

A delegation of eight religious leaders from Myanmar (a.k.a. Burma) recently visited Community Church. Eight Burmese monks, ministers, and an imam are working to establish interfaith linkages between the faiths (and peoples) in their land. They hope to promote a unity based on the similarities found in all faiths rather than point toward where their faiths differ. This delegation appears at the starting point of correcting an injustice that has plagued the people of Myanmar for many years.

The Myanmar population is now 89% Theravadan Buddhist, 4% Muslim, 4% Christian, 2% others and 1% Hindu. Although Buddhists are generally peace loving, those who live in Myanmar have aggressively targeted Jews and Muslims. Today's major concern is for the Rohingya, a Muslim group who live in Northern Rakhine and use the Rohingya language. (The Rohingya are one of the most persecuted people on our Earth.) There are three obstacles that need to be overcome in Myanmar: a denial of the historical presence of the Rohingya, the 1982 citizenship law, and restoring the citizenship and human rights of the Rohingya peoples which they have been denied since 1982.

The Burmese contingent requested a visit with representatives of IWJ, but seemed quite interested in learning about Unitarian Universalism. An imam asked very early in our meeting, "I have heard about UUs, but know little about it, what can you tell us about your faith?"

I began by sharing our openness to diversity. As I was speaking I thought it best to share some of the readings in the back of our hymnal. The clerics seemed pleased that we value many faiths. They nodded as I spoke of UU history and a commitment to justice for all. A Buddhist priest asked if they could take a hymnbook to Myanmar, "It would be good to translate some of these passages into our language." I quickly agreed.

It was a joy to share a brief "elevator speech" about Unitarian Universalism with these religious leaders. I hope several of the selections from our hymnal will be translated into their language(s) and will be used as tools to build peace and understanding in their land. The final highlight of the meeting was the gathering of these leaders in our sanctuary where they sang the Myanmar National Anthem.

