

## MYANMAR

| <b>A. PROJECT IDENTIFICATION</b> |  |   |
|----------------------------------|--|---|
| <b>1.</b>                        | <b>PROJECT TITLE</b>                                     | <b>SUPPORTING PEACE THROUGH THE MEDIA: MONITORING AND ANALYZING HATE SPEECH IN MYANMAR</b>                                  |
| <b>2.</b>                        | <b>NUMBER</b>  | <b>IPDC/59 MM/01</b>  |
| <b>3.</b>                        | <b>MEDIA DEVELOPMENT INDICATORS' CATEGORY</b>            | <b>CATEGORY 4</b>   |
| <b>4.</b>                        | <b>IPDC PRIORITY AREA</b>                                | <b>CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT</b>   |
| <b>5.</b>                        | <b>SCOPE<br/>(NATIONAL, REGIONAL,<br/>INTERREGIONAL)</b> | <b>NATIONAL</b>   |
| <b>6.</b>                        | <b>TYPE OF ASSISTANCE REQUESTED</b>                      | <b>FINANCIAL</b>  |
| <b>7.</b>                        | <b>TOTAL COST OF PROJECT</b>                             | <b>USD 48,800</b>   |
| <b>8.</b>                        | <b>AMOUNT REQUESTED FROM IPDC</b>                        | <b>USD 22,100</b>   |
| <b>9.</b>                        | <b>BENEFICIARY BODY</b>                                  | <b>Myanmar ICT for Development Organization (MIDO)</b>  |
| <b>10.</b>                       | <b>IMPLEMENTING OFFICE</b>                               | <b>UNESCO Bangkok in collaboration with UNESCO/Yangon</b>   |
| <b>11.</b>                       | <b>PROJECT LOCATION</b>                                  | <b>Yangon</b>   |
| <b>12.</b>                       | <b>PROJECT PREPARED BY</b>                               | <b>Ms Rosa Maria Gonzalez, ACI/ UNESCO<br/>Nay Phone Latt (Executive Director)<br/>Htaike Htaike Aung (Program Manager)</b> |

## B. PRESENTATION

### 1. PROJECT JUSTIFICATION:

Myanmar faces increasing risks of religious violence. At least four international groups that monitor and provide early warnings of potential mass atrocities have raised alarms in this regard. The root causes of such violence are complicated, and promoting genuine, sustainable peace and social harmony will be equally complicated – and long term. One core factor contributing to this environment conducive of violence and impeding reconciliation efforts is the perception of Myanmar as a Buddhist nation facing an existential threat from ‘Islamicization’, and the rhetoric that people must actively ‘protect their race and religion.’<sup>1</sup>

In the short term, the risk of mass violence is being increased by radical groups and speakers who are making use of the newfound freedom of expression in Myanmar. Extreme nationalist groups and those who are violently partisan for one religion over another, for example, actively and systematically spread information, both offline and online, contributing to the climate of fear.

An equally serious concern is the potential for renewed restrictions on freedom of expression and crackdowns on political dissent, with new laws being justified on the basis of preventing incitement of religious hatred and disrupting public order.<sup>2</sup> Such restrictions are not likely to address risks of mass violence, because much of ‘hate speech’ that incites mass violence does not violate any law, save for the most draconian ones. Furthermore, besides hate speech, the selective sharing of information, for example, can also contribute to violence.<sup>3</sup> In practice, the new laws could also end up stifling dissent, rather than preventing the incitement of violence. Additional obstacles preventing access to news and information from a variety of sources could also indirectly add to the climate of fear.

The Panzagar, or ‘flower speech’ civil society movement, of which the Myanmar ICT for Development Organization (MIDO) is part of, believes that the space for civil society to speak out in favour of peace and against pro-violence movements must be expanded. In this regard, Panzagar focuses on three main actions: (1) Mobilizing civil society to develop a consensus that hate speech is socially unacceptable; (2) monitoring various forms of hate speech online as well as in traditional communication platforms (media, religious sermons etc); and (3) working with technology experts to develop innovative measures to counter the effects of hate speech.

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<sup>1</sup> Kyaw San Wai, ‘Myanmar’s Religious Violence: A Buddhist ‘Siege Mentality’ at Work’ (2014) No. 037/2014 S Rajaratnam School of International Studies Commentaries; Nyi Nyi Kyaw, ‘Securitization and Islamophobia Analysis of the 969 Movement in Myanmar’ (Islam, Law and the State in Myanmar, Centre for Asian Legal Studies, National University Singapore, 23 January 2014)

<sup>2</sup> On May 1<sup>st</sup> 2014, for example, U Ye Tin from the Ministry of Information said that online hate speech would be prosecuted using the new Cyber Law and print hate speech would be prosecuted under the new Printing and Publication Act, Pyi Myanmar Journal, May 1<sup>st</sup> 2014. At a conference on hate speech on April 24<sup>th</sup>, meanwhile, U Ye Htut from the Ministry of Information said there would be a new law adopted against hate speech.

<sup>3</sup> Matt Schissler, ‘Echo Chambers in Myanmar: Social Media and the Ideological Justifications for Mass Violence’ (17 March 2014) Australian National University Department of Political & Social Change Research Colloquium

This project focuses on Panzagar's second priority, and seeks to establish a platform that monitors and analyzes online hate speech, serves as an unbiased resource for journalists in Myanmar to conduct fact-checks on hate speech-related content, and improve the accountability of the news media and individual news producers.

## **2. DESCRIPTION OF THE TARGET GROUP:**

Direct beneficiaries: Journalists and civil society organizations

Indirect beneficiaries: Netizens and news consumers in Myanmar

## **3. DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVE:**

This project contributes to promoting peace and sustainable development in Myanmar through the building knowledge and capacity of institutions that support freedom of expression, plurality and diversity.

## **4. IMMEDIATE OBJECTIVE:**

To establish an online database containing awareness raising content about hate speech, viral issues/news and unbiased analysis of such content, which will serve as a fact-checking resource and knowledge-sharing platform for journalists in Myanmar

## **5. PROJECT OUTPUTS:**

- Online database of hate speech content and analysis, and hate speech initiators
- Web portal that has active discussion among Myanmar journalists on hate speech

## **6. ACTIVITIES:**

- Monitoring, compilation and analysis of online hate speech content (including viral news, and news hoaxes which could incite violence)
- Launch of and ongoing updates to online database / web portal
- Three coordination meetings with media professionals

## **7. PROJECT INPUTS:**

- Web developer
- Equipment to set up database / web portal
- Two hate speech experts
- Meeting facilities with lunch for media professionals
- Resource persons, existing networks and contacts (provided by MIDO)
- Staff costs, logistical support, office space (provided by MIDO)

## 8. WORK PLAN:

| ACTIVITIES / MONTHS   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Monitoring and compilation of hate speech content                           | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X  | X  | X  | X  | X  | X  | X  | X  | X  |
| Analysis of content   |   | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X  | X  | X  | X  | X  | X  | X  | X  | X  |
| Development of online database and portal                                   |   |   |   |   | X | X | X | X |   |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| Launch of online database and web portal (and ongoing updates after launch) |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | X |   |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| Progress reports  |   |   |   | X |   |   |   | X |   |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| Evaluation reports  |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |    |    | X  |    |    | X  |    |    | X  |

## 9. INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK:

Myanmar ICT for Development Organization (MIDO) is one of the core members of the Panzagar movement, which was formally established in March 2014 after meetings between members of civil society groups including MIDO, COMREG, Paung Ku, Ju Foundation, YSPS and others.

The first activities, under the name ‘Anti-Dangerous Speech’ began at the ASEAN Peoples Forum and ASEAN Youth Forum in March, where young activists handed out stickers and posed for photos with flowers in their mouths, to symbolize promoting peace through words. After this, the movement was re-named ‘Panzagar’. Panzagar’s strategy goes beyond distribution of materials to include complementing real-life actions with social media actions to spread the word and gain momentum among target audiences. In this regard, Panzagar’s social media efforts to ‘occupy Facebook’ for example, have gained much success, with more than 10,000 followers

over a short period of time and the Panzagar movement featured in more than 20 Myanmar and English-language print, radio and video media<sup>4</sup>

As an organization, MIDO is well-connected in the network of CSOs, and has worked with many journalists and media in advocacy and outreach, particularly as a resource for online hate speech. MIDO's mission is to 'Be a catalyst in using ICT; for sustainable and inclusive development; and social and political progress in Myanmar'. Given that the origin of the organization can be traced to activism for the betterment for the people of Myanmar, the organization will always put the interests of the people of Myanmar at the center. Its values are: Altruism, Tolerance and mutual respect, Openness and collaboration, and Commitment to excellence in every sphere of the organization's operations.

#### **10. SUSTAINABILITY:**

Panzagar is as a ground-up movement driven by stakeholders rather than existing as a formal organization, seeking to catalyze and support activities in Myanmar that promote the movement's message. To ensure the sustainability and legitimacy of the group's activities and decision-making processes, a Working Group was formed. The Working Group currently includes members from: MIDO, Paung Ku, Triangle Women, PEN Myanmar, IYCA (Interfaith Youth Coalition on AIDS – Myanmar, COMREG, and local-area CSOs. A comprehensive plan of activities and expected outcomes – both ongoing and upcoming – based on Panzagar's three main focus areas has been prepared, and this IPDC project is one of the many activities in the plan.

#### **11. FRAMEWORK OF MONITORING AND COMMUNICATION STRATEGY:**

MIDO will form a team with at least 2 persons working full-time on the monitoring of hate speech in online media, and 1 part-time editorial staff for analyzing the content. The team will also be responsible for updating content on the online portal. Nay Phone Latt and Htaike Htaike Aung will serve as Team Leader and Project anager, respectively. Resource persons for the project include Prof Susan Benesch, who has written extensively on the broader topic of dangerous speech, and members of the team behind the Umati Project in Kenya.

There will be a formal launch of the portal together with UNESCO. Weekly updated posts and news will be forwarded to the media and journalists thorough feeds, links, and online newsletters as well.

#### **12. EVALUATIONS CARRIED OUT:**

Panzagar has carried out several campaign activities in the area of countering hate speech. Since April 2014, members have been distributing stickers and posters through their networks, with dedicated focus on reaching more people during the Water Festival period. In the areas where materials were distributed, campaigners reported that people were highly receptive, and that afterwards people commented that they felt there were fewer fights and confrontations than might otherwise have occurred during the festival period. Other similar activities in the pipeline

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<sup>4</sup> Inspired by this campaign: <https://www.facebook.com/zerodiscrimination>

for Panzagar include supporting public campaigns in Myanmar that are in line with its priorities, organizing public talks by thought leaders in the field of countering hate speech, and sharing of information through its network of partners, among other things.

### **13. FRAMEWORK OF BENEFICIARY AGENCY’S REPORTING:**

The monitoring team will submit an evaluation report every 3 months on the impact of the web portal content and the media’s usage of the portal.

#### **C. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

#### **D. BUDGET**

##### **BREAKDOWN OF IPDC CONTRIBUTION (in US dollars)**

|   |                   |
|---|-------------------|
| Web developer for portal (one-time fee of \$2,000)                                | 2,000             |
| Hate speech experts (2 experts x \$400/month x 18 months)                         | 14,400            |
| Equipment – 2 computers, 1 printer/scanner, 1 projector (2x\$600 + \$200 + \$500) | 1,900             |
| Coordination meetings with media professionals (3 meetings x 1,000 US\$)          | 3,000             |
| AV equipment rental for planning/coordination meeting (\$100/day x 3 days)        | 300               |
| Meeting materials   | 500               |
| <b>Total IPDC</b>   | <b>USD 22,100</b> |

##### **BREAKDOWN OF THE BENEFICIARY AGENCY’S CONTRIBUTION (in US dollars)**

|   |                   |
|---|-------------------|
|   |                   |
| Editorial staff (1 staff \$500/month x 18 months)                               | 9,000             |
| Furniture (2 x \$300)   | 600               |
| Rent, utilities, communications cost for office (\$750/month x 18 months)       | 13,500            |
| Local transportation for staff working on the project (\$200/month x 18 months) | 3,600             |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>USD 26,700</b> |