

Launching IAPP-Myanmar in the Grand Ballroom of the Hilton Hotel in Naypyitaw

Swe Zin Taik
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While undergoing profound and rapid change, Myanmar is today emerging as one of Asia's most sought-after investment destinations. Its opening to the global economy has come after forty-nine years of military rule. Finally, after this long isolation and internal conflict, Myanmar is opening up to the world.

On Monday, July 3, between 3:00 and 7:00 pm the launching of the International Association of Parliamentarians for Peace-Myanmar took place in the Grand Ballroom of the Hilton Hotel in Naypyitaw with the theme "Addressing the Critical Challenges of our Time: The Role of Governments, Civil Society and Faith- Based Organizations."

Among the 126 guests attending the launching were ninety-nine Burmese members of Parliament, Madhav Kumar Nepal, prime minister of Nepal (2009–2011), a Nepalese member of Parliament, three Thai members of Parliament, four religious leaders, the Nepalese ambassador to Myanmar, four religious leaders, NGO representatives, ambassadors for peace and twelve major UPF leaders.

Once dormant, now revived

The revival of UPF-Myanmar, through Daw Swe Zin Taik becoming its acting president and the choosing of a new Board of Directors, made launching IAPP-Myanmar possible. Daw Swe Zin Taik is a nationally renowned actress and outstanding NGO Leader. Two of the board members have good ties to the government.

With this board in place, we were able to contact parliamentarians, two of whom had attended the IAPP World Summit Conference at the beginning of this year. Two other board members attended the Inauguration of IAPP–Philippines and one member of Parliament attended the IAPP-India inauguration. Last June, twelve members of Parliament attended UPF's Asian Leadership Conference in Bangkok, Thailand. Through these members of Parliament, we could connect to the upper house, House of Nationality, Speaker, U Mahn Win Khine Than After we sent a proposal letter on the launching of IAPP to his office, he agreed to send seventy members of Parliament (as we requested) to participate in our event. Later, the lower house, House of Representatives, Speaker U Win Myint accepted our request to send thirty members of Parliament to the IAPP-Myanmar inauguration.

A living national symbol

The courtesy call on the state counselor, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi came based on the cooperation between Nepal's ambassador to Myanmar and Madhav Kumar Nepal, with the support of Ek Nath Dhakal, a Nepalese Constituent Assemblyman and the Co-chair of IAPP-Asia. Dr. Chung Sik Yong had invited Ek

Nath Dhakal to come to support the launching in Myanmar, with the purpose of gaining the State Counselor's acknowledgement of and support for it.

Through this diplomatic channel, our UPF executives could meet the state counselor and were able to discuss the role and significance of IAPP worldwide in supporting the peace process and reconciliations in Myanmar.



Dr. Robert Kittel describes the meeting with the state counselor as follows:

"Her handshake was firm. Her eyes were strong and clear. She looked each of us straight in the eyes, shook our hands and personally welcomed all eight members of the Universal Peace Federation's (UPF) delegation. She invited us to sit down. She sat on the edge of a couch big enough for three people and filled it with her presence. Her back was straight. It never touched the cushion behind her."

"She had studied in New Delhi, India and then at Oxford University in England where she earned BA degrees in Philosophy, Politics and Economics in 1967 and an MA in Politics a year later. After fifteen years of house arrest, which ended in 2010, her party won a landslide victory winning 86 percent of the seats in the Assembly of the Union. Although prohibited from becoming Myanmar's president because her late husband and children are foreign nationals, she assumed the newly created role of state counselor, a role akin to a prime minister or a head of government. This allows her to work across all areas of government and to act as a link between the executive and legislative branches during a five-year term."



She first invited the head of the delegation, Madhav Kumar Nepal to offer his remarks. He talked about Nepal's peace process and the unique model of transitioning from a 240-year-old monarchy, via a violent insurgency, to a vibrant democracy. M. K. Nepal was one of the main architects of this historic undertaking. During these turbulent times, armed militant Maoists peacefully integrated into a democratically elected government and helped write Nepal's new constitution making it a Federal Democratic Republic. She listened intently.

The former prime minister then offered Dr. Thomas G. Walsh, president of UPF International, the floor. He highlighted the role of UPF in peace

building in other parts of the world -- the Middle East, Northeast Asia, Europe and Africa. He also spoke about the numerous high-level personalities around the world supporting these initiatives, which are based on Rev. Moon's universal principles of peace. She again listened carefully with her eyes fixed on this tall American who looks like Prince Charles.



She then spoke. Her voice was poised and steady. Her words were measured and her manners full of grace without much movement of her hands. First, she thanked everyone for coming to Myanmar. To M. K. Nepal, she was courteous and fondly remembered her many visits to Nepal officially and on leisure. In fact, her mother was the first ambassador from Myanmar to Nepal.

She then asked our help. It was a humbling moment. We were caught off guard by this request. Our hearts immediately focused and yearned to understand how we could assist. First, she said her government needed help in reconciliation. Without

specifics she was obviously referring to a number of fronts: religious harmony, political integration, and building concord between the 135 officially recognized ethnic groups in Myanmar.

In the same vein, the Nobel laureate (1991) and youngest daughter of Nepal's "Father of the Nation," (Major General Aung San), talked about human rights from the international perspective. There was pain in her heart as she spoke. So many times people use human rights violations as if they were arrows of accusations. They criticize nations for their shortcomings and only blame governments for failures. This, she said, was unhealthy. She wanted our help to change this attitude in the international community.

In turn, each delegate spoke. When the topic came to "raising the children of a nation," her motherly heart sprang forth. Her main concern was that the internet posed a serious problem for young people. It was too easy for adolescents in their formative years to be misguided. Parents are clueless to what is happening and youth are exposed to extreme forms of selfish individualism in areas affecting lifestyles and relationships.

The last speaker was Ek Nath Dhakal, a member of Nepal's Legislative Parliament and twice a government minister, representing the Nepal Family Party. In addition, he is the Asian chairman for the newly formed International Association of Parliamentarians for Peace (IAPP). He first outlined IAPP's impressive list of activities in South and Southeast Asia and then thanked the state counselor for supporting the launching of IAPP in Myanmar, noting that the program would take place later the same day. To this Daw Aung San Suu Kyi replied:

"When you meet the members of Parliament this evening, please ask them to go beyond being politicians and become statesmen who put the interest of the nation even above party politics."

"At the close of the meeting she accepted our request that she invite five or six delegates from Myanmar, whom she might select, to attend one of our Asian Leadership Conferences in Bangkok. This was a model that Dr. Chung Sik Yong, chairman of UPF-Asia, used in Nepal to teach Communist leaders. She agreed and suggested we work out the details with Myanmar's Embassy in Thailand."

"Prior to meeting us, she had been chairing an important session of parliament, which she had left to be on time for our meeting. We were to meet for thirty minutes, but in the end were cordially granted forty minutes. Even though we were running overtime, she was endearing enough to allow us to have memorable photographs with various contingents of our delegation -- the Nepalese diplomats, the UPF staff, and then all together."

The launching

Later, in the afternoon of the same day, our UPF delegation led by Madhav Kumar Nepal, Ek Nath Dhakal, Thomas Walsh, Dr. Chung Sik Yong, and other UPF executives met with the Speaker U Win Myint at the House of Representatives. As a result the Speakers sent U Khun Maung Thaung, president of the Citizenship Committee and U Khin Maung Win, president of the Judiciary and Law Committee to participate in the IAPP inauguration on their behalf. In this sense, the Myanmar government has supported the IAPP-Myanmar launching. This gives us great hope that Burmese parliamentarians will cooperate with us in the future.

The launching of IAPP-Myanmar began with an interfaith peace ceremony conducted by representatives from Buddhism, Islam, Christianity and Hinduism. They created a beautiful atmosphere with their

blessings for peace in Myanmar as they all poured water into a common vase representing the harmony of all religions.



Daw Swe Zin Taik gave welcoming remarks. Dr. Walsh delivered the opening speech. Dr. Yong, Madhav Kumar Nepal, Ek Nath Dhakal and Dr. Kittel gave special remarks. Representing members of Parliament from both houses, Shi lar Nan Town gave congratulatory remarks acknowledging support for the IAPP launching in Myanmar. She said, "It was great to learn that IAPP has such a noble vision and the government should support the work of IAPP in Myanmar." Myanmar parliamentarians confirmed their support by signing the IAPP Resolution.

At the end of the inaugural session Mr. Myo Win, vice-chairman of IAPP-Myanmar, delivered the vote of thanks. Mr. Jakari Iamsam-Ang, assistant secretary general of UPF Thailand, served as the Master of Ceremonies of the inaugural conference. A dinner banquet and cultural performance followed the inaugural session.

This victorious breakthrough, the launching of IAPP in Myanmar, came after all our Myanmar Family Federation members went to Thailand to attend True Mother during her visit from June 11 to 14. We all felt the great blessing from True Mother, who encouraged us to take responsibility for the national restoration of Myanmar.

The only way to do this is to reach up to the top level of the state. True Mother gave us this initiative, IAPP, last year to help us fulfill this mission. Dr. Chung Sik Yong unites with True Mother absolutely and helped us with the launching. Through this successful launching we have gained trust from the government. The gate is now open to make Myanmar into an ideal peaceful nation, Cheon Il Guk under God and True Parents.