

Learning Program in Myanmar on Human Rights for Young Activists

Report prepared by Asian Institute for Human Rights

Objective: The objective of the program was to strengthen the knowledge and skills of the participants for using the human rights framework for doing human rights education with communities, campaign and advocacy.

Description of the Program: In order to achieve the above objective, an eight-day study session on human rights was organized in Yangon from the 25th February - 4th March 2014. The study session was organized in collaboration with the national partner, Pandita Development Institute.

Participants: Thirty-one young activists attended the program. The registration sheet of the participants is attached as Annexure 1. The activists represented different regions such as Kachin State (3), South Shan State (6), North Shan State (1), Chin State (2), Sagaing region (4), Ayeyarwaddy region (2), Yangon (5), Mon State (2), Kayah State (3) and Pago division (3). The participants represented organizations working on issues of human rights defenders, women, children, education on human rights and democracy, development, health, education, justice and legal aid. One of the participants was from the National League for Democracy.

Contents of the Learning Program: The chronological content of the learning program included:

- a. *Learning about the different issues in Myanmar:* The study session began with sharing by the participants about the different issues faced by them in the course of their work and reflecting upon the causes of such problems. The participants also tried to connect these problems and issues to human rights.
- b. *Learning about the human rights framework:* Under this part, there was discussion on the fundamental characteristics of human rights, sources of human rights, study of the international bill of rights and the Constitution of Myanmar, understanding the different types of State obligations, principles of Rule of Law and its importance in promoting and protecting human rights and business and human rights. The concepts and principles were discussed by taking examples of cases in Myanmar and other countries.
- c. *Applying the human rights framework:* Under this part, the participants applied the human rights standards to given case studies and identified the rights involved, the nature of human rights violation and the action that could be taken to redress the violations.
- d. *Human rights mechanisms in national, regional and international context:* Under this part, the participants made a visit to the National Human Rights Commission of Myanmar (MNHRC). The chairperson of the Commission gave a presentation to the participants about the Commission, its role and powers, and the challenges faced by it. The presentation of the Chairperson was followed by a question and answer session with the participants. The participants asked numerous

questions regarding its independence, the ways in which civil society could send complaints to the Commission and the ways in which the Commission could respond to such complaints. There were also sessions on ASEAN human rights mechanism and the mechanisms for promotion and protection of human rights under UN.

- e. *Strategies for promotion and protection of human rights:* Under this part, there were sessions on legal aid and assistance, advocacy and campaign strategies, and principles of human rights based approaches to programs and plans.
- f. *Action plans:* At the end of the learning program, the participants presented their plans about how they would use their learning into their work. Most participants shared that the knowledge gained during the learning course would strengthen their ability in implementing their programs. They also said that they would share their learnings with their colleagues and friends. The participants also decided to launch a campaign at the national level on human rights. Under this plan, a flower campaign would be organized when participants from the different regions would distribute to the public a flower with an article of UDHR tagged with it. The Pandita Development Institute (national partner for organizing the course) would facilitate the coordination of this campaign.

Methodology used in the Learning Course: The methodology used was participatory in nature. There was a balance of lectures, group discussions, group work, field visits and educational activities. A number of educational activities or games were conducted. The objective of such educational activities was shared so that the participants could apply the human rights education programs conducted by them.

Evaluation: The summary of the evaluation forms is attached to the report. Some observations from the participants noted by the organizers are:

- a. Discussions on human rights, discrimination, state obligations, rights in UDHR, etc. have started taking place in Myanmar only since the last couple of years. These concepts and ideas are still new. There needs to be many more discussions and dialogues to enable activists and people to understand the different dimensions of these concepts and their application.
- b. Methodology of education: In Myanmar, the methodology of education does not allow space for critical thinking. The teacher gives lectures and the students absorb the information without question. As a result the people are not used to questioning the information that is presented to them or examining them critically. There needs to be more programs where the participants are able to have space for critical thinking and analysis.
- c. Application of rights framework to issues: The participants shared that there was a need to have more discussions on how human rights law or provisions of constitution could be applied to analyse cases from a human rights perspective. As part of this, the draft law on inter-faith a

marriage was taken up for discussion. The participants found the exercise of analysing this law against human rights principles useful.

- d. Space for discussions amongst different ethnic groups in Myanmar: Myanmar has many ethnic groups. There is a demand amongst the ethnic groups for social and institutional recognition of their ethnic identities and cultures. There is also the need for nation building. In this context, there should be increased spaces for civil society groups of different ethnicities to interact with each other, share their issues and concerns and have dialogues and discussions on them. The participants made a request for sessions in the evening when they could learn more about each other's work and the situation of human rights context as well as about human rights situations in other countries.
- e. Need for resources in local language: the participants expressed the need for resource materials on human rights in local languages.
- f. Request for field visits: The participants also requested for field visits.