

A PERSONAL STATEMENT BY
HIS GRACE ARCHBISHOP CHARLES MAUNG BO

3 May, 2013

To my brothers and sisters of all religions and none,

It breaks my heart to see the rising hatred and religious intolerance in Myanmar, and even more so to see waves of horrific violence and destruction. I am therefore writing this personal appeal to my Buddhist and Muslim brothers and sisters, to call for voices of peace and harmony to speak out loudly, to urge the Government to take urgent action to protect vulnerable communities and stop those who incite or perpetrate hatred and violence, and to urge all communities to unite to build a nation in which people of all religions and ethnicities can live with respect for each other, in peace and dignity.

I am gravely concerned that if the violence we have seen this week in Oakkan and elsewhere, and previously in Meikhtila and in Rakhine State, continues, our fragile freedom that is just beginning to emerge could be snatched from our hands and Myanmar could descend into a vicious cycle of hatred, violence and turmoil.

The voices of hatred and intolerance are a minority. Those of us who desire peace and harmony and a society of mutual respect are the majority. Yet the voices of hatred and intolerance are vocal and violent, and the voices for peace are largely silent. It is time for the silent majority to join hands and speak up.

I appeal to people of all religions and none to look to what is best in their own teachings and philosophies - and live by the principles of "Metta" (loving kindness) and "Karuna" (compassion), "Salam" (peace), "love your neighbour as yourself" and "love your enemy", and to basic common humanity. The silent majority needs to wake up, unite and say "no" to violence and hatred.

Pope Francis 1 recently called on Christians to be a "community of love", "a community of open doors", and "a community of 'yes'" – saying yes to the positive opportunities that await us. I extend the Pope's appeal to all the people of Myanmar. There are many opportunities facing us in Myanmar. After decades of oppression and injustice and isolation, at last we have an opportunity to build a nation of freedom, open to the world. A nation in which we can be ourselves at last, prosper and fulfil the full potential of our Golden Land. We must be a community of 'yes', that seizes this opportunity to end decades of conflict and oppression. But in order to be a community of 'yes', with a positive view of the future for Myanmar, we need to be a people that says 'no' to hatred and violence.

From the depths of my heart, first and foremost as a person from the soil of Myanmar, and as a humble religious leader, I cry out two words to my brothers and sisters from all communities in my beloved country: 'peace' and 'love'. These

two words can triumph over the words of hatred and the acts of violence, if we unclench our fists, invest in a serious effort to promote inter-religious dialogue, peace and harmony, and work together to rebuild not only the physical structures of our country, but the hearts and minds of our people.

May God bless Myanmar and all its people.

Archbishop Charles Bo

Archbishop of Rangoon