

## Myanmar Commemoration of International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHOT) 2014 Report



*"Millions of people around the world observe the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia on 17 May...*  
*I believe in and strive to achieve a world rooted in tolerance, freedom and equality; a world where we are all free to live a life of dignity.*  
*There are no exceptions. Human rights are for everyone, no matter who you are or whom you love."*  
UN SECRETARY GENERAL BAN KI-MOON

May 16, 2014

## Country Background

In 2011, Colors Rainbow (CRB) and the Human Rights Education Institute of Burma (HREIB) conducted four IDAHO events in Yangon, Mandalay, Monywa, and Kyaukpadaung, marking the first time the day was celebrated openly inside Myanmar, a momentous occasion for those involved and a significant indicator of the country's shifting political and socio cultural environment. The events were attended by a total of around 1,500 people and covered widely by international media.<sup>1</sup> In 2012, Colors Rainbow/HREIB organized events in seven locations across the country, with a total of approximately 4,000 people in attendance.

Objectives of 2014 International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia are -

- To raise awareness, provide information and address prejudice and misconceptions of LGBT people
- To build further collaboration among LGBT CBOs working with different sectors and target groups and develop new partnerships
- To increase openness and support among the media, non-LGBT CSOs, political stakeholders, and the general public for awareness-raising efforts and ongoing advocacy campaigns
- To strengthen ties between LGBT and non-LGBT groups and increase the LGBT rights movement's visibility within broader civil society

Colors Rainbow starts doing LGBT identity promotion as national core focus issue with the theme **"LGBT is an Identity"** with global core focus issue freedom of expression with the theme **"Free Expression"** for 2014.

Myanmar LGBT logo was also finalized from the inspiration of national animal "peacock" (as seen below) in preparation weeks.



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<sup>1</sup>BBC: [A pride with no parade for Burma's first gay festival](#); Los Angeles Times: [Activists fight homophobia from Myanmar to Malawi](#); Bangkok Post: [Myanmar marks gay pride](#); Channel News Asia: [Myanmar to celebrate first gay pride event](#); IDAHO: [Landmark IDAHO Celebrations Across Burma](#); Edge: [Gay Life Opens Up in Oppressed Burma](#); The Irrawaddy: [Burma Marks First Ever LGBT Day](#).

## Summary of the event

The days was marked in 10 cities in Myanmar. Canada Embassy in Yangon, British Embassy in Yangon, Swedish Fund for Human Rights supported and collaborated in the organizing the events.

| No                           | Type of Activity  | Venue  | Location     | Estimate people attended |
|------------------------------|---|--|--------------|--------------------------|
| 1                            | Photo Competition and Exhibition (11 to 18 May 2014)            | The Witness Yangon Documentary Arts Space          | Yangon       | 300                      |
|                              | Public campaign (10 AM to 1 PM)                                 | People's Park                                      |              | 400                      |
|                              | Panel (2 PM to 4:30 PM)   | American Center No 14, Tawwin Road, Dagon Township |              | 100                      |
| 2                            | Ceremony  | Dhamma Tharla Hall                                 | Mandalay     | 150                      |
| 3                            | Ceremony  | Myanmar Medical Association Hall                   | Lashio       | 100                      |
| 4                            | Public event  | Khine-Hnin-Si Office                               | Monywa       | 400                      |
| 5                            | Public event  | Htein-Kan Buddhist Monastery                       | Kyaukpadaung | 100                      |
| 6                            | Public event  | Pyi Gyi Khin Office                                | Pakokku      | 110                      |
| 7                            | Public event+ legal awareness talk in relation with LGBT issues | Koe-Thaung Hall, Shwe-Nat-Taung Pagoda             | Pyay         | 600                      |
| 8                            | Public campaign   | Maungmagan Beach                                   | Dawei        | 400                      |
| 9                            | Public campaign   | JJ Garden Hotel                                    | Myeik        | 300                      |
| 10                           | Public campaign   | Garden Hotel Function Hall                         | Kawthaung    | 150                      |
| Total participant (estimate) |   |  |              | 3110                     |

## Highlights of the Day in Aras

Colors Rainbow developed campaign materials (i.e., shirt, flyer, poster, and rainbow pride stickers) and distributed to the areas to ensure the proper dissemination of the messages. LGBT identity was impressively promoted and inspired LGBT communities to improve self esteem through motivational speeches and messages. Organizers in some areas viewed the Day as “Coming Out Day” according to unexpected stories they collected.



Photo 1: IDAHOT Shirt



Photo:2 IDAHOT posters (in Burmese)



# &PROUD

## MYANMAR LGBT PHOTO COMPETITION

**&PROUD** is a photo competition for amateur and professional photographers.

- > anyone with photos that **show Myanmar LGBTs in a positive light** can join the competition
- > **win up to \$300** and have your photos exhibited at a special exhibition in Yangon

**&PROUD** ကတော့ အပျော်တမ်းဓာတ်ပုံရိုက်ဝါသနာရှင်တွေနဲ့ ပရော်ဖက်ရှင်နယ်လ်ဓာတ်ပုံရိုက်ကူးသူတွေအတွက် ဓာတ်ပုံပြပွဲယှဉ်ပြိုင်ပြိုင်ပွဲခွင့်ပေးတဲ့ ပြိုင်ပွဲတစ်ခုဖြစ်ပါတယ်။

- > မြန်မာနိုင်ငံအတွင်းမှာရှိတဲ့ လိင်စိတ်ခံယူမှုကွဲပြားသူ (LGBT) တွေရဲ့ ပတ်သက်တဲ့ အကြောင်းအရာတွေကို အကောင်းမြင်တဲ့ဘက်ကရိုက်ကူးပြသထားတဲ့ ဓာတ်ပုံမျိုးဆိုရင် ဘယ်သူမဆို ဒီပြိုင်ပွဲမှာ ပါဝင်ယှဉ်ပြိုင်ပြိုင်ပွဲခွင့်ရမှာပါ။
- > ဆုကြေးငွေ ဒေါ်လာ ၃၀၀ ကို ဆွတ်ခူးရရှိနိုင်တဲ့ အခွင့်အရေး အပါအဝင် ဆုရရှိတဲ့ ဓာတ်ပုံတွေကိုလည်း ရန်ကုန်မြို့ မှာရှိတဲ့ အရမ်းထူးခြားတဲ့ပြပွဲမှာလည်း ပြသခွင့်ရဦးမှာပါ။

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ပြိုင်ပွဲဝင်လမ်းညွှန်တွေကို ဒီမှာဝင်ရောက်လေ့လာနိုင်ပါတယ်။

[http://www.ygevents.com/andproud/andproud\\_guideline\\_mm.pdf](http://www.ygevents.com/andproud/andproud_guideline_mm.pdf)

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Photo 3: IDAHOT LGBT Photo Competition flyer





Photo 4: 2014 IDAHOT flyer (front)



Photo 5: 2014 IDAHOT flyer (back)

**Yangon** – Various events were organized throughout the week around the Day. Myanmar’s first LGBT photo competition and exhibition was organized from 11 to 18 May. Photos of the opening ceremony of the exhibition can be watched here:

<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.1449968425247168.1073741830.1426872970890047&type=1> and here for TV news <http://mcntv.biz/news/544>.

In the morning of May 17, a public event was held at People’s Park with public performances from music and theater groups (Photo can be seen at section “Photos” below). Embassies in Yangon, UN organizations, INGos, NGOs, CBOs general people and reporters attended the event. In the afternoon, a panel on LGBT and SOGIE (sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression) issues was organized at American Center. Canadian Ambassador, Deputy Head of British Mission, Country Director of UNDIAS, and Myanmar National Human Rights Commission (MNHRC) delivered honorable opening speeches. Closing speech was made by Public Affair Officer of the American Center. The panel “LGBT and Homophobia” was discussed from fields of psychiatry, law, human rights, social media, and film/TV by experts from the respective sectors. Names and titles of the people on the American centre panel are;

- 1) U Kyaw Hoe – Advocate, Managing Council at HRMR law Firm, Central Law Committee Member of National League for Democracy
- 2) U Aung Myo Min - Executive Director, Equality Myanmar
- 3) Dr. Nweni Wynn - Mental Health Officer & Trainer, Salus World
- 4) Daw Swe Zin Htike - Former Actress and women rights activist
- 5) Ko Nay Bone Latt - Executive Director of Mido, Secretary of Pen Myanmar and prominent blogger



The events appeared on different media including state TV channels such as MRTV and Sky Net. Some media coverage can be seen on [Myanmar Times](#), [Yangon News](#), and [Kamayut Media](#). US Embassy in Rangoon supported the event on their [Facebook Page](#) and British Embassy in Rangoon [flew rainbow flag at their embassy](#).



Photo 6: Poster and Photo Exhibition at People's Park



Photo 7: Edutainment at People's Park



Photo 8: Community participation at People's Park event



Photo 9: Activists's LGBT Identity promotion performance



Photo 10: Canadian Ambassador, Deputy Head of British Mission, UNAIDS Country Director and MNHRC representative at American Center Panel





Photo 11: Panel discussion by experts



Photo 12: (left to right) U Aung Myo Min, U Kyaw Hoe, Ko Nay Bone Latt, Dr. Nweni Wynn and Daw Swe Zin Htike

**Mandalay, Myeik, and Kawthaung** – The events were held with invited authorities, political parties, INGOs, NGOs, CBOs, friends and families of LGBT community. According to local demand, IDAHOT messages were disseminated via edutainment, docudrama and transgender beauty pageants. LGBT groups in Myeik are keen to put more efforts on LGBT rights-based approaches in their area after Colors Rainbow visit in March and the event (transgender beauty pageant) was organized mostly by their own fund. Visibility of lesbians is increased during the event in Mandalay and they need more campaign exposure for long run in the main stream movement. Activists in Kawthaung used the Day to extend solidarity with lawyer network and political parties in the area.

**Monywa, Pyay and Dawei** – Once again open public actions were held in the vast majority of network cities. Local authorities and different organizations supported the commemorations of the Day though instability in Monywa. Lesbian community actively participated in Monywa and started initiation to form group for involving in the movement. Activists in Pyay include legal awareness session to protect arbitrary arrest for transgender community and extend networking with lawyers. The activists moved the action to a prominent pagoda and performed as mobile public awareness activities among the general public. Hundreds of people were introduced to the Day and the message “LGBT is an Identity”. Dawei activists held the action at a prominent beach, Maung-Ma-Gan Beach. Local religious leaders from different religions, police officers, local authorities and organizations in the area presented at the commemoration. The action focused on same-sex relationship and marriage equality as trendy issue in country.

**Kyaukpadaung** – A faith-based action was held by local activists at a well-known monastery, Htein-Kan East Monastery. GONGO, authorities from religious committees, education officers, and political parties, LGBTs from neighboring cities (i.e., Nyaung-U, Myingyan, Ma-Hlaing and Mandalay) attended and supported the Day activities. The Day provided a space for discussion among activists and the attendees regarding LGBT issues in area and across the country.

**Lashio** - Despite significant security concerns after bomb blast in Lashio, activists managed to come together to hold the first ever Day in the city. The Day was an opportunity to raise the issue of depathologizing based on their personal stories. Unexpected and efficient lesbian participation is observed. Some closeted couples came out on the Day event. Special Police department and health department officials started initiation and pave the way of collaboration for future LGBT rights activities in the area. During the event, Local Resource Center offer opportunities for capacity development of the LGBT community in Lashio.



**Pakokku** – A pioneering event in Pakokku took place in cooperation with “Pyi-Gyi-Khin”, a local organization which addresses HIV/AIDS for gays, transgender and sex workers. Organizers viewed the event as a milestone in the emergence of a new movement in the area. They introduced the Day to the local community, and disseminate information on SOGIE along with LGBT identity promotion and free expression. Local community recognized the unity of LGBT groups and individuals in the area on the Day event. As result LGBT community earn earns respect from general public.

\*Full reports of 10 cities are available (only in Burmese) upon request.

## Lessons Learned

- Events are organized in public where everyone can easily accessible without any strict security checks and prohibition of electronic devices
- Make sure the information are reached to media person and provide necessary logistic arrangement for them to disseminate effective messages to general public
- LGBT activists in areas outside Yangon need more exposure with organizing campaigns
- Well-preparation is important to avoid unnecessary threats
- Campaign materials provide huge impact in promotion of LGBT rights movement
- Providing relevant information for speeches is the key for every event to make sure dissemination of message
- Non-LGBT and authorities participation is important for LGBT rights movement in areas to tie stronger communication
- Immature behavior between organizers creates unnecessary efforts during the preparations
- LGBT are born with creativity and can be utilized in effective advocacy/lobby works
- Colors Rainbow is capable of providing technical assistance for local campaigns via various communication channels even to very remote areas. The effort creates remarkable experiences in network areas.

## Recommendations

- Human rights and LGBT rights awareness training followed by capacity building training such as advocacy, public speaking, community mobilizing, leadership training, for LGBT groups in network areas should be provided for further advocacy/lobby work.
- Empowering lesbian groups in network areas is important to ensure lesbian issues are raised in mainstream movement. Lesbian only trainings and workshops should be organized to ensure Myanmar LGBT Rights Network strategies on lesbians.
- Recent network visits conducted by Colors Rainbow plays a big role in the commemorations of the Day in the areas. Thus, Colors Rainbow and network members should make more effort on network strengthening trips to areas to increase solidarity with local groups.
- Social media campaign should also be focused as effective advocacy tool for urban community and closeted LGBT community.

- Information, education and communication (IEC) materials should be developed for every campaigns with regular review process for updating information to local communities.
- According to the presence of different religious leaders in areas and their support, LGBT activists should reach out to them and provide proper education/information around LGBT issues in Myanmar. Updating their knowledge on the issue will have a greater impact for the LGBT rights movement.

### **Key Person to contact for further information**

Aung Myo Min, Director of Equality Myanmar

Mobile: 09448015306

Email: [myominburma@gmail.com](mailto:myominburma@gmail.com)

HlaMyatTun, Program Officer of Colors Rainbow

Mobile: 0973022564

Email: [hlaMyat.crb@gmail.com](mailto:hlaMyat.crb@gmail.com)

Prepared and Submitted by,



HlaMyatTun

Program Officer  
Colors Rainbow