

## A FERVENT APPEAL OF THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS

Seize this opportunity!

**A message addressed to**

**Civilian, Ethnic, Armed Groups, Political Parties and Religious Leaders  
of Myanmar**

We are weary of war, worn down by enmities. War disgraces everyone. Why is it that Myanmar's conflicts never end? Where does responsibility lie? Of course one may accuse the belligerence of the Tatmadaw, even her obstinacy in refusing a full ceasefire to allow the nation to cope with the pandemic. One may deplore the faint authority of the civilian government, or the lack of due process in the judicial system. One may accuse ethnic leaders and truant cronies who benefit too much from trade in jade or drugs to desist. One may deplore that we religious leaders are too timid in protesting injustice.

But with this message, in anticipation of important national elections and the 21st Century Panglong Conference, we appeal directly to all leaders of Myanmar and to our fellow religious leaders to listen with respect to one another and determine to seek the good of all.

A golden opportunity is now given us in the new conditions and new challenges in our world. We urge all: seize this moment. Myanmar is caught in a three-fold global crisis. A tiny pathogen has halted humanity. Nature is arrested. Coronavirus gives us a chance to take new paths. Second, environmental threats puts all at risk. Myanmar is one of five countries most affected by climate change this century. Third, a global wildfire reveals how deeply race relations matter. Despite the beauty of

diversity, Myanmar people cling to the folly of assuming a ranking in ethnic differences.

What can we do differently instead of returning to senseless divisions? What future do we want for our young? For decades they have been given no opportunities at home and so went abroad by the millions, to labour as slaves. How can we best promise a future and give health, benefit and dignity to our people? With what courage and creativity can we claim our right to respect, equality, sustainable prosperity and enduring peace for Myanmar?

Myanmar is surrounded by many neighbours. They see the riches of our country, our gold, teak and jade, our generous rivers and untouched forests. When we fight one another, we become distracted, our land is ravished, our young are destroyed by addictive stimulant drugs, and thousands of our young women and men leave their country only to lose their dignity and their lives. Again last week hundreds of young jade miners were buried in watery graves, while foreigners run away with our wealth. When we fight we put our young men at enmity with their brothers. Their lives and limbs are broken, mothers weep and young wives are made widows. It is time to stop.

The colonisers' strategy was to divide and rule. Let us not be misled again. To build a nation we need not be afraid of difference, but rather learn to negotiate, compromise, dialogue and rejoice in who we are. When we elect a civilian government, are we not choosing who has authority in our nation? Is not democracy our goal in the elections?

The peace agreements we sign are flimsy. They may pause the fighting but forests are still plundered. Precious riches are still taken from our soil and stolen from future generations. Go deeper in your negotiations! We do not protect the rights of our poor when we do the same as the aggressors. To trade with thieves is to deal in death. We plead with you,

choose the uphill path of the 'new', not the downhill path of the 'safe'. Confront your enemies with truth. Work to convince them that peace is in their best interests too.

Invest in hope. Prepare for the future world after the pandemic. Listen to the cries of Mother earth. Respect one another. Encourage our young to study. Asia and the world will need what Myanmar can contribute for generations to come. Our cultures are treasures, built over centuries. The forests of Myanmar are the lungs of Asia. Our indigenous people know how to conserve them. Myanmar's paddy fields are the rice bowl of Asia. Our farmers deserve just recompense. The youth of Myanmar are tomorrow's peace makers of ASEAN. Prepare them well.

Buddhist, Christian and Muslim people of Myanmar, with ethnic and community leaders, can live the message that the world longs to hear. When we unmask insincerity, heed one another and look in harmony to the future, we will promote a world that is peaceful, just and inclusive. Then Myanmar will be a proud member of the family of nations.

The people of Myanmar deserve peace, not unending war. There can be no peace without justice. There can be no justice without truth. Let a new Myanmar of hope, peace and prosperity dawn as we march towards the goal of democracy through elections.

Seize this opportunity!

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