



CROSSROADS AHEAD: MYANMAR

OFFICIAL PROGRAMME REPORT



PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

Delegations for Dialogue's inaugural programme in Myanmar took place at an incredibly important time in the country's transition. With the first elected civilian government in 50 years preparing to be ushered in, the country was buzzing with a strong sense of anticipation toward what changes may be around the corner. Our programme was constructed to engage with a diverse cross-section of society; from local university students and academics to expats, NGO staff and media outlets, all of whom share the same desire to steer the country towards a more positive future. The delegation, consisting of students from the UK, France, Germany and Poland, gathered in Yangon on the 24th of March 2016 to begin a week-long exploration into the prospects for Myanmar at this historic crossroad.



There can be no national reconciliation in Burma,
as long as there are political prisoners.



EVEN THOUGH I'M FREE I AM NOT



PROGRAMME DATES

**START: 24 MARCH
2016
YANGON, MYANMAR**

**END: 31 MARCH
YANGON, MYANMAR**

PROGRAMME TYPE

**TRAVELLING
SYMPOSIUM**

PROGRAMME DESTINATIONS

YANGON

BAGAN

DELEGATION DEMOGRAPHICS

4 Delegates

German x 2

French x 1

Polish x 1

PROGRAMME DETAILS

The Crossroads Ahead Programme offered a select group of delegates the unique opportunity to experience Burmese culture firsthand and better understand the political developments the country is currently undergoing.

**UNDERSTAND
MYANMAR'S
CULTURE AND
LANGUAGE**



**HEAR POLITICAL
PERSPECTIVES
FROM
IMPORTANT
STAKEHOLDERS**



**GET TO KNOW
THE STUDENTS
WHO ARE THE
FUTURE OF THE
COUNTRY**



**PROGRAMME
OBJECTIVES**

GETTING TO GRIPS WITH THE BURMESE LANGUAGE

On the first day of the programme our delegates had the challenge of an introductory lesson to Burmese. The delegation was lucky enough to be taught by local teacher Dolly Ba Chaw, who not only teaches Burmese to foreigners, but also English to the local school children. Learning some of the basic phrases in Burmese and an introduction into the unique script of the Burmese language proved useful for the rest of the programme.



MEETING WITH THE OPEN MYANMAR INITIATIVE

A visit to the Open Myanmar Initiative (OMI) highlighted the major battle Myanmar's civil society has been fighting; to bring a greater degree of transparency to domestic politics. OMI is a local NGO who have been actively pushing for greater access to parliamentary sessions and discussions, while also striving to reach and engage as much of the general public as possible. The visit coincided with OMI's Founder's preparations to meet with the new parliament in the capital and political centre, Naypyidaw.



THE ALL BURMA FEDERATION FOR STUDENT UNIONS (ABFSU)

Myanmar's student unions have long been the center of political activism in the country, often at the expense of their own safety and freedom. Student protests calling for greater academic freedom in the spring of 2015 were quashed by authorities, leading to many student union members being arrested and held, without charge, for over a year. The delegation were able to meet some of the leaders from the All Burma Federation of Student Unions (ABFSU) at the famous University of Yangon campus. The students shared their experiences of the education system in Myanmar and how they would like improve it, while also describing the risks inherent to student activists in the country.



BAGAN

BAGAN AND ANCIENT MYANMAR

After an overnight bus from Yangon, the delegation reached the ancient city of Bagan. Arguably one of the most impressive tourist attractions in the whole of Myanmar, the city is home to over 2,200 temples and pagodas dating back almost 1000 years ago. Exploring the temples of the ancient city offered a glimpse into the history of the country as well as its deep culture. The visit also illustrated how important these places of worship are to many Myanmar people, whose Buddhist background remains a significant part of their national identity.



**PROGRAMME
HIGHLIGHTS**

MIZZIMA NEWS AND THE STATE OF JOURNALISM IN MYANMAR

Myanmar has only had a free press since 2010, and there has been a big adjustment during recent years as a result, as the population gets to grips with the multitude of news sources at their disposal. A meeting with Mizzima News, who were an exile news organisation during the military junta, allowed the delegation to hear insider accounts as to how the environment for journalists has changed in the last 5 years. The delegation also heard the difficulties that still exist when wanting to report the news as they wish, as well as Mizzima's plans for entering into the television broadcasting industry as a way of reaching more people.



BBC BURMA: YOUTH EXPECTATIONS FROM THE NEW GOVERNMENT

Held at the Novotel Yangon Max, one of the many new international hotel developments in city, BBC Burma organised a pioneering event offering over 100 young people the chance to question to put forward questions to a panel of local public figures and discuss their expectations of the newly elected government. Our delegates were invited to the event and were able to interact with some of the members of the audience and panel.



COSTRUCT AND MYANMAR'S BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

As the economy grows rapidly, there have been a number of investments from international sources, which has put more scrutiny on the business environment of the country. Jessica Berlin, founder of Costruct (a social company specialising in technology and business innovation in emerging markets) described the process of starting a business in Myanmar and what needs to be done to help both local and international businesses prosper in the evolving business environment.



DR KHIN MAUNG NYO AND ECONOMIC REFORMS

The delegation also had a private meeting with Dr Khin Maung Nyo, who is a former economic adviser to the prime minister. The prospects of the Myanmar economy were discussed, warning that though growth is almost inevitable it will be important to make sure the growth benefits all members of society and not just an elite few.



DALA AND INEQUALITY IN MYANMAR

Dala Township is situated south from Downtown Yangon, on the otherside of the Yangon River. The delegation took a short ferry trip to explore this suburban township, providing a stark contrast to the urban sprawl of the Yangon main built up area, with many more community built housing and considerably less infrastructure development.



THE ASSISTANCE ASSOCIATION FOR POLITICAL PRISONERS (AAPP)

Under military rule many political activists were incarcerated for various activities ranging from publicly protesting to simply belonging to an unregistered organisation. The Assistance Association For Political Prisoners (AAPP) work tirelessly to represent those still in prison by supporting them legally, providing support to their families as well as helping them readjust when they are eventually released. The staff at AAPP were all once political prisoners themselves and, as a result, the delegation were able to hear first hand accounts of the extremely traumatic conditions and experiences they, before, during and after being imprisoned.



KACHIN STUDENT ASSOCIATION GROUP AND ETHNIC ISSUES IN MYANMAR

The Kachin are one of more than 135 ethnic groups in Myanmar. The Kachin Student Association based in Yangon offers a place where young Kachin students can gather and socialise. The delegation were able to learn about what the various ethnic groups in Myanmar were hoping to achieve in their dealings with the central government, while also discussing what it's like to be a minority ethnic in Yangon as well as the ongoing conflict in the region.



**PROGRAMME
ORGANISERS**



DELEGATIONS FOR DIALOGUE

Delegations For Dialogue is a UK-based non-profit, non-partisan, non-religious organisation that equips future generations of global leaders with the knowledge and skills necessary to understand the causes of conflict. Each year they organise a series of "travelling symposiums", fact-finding programmes and sports and cultural diplomacy missions within contentious regions . They also organize conferences and events locally within a growing network of university campus associations located around the world. Delegations For Dialogue was established in 2015 and has since nine global dialogue programmes engaging over 114 students and professors from 29 different countries.

More information: www.delegations.org



AEDAN MORDECAI

DFD Founder

Myanmar CO-ORDINATOR

Aédán was involved in a number of educational projects in Mainland China and Taiwan before co-founding Delegations For Dialogue in 2015. He currently works as a Political Economy Analyst, based in Singapore where he also features in local news sources commenting on international current affairs. He obtained his MSc from the Nanyang Technological University (NTU) in Singapore and holds a BA in Geography from Kings College London. He speaks English and Chinese.



ALAN GREGORY

DFD Founder

Myanmar CO-ORDINATOR

Alan is a mixed British-Chinese graduate of the University of Hong Kong. Following graduation Alan gained professional experience in strategic consulting and academic research. Prior to co-founding Delegations for Dialogue, Alan was based in Beijing where he organised more than a dozen student programmes in North Korea. He has since organised all of Delegations For Dialogue's programmes in NE Asia and Myanmar. He most recently established a coffeeshop in Taipei, Taiwan and currently works as a freelance writer and analyst. Alan speaks English and Mandarin Chinese.