma Partnership
23. Friendship
24. DNH Alumni Network
25. CDCE Alumni Network
26. Irrawaddy Division Women Group
27. Htoi Gender Group
28. Kachin Peace Network (KPN)
29. Generation Waves
30. Kachin Women Union (KWU)
31. Sawm Rawm Women Peace Builder Team (SRWPBT)
32. Bayda Institute
33. Sunflower Group Social Enterprise
34. Charity Oriented Myanmar (COM)
35. Pyi Gyi Khin
36. Gender Equality Network (GEN)
37. Women Initiative Network for Peace (WIN-Peace)
38. Ratanna Metta Organization
39. ComReg
40. Myanmar Disabled Women Association (MDWA)
41. Ninu (Women in Action Group)
42. Khit Thit Community Organization – Tontay
43. UKSY – Loikaw (Union of Karenni State Youth)
44. KNGY – Loikaw (Kayan New Generation Youth)
45. KWO – Loikaw (Kayan Women Organization)
46. Myanmar Mobile Training Team
47. A Lin Say Ta Marn Organization

48. Safety Net
49. Pa Dae Thar Moe
50. Pyo Khin Thit Ma U Pin
51. Human Rights Defender and Promoter
52. Myanmar Green Network
53. POINT
54. Youth Circle
55. Ayeyarwady Youth Network
56. Upper Myanmar Lawyer Network
57. Myanmar Lawyer Network
58. Agriculture and Farmer Federation of Myanmar – Lutputta
59. Lan Pya Kye – Seik Phyu
60. Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)
61. Pathein Myitta Yae Kyi Social Support Group
62. Chapter – 8
63. Twig
64. Peace Network
65. Women for Justice
66. New Generation Shan State – Taunggyi
67. Green Network Sustainable Environmental Group
68. Thinking Classroom Foundation
69. Kanbawza Youth Library – Taunggyi
70. HRDP – Ayeyarwaddy (Pathein, Hinthada, Bogalay, Danuphyu, Lay Myat Nar, Ngwe Saung, Kyone Pyaw, Nyaung Done, Nga Pu Taw, Tha Paung, Kyaik Latt)
71. HRDP – Bago (Pyay, Shwe Taung, Min Hla, Let Pan Dan, Shwe Kyin, Nyaung Lay Pin)
72. HRDP – Shan State (Taunggyi, Nyaung Shwe, Shwe Nyaung, Heho, Aye Thar Yar, Nam San)
73. HRDP – Mandalay (Myin Gyan, Thar Si, Wan Twin, Taung Tha, Pyin Oo Lwin, Nwa Htoe Gyi)
74. HRDP – Tanintharyi (Myeik Kyun Su, Dawei, Kaw Thaug)
75. HRDP – Mon (Thein Zayat)
76. HRDP – Yangon (Hlaing Thar Yar, Tontay, Thone Kwa, Kha Yan, Kyi Myin Dine, San Chaung, Hlaing, Pa Be Dan)
77. IFI watch Myanmar
78. Democracy and Peace Women Network
79. Political Group of outside Parliament
80. Let Twe Ku Mae Pyay Volunteer Youth Group
81. Karunna Hands Network
82. 7 Day Blood and Children Support Network
83. Bartha Paung Sone Tha Yae Nar Yae Kunyi Mu Association
84. Saytanar Shin Thway Luu Shin Association
85. Volunteer Trainer Team
86. 88 Generation Students, Open Society and Peace (Women Department)
87. Campaign Network Group (Pyay, Monywa, Mawlamyine, Htee Chike, Maung Kone, Pakkoku)
88. Green Light (Sagaing)
89. Tarkapaw (Dawei)

90. Ta ang Women Organization (Lashio and Kut Khai)
91. YWCA (Taunggyi)
92. Shan State Women Development Organization – Taunggyi
93. Pa Oh Women Education Foundation
94. Yangon School of Political Science (YSPS)
95. Myanmar ICT and Development Organization (MIDO)
96. Women Galaxy
97. Sex Workers Network in Myanmar (SWIM)