



UNITED STATES
INSTITUTE OF PEACE

fact
SHEET

USIP's Work in Myanmar

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CURRENT SITUATION IN MYANMAR

The country's transition from military rule to representative democracy is complicated by entrenched political and economic interests, religious and ethnic cleavages, and difficult negotiations with an array of armed groups to settle decades-long internal conflicts. As peace talks drag on, the nation's parliamentary election, slated to take place in late 2015, threatens to exacerbate tensions within and among groups. In addition, the constitution unfairly prohibits the main opposition candidate, Nobel Peace Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, from standing for president. Myanmar also faces the imperative to address communal (particularly Buddhist/Muslim) violence intensified by narratives spread on social media and elsewhere that inflame prejudice and violence.

USIP'S WORK

Since 2011, the U.S. Institute of Peace has worked directly with Myanmar's government and with civil society organizations in the once-isolated nation, which is also known as Burma. The aim is to support and sustain democratic reform and peacebuilding for a more resilient society that can withstand the inevitable strains of transition. USIP bolsters initiatives that prevent and manage local violence; deepen understanding and collaboration among ethnic/religious groups, civil society sectors, and community and government leaders; assist those working on legal reforms necessary for democratic transition; strengthen social, political, and legal norms of religious and ethnic tolerance; and support the peace process. The Institute's recent work in Myanmar includes:

Engaging Religious Networks: Local partners have identified religious actors and interfaith groups as a key sector to bridge societal divides and promote peaceful coexistence. USIP works with Christian, Buddhist, and Muslim communities in Myanmar to empower, connect, and build the ability of religious leaders to promote interfaith understanding and collaboration and to monitor and prevent communal violence.

Rule of Law Support: As the country transitions from military authoritarianism, it is crucial to build accountable and effective justice and security systems that meet international standards. The challenges are enormous, including decades of entrenched corruption and high levels of mistrust between government and communities. USIP's work to promote the rule of law in Myanmar has focused on developing inclusive and collaborative processes for legal reforms and strengthening the capacity of the Myanmar Police Force to work in partnership with communities on preventing and managing violence. USIP has played a key role leading consultations on election security strategies with police, the Union Election Commission, and local communities.

Media and Technology for Peace: Hate speech and other inflammatory rhetoric and narratives fuel the country's ethnic and religious violence. The PeaceTech Lab, an initiative of USIP now operating as a separate organization, brought together technologists and civic leaders, including religious activists, in Yangon to devise methods for monitoring and addressing discourse that intensifies conflict, especially on social media. Co-hosted with the Myanmar ICT for Development Organization (MIDO) and Phandeeyar, an innovation lab nurturing the country's tech community, the PeaceTech Exchange helped participants develop projects that now are being funded with small USIP grants.

USIP EVENTS

USIP frequently hosts events, bringing together thought leaders, scholars, experts, policymakers and elected officials. Since 2012, USIP has hosted dozens of presidential advisors, senior religious leaders, women's rights activists, minority political representatives, and peacebuilders from Myanmar for discussions and courses offered by USIP's Academy for International Conflict Management and Peacebuilding. Events in Washington D.C. have included:

Burma's Peace Potential: Portraits of Diversity: The April 2015 event featured the premiere of the short-film series Portraits of Diversity and a discussion, in partnership with the Cambodia-based Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies. The documentaries feature five individuals from Burma's diverse religious and ethnic communities who work across the usual divides and help nurture interfaith connections.

Burma/Myanmar in Transition: A Discussion With Aung San Suu Kyi: The Nobel Peace Laureate and opposition leader addressed an audience at USIP with Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton in September 2012 in an event co-hosted with the Asia Society. The occasion marked Daw Suu Kyi's first public appearance in the United States in more than two decades.

USIP PUBLICATIONS

USIP's work in the field informs policymakers, practitioners, and scholars in the international community. Institute experts publish in-depth reports, as well as short, timely policy briefs, to distill the results of research, report on lessons learned from fieldwork, and suggest new solutions. Recent articles and publications on Burma include:

"Myanmar: Anatomy of a Political Transition," Special Report, by Priscilla Clapp (April 2015)

"Burma: Can the 2015 Elections Overcome the Legacy of 2010?" The Olive Branch, by Priscilla Clapp (March 2015)

"Media and Conflict in Myanmar: Opportunities for Media to Advance Peace," Peaceworks, by Theo Dolan and Stephan Gray (January 2014)

"The Economy of Burma/Myanmar on the Eve of the 2010 Elections," Special Report, by Lex Rieffel (May 2010)

"Communal Violence in Burma," Q&A, by Priscilla Clapp (June 2012)

"Burma/Myanmar Democracy Activist Daw Aung San Suu Kyi Calls for U.S. Support, Easing of Sanctions at USIP," News Feature, by Thomas Omestad (September 2012)

"Democracy is a Process—and a Journey," The Olive Branch, by Colette Rausch (July 2012)

"Mixed Blessings: the Power of Religious Protest in Burma," The Olive Branch, by Susan Hayward (September 2012)

"Burma Rule-of-Law Reform: USIP Work in Progress," The Olive Branch, by Colette Rausch, Susan Hayward, Leanne McKay, and Kay Spencer (September 2013)