

Southeast Asia Inter-Cultural and Inter-Religious Dialogue Think Tank

Yangon, 24-25 January 2015

Background

In many parts of the world, culture and religion are at the epicenter of people's lives. Culture and religion are not simply an ideological concept – they have a direct influence on daily life and the practicalities of interacting with the surrounding community.

Over the past decade, the importance of religion and culture have grown to become one of the dominant and defining characteristics of both individuals, collective communities and states. Religious and cultural tensions have erupted in many fragile parts of the world, and consequently, the need for more inter-cultural and inter-religious understanding has become greater than ever.

The humanitarian community is playing an increasingly active role in bridging the cultural and/or religious divide in fractured communities. Oftentimes, humanitarian activities in sensitive contexts cannot be approached without factoring in questions of religious and cultural understanding or adaptation.

Across Southeast Asia, the humanitarian consequences of inter-cultural and inter-religious issues are not only important for those directly involved in humanitarian assistance. The issues also extend to a wider range of actors including states, universities, and religious institutions, among others. In the interest of wider society, the benefits of interventions to prevent or mitigate the consequences should be valued.

Rationale and objectives

It is within this context that the Center for Strategic and International Studies-Myanmar Development Resources Institute (CSIS-MDRI), Interfaith Dialogue Group (Myanmar), Myanmar Red Cross Society, and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) are engaging relevant stakeholders for a regional think tank focusing on inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue.

The think tank aims to serve as a platform for relevant stakeholders in Southeast Asia, South Asia and the Middle East, to discuss relevant challenges, share best practice, and evaluate methods to mitigate tension in the context of their work. The think tank should provide better comprehension on the prevailing beliefs, customs and faiths in Asia among the participants involved. It should strengthen a strategic direction on the related issues, and indicate the types of action the participants can and should do to address these issues within Southeast Asia and beyond. The target group is both humanitarian and non-humanitarian actors.

Specific Objectives

This think tank aims to achieve the following objectives:

- Enhance relations between regional representatives of various government agencies, humanitarian organisations, academics, and inter-faith organisations in Asia, which work with groups from different cultural, ethnic, and religious communities.
- Create a platform for an open, constructive exchange, which enhances collective understanding and allows participants to discuss relevant challenges, share best practices and evaluate methods to mitigate tension in the context of their work.
- Increase understanding on the prevailing beliefs, customs and faiths in Asia among participants involved and strengthen a strategic direction on the related issues, indicating the type of action the participants can and should address in their own context.
- Identify and assess the current challenges of working in sensitive religious/cultural contexts against the backdrop of basic humanitarian principles.
- Contribute to the regional thinking that will in turn influence national and/or regional actors

Expected Outcomes

Key findings and recommendations will be consolidated into a conference report after the conclusion of the think tank. Other steps forward at the national and regional level will be determined by the participants.

Event details

Date: 24-25 January 2015

Location: Summit Parkview Hotel, Yangon, Myanmar

Participants:

- Relevant government agencies
- Religious organizations, relevant UN, INGO and NGOs
- Center for Strategic and International Studies-Myanmar Development Resources Institute (CSIS-MDRI)
- Interfaith Dialogue Group (Myanmar)
- Myanmar Red Cross Society (MRCS)

Contact information

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