National Conference on Faith for Children, 2014
Myanmar Interfaith Declaration

Through this declaration, religions represented in the National Conference on Faith for Children re-affirm that every child is entitled to a safe, protected childhood during which every child can grow and develop to her or his optimal potential, has a right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and more generally to enjoy his or her rights according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Religions support the core principles of the CRC, namely the best interests of the child, the rights to life, survival, development and participation, the principle of non-discrimination of any kind, and the universality of rights.

The Religions also recognize that a family is the best place for a child to grow and that families should be supported to be able to raise their children in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding. Religions have a shared mission to enhance the knowledge and skills of children’s caregivers to ensure children’s rights are protected as they are the future of Myanmar.

PREAMBLE

INSPIRED by our holy Scriptures; We the religious leaders from the Buddhism, Islam, Christianity and Hindu communities in Myanmar deliberated the issues affecting children in Myanmar during 2 -3 April 2014 convened with the initiative of Ratana Metta Organization (RMO) in partnership with UNICEF;

AFFIRMING and RESPECTING the sanctity and dignity of human life:

NOTING with great concern the poor health indicators of children in the country, low enrolment and completion of primary and secondary education, children’s exposure to violence and conflict, as well as the many children separated from their family who may end up in abusive or exploitative situations, or harmful institutional care;

APPRECIATING the efforts of the Government of Myanmar and relevant Ministries for their programmes and efforts for child survival, protection and development and working with development partners;

VALUING the ethnic and religious diversity of Myanmar, and the contribution such a diversity must play in the development of Myanmar
APPRECIATING the role of international cooperation, in particular technical and financial assistance from international development partners, including UNICEF, in helping the Myanmar society ensure that its children reach their full potential, and in particular their efforts to support the efforts of religious communities and other local organizations;

COGNISANT of the moral responsibility of religious leaders and faith communities as moral and ethical guides to healthy living and the care and protection of the vulnerable children in our communities and the society in general;

RECOGNISING the influence and commitment of religious leaders and faith communities to harness their collective resources for positive societal transformation;

TAKING into account the enormous spiritual, moral and social assets that religious leaders and faith communities have at their disposal which they have often employed for child rights in the country;

AGREEING to establish and maintain an interfaith mechanism to regularly dialogue and consolidate the efforts of faith communities and other stakeholders in support of child rights in the country.

DECLARATION

WE declare as follows:

WE commit ourselves to a national and sustainable contribution to the effort to prevent diseases, deaths and sufferings of our children and families from preventable causes;

WE commit to effort to increase access by all children to an education of quality, which prepares the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, kindness, acceptance and respect, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups;

WE commit to effort protecting children from all forms of neglect, exploitation, abuse and violence in the family, communities and in conflict;

WE commit to ensuring that families and communities are encouraged and supported to provide safe loving care for their children, and that any form of institutional care of children is the last transient resort;

WE affirm and commit ourselves to use our Scriptures and social teachings as developed into the Faith for Children materials to mobilize and persuade our congregations, followers and communities for healthy behaviours and practices;
WE undertake to maximize the use of the spiritual, moral and social assets of religious communities in support of a comprehensive communication mechanism for the child survival, protection and education of our children;

WE resolve to develop programmes, projects and partnerships that will empower religious leaders and faith communities with skills, teachings and facilitation to support the rights and protection of children;

WE resolve to work together to prevent inter-communal violence based on ethnicity or religion, and to jointly condemn such a violence whenever it happens;

WE subscribe to set up an interfaith dialogue mechanism and partnership for children.

WE commit to disseminate the declaration through religious talks, gatherings, events and communication channels.

WE express our gratitude to RMO and UNICEF Myanmar, for convening this National Conference on Faith for Children.

WE thank the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement for their support and technical input to faith communities in their endeavors under the Faith for Children initiative.

Signed on behalf of the Conference by:

Religious Leaders

Buddhist

Venerable Dr. Ashin Nyanissara
Sitagu International Buddhist Academy

Buddhist

Ashin U Kavinda
Parahita Hman Kin Monastic School

Christian

Father Joseph Maung Win
Catholic Bishop’s Conference of Myanmar

Christian

Rev. Saw Shwe Lin
Myanmar Council of Churches
Islam

Mufti U Ko Lay
Suratee Jamia Masjid

Hindu

Pandit Mohan Raj Upadhyay
Shri Bhutnath Mahadev Temple

Ratana Metta Organization

U Myint Swe, President of RMO

Acknowledging the Myanmar Interfaith Declaration and the commitments mentioned above, UNICEF undertakes to strengthen the collaboration with the religious communities for interfaith dialogue and action to help shape a better future for Myanmar children.

UNICEF Myanmar

Mr. Bertrand Bainvel, Representative