

September 2014



# Factsheet

# BURMA

## USCIRF Examines Religious Freedom Violations During Fact-finding Trip to Burma

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USCIRF Commissioners Eric P. Schwartz and M. Zuhdi Jasser meet with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in Rangoon, Burma, along with USCIRF Director of Policy and Research Knox Thames and East Asia Analyst Tina Mufford.

USCIRF conducted its first-ever Commissioner-level visit to Burma between August 19-23, 2014. Traveling to Rangoon, Mandalay, Meiktila and Naypyidaw, USCIRF met with Union and state government officials, Rangoon-based representatives of ethnic and religious groups, representatives of non-governmental organizations, representatives of political parties, including Aung San Suu Kyi, and religious leaders. During this trip, USCIRF examined ways to promote tolerance and inclusion in light of the violations of religious freedom that have taken place, as well as the violence and discrimination religious and ethnic minorities have experienced.

The visit not only confirmed USCIRF's concerns about religious and ethnic minorities and the ongoing discrimination against Rohingya Muslims, but that Burma belongs on the list of "countries of particular concern" (CPC). USCIRF has recommended since 1999 that Burma be designated as a CPC for its severe religious freedom violations and highlighted policies the U.S. government could undertake to encourage reform and respect for human rights. The State Department has designated Burma as a CPC since 1999. The Commission will issue a full report of its trip and share policy recommendations with relevant U.S. and international stakeholders.

Visit [uscirf.gov](http://uscirf.gov) to see a slideshow of USCIRF's trip to Burma

**THE U.S.  
COMMISSION ON  
INTERNATIONAL  
RELIGIOUS  
FREEDOM**

was created by the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 to monitor the status of freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief abroad, as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and related international instruments, and to give independent policy recommendations to the President, Secretary of State, and Congress.

**BURMA**

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## CONCERN FOR RELIGIOUS AND ETHNIC MINORITIES

USCIRF has expressed concern about limitations on religious freedom for everyone – majority Buddhists and minority non-Buddhists – and welcomed the recent release of prisoners of conscience, easing of restrictions on freedom of expression and other encouraging developments. However, USCIRF’s August visit confirmed concerns about serious and substantial discrimination committed against minority religious faiths that have been imposed by law, regulation and practice. Members of these faiths thus have unequal personal status that is reflected, for example, in their identification documents and the lack of some rights associated with citizenship. Other restrictions have prevented the construction of religious institutions and impose obstacles to Muslims and Christians practicing their faith.



The Mandalay Regional Cabinet meets with USCIRF to discuss the aftermath of July 2014 violence between the majority Buddhist and minority Muslim communities.



A mosque located in the Muslim section of a Mandalay cemetery was burned during communal violence. Several other structures were burned as well.



A Koran burned in a mosque fire during the July 2014 communal violence in Mandalay.

While meeting with officials from the Meiktila District Administrative Office, USCIRF learned that the city has five camps for displaced persons: three for Muslims, with a total population of more than 3,000, and two for Buddhists, with more than 800 residents. The camps were established following violence in March 2013 that resulted in the destruction of 1,500 to 2,400 homes, shops and religious building and the displacement of more than 11,000 residents, both Muslim and Buddhist. District officials refer to these dwellings as “rescue camps.”



In Meiktila, USCIRF visited a camp for internally displaced Muslims who lost their homes in the March 2013 episodes of communal violence. Throughout its trip, USCIRF also learned of the conditions for Rohingya Muslims in camps located throughout Rakhine State.



Also in Meiktila, USCIRF visited a camp for Buddhist displaced persons.

## **DISCRIMINATION AGAINST ROHINGYA MUSLIMS**

During its visit, USCIRF received deeply troubling reports of abuses committed against Rohingya Muslims. In particular, the Rohingya Muslim community in Rakhine State has experienced systematic, large-scale and egregious abuses of human rights that have resulted in deaths, injuries, displacement, denial of basic health and other services, denial of freedom of movement, and denial of the right to a nationality. In addition to the extreme poverty that has negatively affected all communities and faiths residing in Rakhine State, Rohingya Muslims face discrimination, abuse and violence of such degree and scope that their situation is particularly dire.