



# Portraits of Diversity

## A Study Guide

### Introduction

*Portraits of Diversity* is a series of videos that celebrates five individuals in Myanmar, and shows how their work and passion attempt to bridge the divide in a multi-ethnic context. This companion guide can be used as a tool to generate discussion about diversity and tolerance, and to create a space to foster acceptance and share visions for the future.

There is a discussion guide for each video portrait followed by suggested activities that can also be adapted to different learning environments. For each video, background is provided on the person and their context, followed by five discussion questions, and extension activities.

### Discussion Objectives

- To engage in discussions on diversity and religious tolerance in the Myanmar context.
- To relate individual action to cooperation and creating a strong social fabric.

Sources Cited: Partners Against Hate. *Building Community and Combatting Hate: Lessons from the Middle School Classroom*.

# Portrait One • Dr. Khin Win Kyu

## Introduction

A Consultant Obstetrician and Gynaecologist, Dr. Khin Win Kyu has been volunteering much of her time for the last 17 years at the Muslim Free Hospital in Yangon, a hospital that treats poorer communities without charge, regardless of race, religion or ethnicity. Earlier Dr. Khin Win Kyu worked in the government service for 22 years. Established in the 1930s, the hospital is a microcosm of what an ideal Myanmar society could be like, where doctors from all faiths come together to treat the less fortunate. Dr. Khin Win Kyu's department treats between 120-180 pregnant mothers from different ethnic and religious backgrounds every month.

## Discussion Questions

1. How does the Muslim Free Hospital where Dr. Khin works promote diversity and peace?
2. Dr. Khin says that "*the hospital functions mainly because of different faiths working together.*" Why do you think this is so? How can this be applied in other settings/contexts?
3. How does she react to anti-Muslim violence in Myanmar? What does she believe causes people to carry out this violence? Do you agree?
4. What does Dr. Khin do or say that shows hope and a vision for a peaceful future?
5. What do you see and hear Dr. Khin doing that counters the misconceptions she says some people have that Muslims are extremist or aggressive? What can be done to gain more knowledge about different faiths?

## Extension Activities

- Make a list of the ways providing care for mothers can positively effect in your own community. In partner or small groups, share your lists, and draw out common ideas, and discuss how this can apply to other communities. Be sure to question and explore any different that might be unique to the communities of the group.

# Portrait Two • U Nay Win

## Introduction

U Nay Win is the General Secretary of the Mandalay YMCA. A Christian, he is from a mixed heritage and his family travelled widely across Burma, making friends from different communities. Many of these places are still home to him. U Nay Win's work extends to coordinating the efforts of interfaith groups both in Mandalay and surrounding areas, like Meikhtila, where there have been outbreaks of religious violence targeting Muslim communities. He talks about his work, the challenges he has faced and how Christians could perform an intermediary role.

## Discussion Questions

1. What is important about U Nay Win sharing information about his sons and ancestors?
2. U Nay Win talks about living in different places and at first having difficulties because of being of different ethnicities. How were these difficulties overcome and how does this parallel the current situation in Myanmar?
3. In which ways does the video show U Nay Win acting on the responsibility he feels he has to unite both Buddhists and Muslims to live in harmony?
4. Why was it important to focus on interfaith humanitarian assistance in Meikhtila?
5. U Nay Win believes that it is necessary to accept that diversity has always existed in Myanmar. What else can be done to promote acceptance?

## Extension Activities

- In partners, take turn, telling each other a story about your family or ancestors. If possible think of a story that talks about where your family comes from and customs they may have. Then on chart paper, discuss what was similar between the stories, and what you have learned from each other.
- Prepare a list of all the support you or your community could provide in times of a humanitarian crisis. Compare your list with a partner, and share your list with the group. Discuss how communities of different faiths can provide for each other.

# Portrait Three • U Thayzar Dipati

## Introduction

U Thayzar Dipati is a Buddhist monk from Shwebo, northwest of Mandalay. He grew up in the monastery as a young novice monk, and today his chief role is to care for young HIV patients, and to run the monastery of young monks. U Thayzar Dipati is often called upon by the local community in the area to help neutralise rumours before they grow out of control and on social media, and prevent outbreaks of violence locally. He has strong links to the other religious communities in the area, and fosters inter-religious understanding. The monk believes that by learning about other religions, we will realize that they are not so different to each other

## Discussion Questions

1. Compare the Shwebo monastery when U Thayzar Dipati was a young novice to life at the monastery today. What has changed? What do you think is the same?
2. What activities does the monk identify as having kept people from different backgrounds together?
3. Why do you think it is important to visit and understand another person's place of worship?
4. How does the monk show that he fosters inter-religious understanding and that he values building relationships?
5. The monk says "*Rumours come here every day.*" What can you do in your community to address potentially destructive rumours?

## Extension Activities

- On a piece of paper, draw a large circle and a smaller circle inside it. In the inside circle, write all the things that you feel are part of your identity, your values, etc. In the outside circle write things about your identity that are stereotypes or misconceptions you may have faced. In small groups, present your circles, and on a separate piece of paper write out "I am..., but I am/do not ..."
- Play a version of the "Telephone Game." Have one person pick a short story from a hat and whisper it to the person next to them. Each person in line has to whisper to the next, and the last person recounts the story. Discuss as a group how things are misinterpreted. Discuss how rumours and misinformation can be harmful to community relationships.

# Portrait Four • Saw Phoe Khwar

## Introduction

Saw Phoe Khwar is a popular reggae singer from Yangon and a former national football player. A Karen, his grandfather was a missionary who raised Saw Phoe Khwar as a Christian, going to Sunday school regularly and joining the church choir. His single, "Love Each Other," has been a huge hit among young people, and he performs regularly around Myanmar for diverse audiences. Saw Phoe Khwar has two simple messages, "Stop the hate," and "Love one another," which he distilled down from his reading of the Bible. He hopes these will inspire people to coexist peacefully.

## Discussion Questions

1. Why is it important that Saw Phoe Khwar's songs are a message to Myanmar, but to the whole world as well?
2. What influence has Saw Phoe Khwar's family had on his music?
3. How can communities act upon Saw Phoe Khwar's two messages of "Love Each Other" and "Stop the Hate"?
4. How do you think being a professional soccer player influenced Saw Phoe Khwar his view for peace in Myanmar?
5. What do you see and hear Saw Phoe Khwar doing that shows he is not discouraged from spreading his message?

## Extension Activities

- In a small group brainstorm messages that communicate peaceful co-existence. As a group, choose one or two messages to write a song or poem that you can teach to the rest of the group.

# Portrait Five • U Aye Lwin

## Introduction

Outside of his work as the head of the Physical Education Dept. at the Diplomatic School in Yangon, U Aye Lwin, a Muslim, works tirelessly to debunk myths about Muslims and Islam through peaceful ways, like distributing pamphlets and holding interfaith meetings. U Aye Lwin is also the chief convenor of the Islamic Center of Myanmar and a core member of the Religion for Peace Myanmar interfaith organisation. Learned in Buddhism too, U Aye Lwin believes that Muslims must also look within themselves and open their doors to other faiths so they may learn that his peace-loving religion is not so different from theirs.

## Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think describing his family history in Myanmar is important to U Aye Lwin?
2. What are some ways you see and hear U Aye Lwin trying to reduce the misconceptions about Islam and eliminate the intolerance?
3. What does hearing the expression *“You can’t clap with one hand. You need both hands”* mean to you in the context of Myanmar?
4. Why is it so important for U Aye Lwin to invite people from different religions to the mosques and religious events?
5. U Aye Lwin identifies mistrust as one barrier to religious tolerance. What other barriers are relevant in your community and how can they be addressed?

## Extension Activities

- Make a list of different religions. Write in one column what you know and what you’d like to know more about.