



Civil Society in Myanmar's 2020 Elections

CONFERENCE REPORT | SEPTEMBER 2019

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iPACE
INSTITUTE FOR POLITICAL
AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

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The principle author of this report is Andrea Welsh.
Speakers and panelists provided their services on a voluntary basis.

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Contents

I. Introduction	4
II. Panelists and Speakers.....	6
III. Summaries of Remarks and Presentations.....	7
IV. Conference Agenda.....	24
V. Bios of Presenters.....	26

I. Introduction

Over the past seven years, World Learning's Institute for Political and Civic Engagement (iPACE) has built the capacity of diverse individuals and organizations across the Myanmar, amplifying the impact of emerging democracy activists and leaders as they work together to address issues critical to the country's ongoing democratic transition. Working closely with participants and alumni from across the country, World Learning recognizes the important contributions they make on a daily basis to the communities where they live. While there have been notable gains since Myanmar's historic elections in 2015, there remain serious issues of slow economic growth, challenges to the peace process, and persistent communal tensions. Despite increasing scrutiny and crackdowns, civil society leaders continue to demonstrate their commitment and courage to carrying out grassroots community organizing work despite the immense challenges and risks. In this complex environment leading up to the elections in 2020, it is more important than ever to support civil society leaders, organizations, and the sector as a whole by providing them with the knowledge, skills, tools, and resources they need to succeed.

With this in mind, iPACE organized its third annual conference to provide an opportunity for civil society actors and other important stakeholders to pose and examine the most pivotal questions regarding civil society's role in Myanmar's upcoming 2020 elections. Similar to the overwhelming response in 2018, we received more than 120 attendees from civil society organizations (CSOs), political parties, embassies, and international organizations for this one-day event at the American Center Yangon on September 19, 2019.

In designing this third conference, we consulted with some of the country's most engaged and experienced democracy advocates from different aspects of the political spectrum: political prisoners, labor unions, political party members, interest groups, media, and international donors.

Common themes which resulted from the discussions included the following:

- As in past elections, Myanmar's civil society sector has an opportunity to play a critical role in the upcoming 2020 elections.
- While the civil society sector in Myanmar has made significant strides to present itself as a whole sector, there is still more work to be done to coordinate efforts. CSOs continue to respond to the needs and interests of their individual communities rather than work together when they have common interests. If this trend continues, this will hamper civil society's effectiveness in the 2020 elections.
- Myanmar's transition to a democracy led by a civilian led government took place with the national elections of 2015. Applying lessons learned from the historic national elections, as well as the smaller local elections, will be critical guaranteeing free and fair elections that are inclusive for people from across the country regardless of ethnic group or religion.

- Media, especially social media, will be a critical component of the upcoming elections. Civil society organizations have an opportunity, as well as a responsibility, to ensure that communities are well-informed through effective outreach campaigns and media literacy training.
- The prevalence of fake news, disinformation, and hate speech is expected to be at an all-time high in the run up to the elections. Media agencies and civil society organizations need to work more closely to identify and stop the spread of this type of information.
- Strengthening strategic advocacy efforts employed by civil society in Myanmar remains an immediate need for sustainable development and effective policy change. This is particularly important when considering electoral legislative reforms and media/communications legislative reforms.

In summary, we would like to express our special thanks to everyone who contributed to the success of the event—the distinguished speakers and panelists, staff and consultants, interpreter who artfully interpreted in English, attendees, and the U.S. Embassy in Burma whose generous support of World Learning makes this iPACE program possible.

II. Panelists and Speakers

(Listed in order of appearance)

Andrea Welsh	Director, iPACE, World Learning
Deborah C. Lynn	Public Affairs Officer, U.S. of America Embassy in Burma
Shwe Yee Win	Peace and Justice Myanmar
Myint Kyaw	Myanmar Journalist Network
Cing Don Nuam	Phandeeyar
Hsu Hla Phyu	Phandeeyar
Kyaw Htin	New Myanmar Foundation
Scot Marciel	U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of the Union of Burma
Zeya Thu	The Voice
Sai Ye Kyaw Swar Myint	People's Alliance for the Credible Elections
Zin Mar Oo	Myanmar Network Organization for Free and Fair Elections
Nay Lin Soe	Myanmar Independent Living Initiative
Mahn Thaik Tun	iPACE Trainer

III. Summaries of Remarks and Presentations

Welcoming Remarks from World Learning

ANDREA WELSH

Andrea Welsh, Director of World Learning's Institute for Political and Civic Engagement (iPACE), provided opening remarks by welcoming special guests, civil society leaders, and distinguished speakers to this third annual conference. Ms. Welsh shared a brief description of World Learning's history, current programs around the world, as well as its mission in Myanmar. Since 2012, iPACE has been at the forefront of strengthening Myanmar's civil society sector by delivering practical, experiential learning with the aim to empower individual leaders with the skills and knowledge they need to be successful in their communities. iPACE designs and implements intensive civic education through thematic courses, mobile clinics, and networking and advocacy events at the American Center in Yangon and the Jefferson Center in Mandalay. Workshops and networking activities are provided to both alumni and the public. Recognizing the importance of bringing this information to those who cannot attend our courses in these locations, iPACE has conducted mobile training programs in remote communities in every state and region across Myanmar.

Over the past seven years, iPACE has had the honor of collaborating with the U.S. Embassy Department of State here in Myanmar to bring this experience to over 3,000 individuals from local community-based organizations, political parties, labor unions, peace advocacy groups, women's empowerment groups, disability rights groups, LGBT rights groups, student unions, and many more. World Learning could not have accomplished this without the steadfast support of the U.S. Embassy and we remain continually grateful to Ambassador Scot Marciel and Public Affairs Officer Deborah Lynn for their support.

Ms. Welsh reminded the audience that while the presentations and breakout sessions will primarily focus on Myanmar's pivotal upcoming elections in 2020, we must also recognize that the work of the civil society will go on far beyond one election. Events like this conference offer opportunities to reconnect with fellow iPACE alumni, meet new colleagues from the civil society sector, and learn new ideas from the distinguished speakers.

Invoking the words of President Barack Obama, Ms. Welsh reminded the iPACE participants that: **"Change will not come if we wait for some other person, or if we wait for some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek."** Ms. Welsh closed her remarks by stating that iPACE is incredibly proud to support civil society organizations in Myanmar and honored to have a platform to bring everyone together during this conference as well throughout the year.

Welcoming Remarks from the United States Embassy in Burma

DEBORAH C. LYNN

Public Affairs Officer, Deborah C. Lynn, shared congratulatory remarks in Myanmar language to the iPACE Alumni on their participation in the iPACE program along with their demonstrated interest to continue collaborating and coordinating their efforts as a wider civil society sector. Ms. Lynn briefly described the United States' consistent support of Myanmar over the past 30 years by helping it to achieve democracy and prosperity. She shared a brief history of the American Center Yangon and Jefferson Center Mandalay and how both centers have continued to serve as safe spaces where people have the freedom to meet and talk about important issues, attend engaging education events, and access library resources. **Programs like iPACE reaffirm the necessity to continue investing in the civil society sector in Myanmar in order to lift communities from the grassroots level.** Ms. Lynn emphasized the Embassy's continued commitment to supporting iPACE and encouraged each conference participant to connect and learn from one another.

Keynote Presentation

Role of CSOs in Myanmar's Elections - Lessons Learned from Previous Elections

SHWE YEE WIN

In her remarks, Shwe Yee Win explored the pivotal engagement of CSOs in elections since 2010, highlighting challenges and successes which can offer important lessons for CSOs in the coming elections.



Highlighting that the motto of international democracy for 2019 is 'participation,' Shwe Yee Win discussed how important it will be for the Union Election Commission (UEC) and all levels of sub commissions, political parties, and CSOs to coordinate with one another in order to ensure that Myanmar's elections are free, fair, and up to international standards.

As Myanmar has only transitioned to a democracy in the last ten years, CSOs were not allowed to officially participate in the elections process during the 2010 general elections according to Section 399 of the 2008 Constitution.

Despite there being a renewal of the UEC after the 2010 general elections and a potential opportunity for greater collaboration with CSOs, the UEC only met with two organizations: Myanmar Red Cross Association and Myanmar National Committee for Women's Affairs (MNCWA).

The level of communication increased by November 2013 when the UEC met 25 local CSOs and launched a pilot project to create basic voter lists in Chin State. In 2014, this pilot was launched in Ahlone Township, Yangon and Myitkyina, Kachin State. These pilot projects were particularly noteworthy because they were the first time in Myanmar's history that CSOs had the opportunity to collaborate in the official electoral process.

In the lead up to the 2015 elections, even though the Government of Myanmar and the UEC held deep mistrust of CSOs, they finally recognized CSO work to be nonpartisan and professional. During that year, voter lists were announced on four occasions throughout the country and CSOs played a major role in motivating the public to check the voter lists through effective outreach and voter education campaigns.

While there was no official election law or procedures in regard to official election observation, CSOs advocated to the UEC and its Chairman to officially allow election observation following a strict code of conduct. This request was granted which resulted in 13 local CSOs comprised of 9,430 observers who observed the 2015 general elections at the national, regional, and township levels. Shwe Yee Win pointed out that this was the first time in Myanmar's history that elections at all levels had election observers.

In addition to strong participation from national and international election observers, there was participation from 91 political parties and a 69% voter turnout. This election was widely reported by the media to be a trustworthy and transparent election, and one in which the CSOs played a critical role.

After the 2015 elections, Shwe Yee Win noted several important points about the UEC that CSOs should keep in mind (particularly in the lead up to the 2020 elections). Between 2016-2019, the UEC organized four broader meetings and discussions in addition to smaller monthly meetings with individual CSOs and political parties. As a response to this limited interaction, ten local CSOs united to form the Electoral Reform Coordination Body (ERCB) in 2016 and advocate to the UEC in monthly meetings. While this lack of sector wide engagement meant that the level of coordination was reduced, the UEC did consult with CSOs on a gender equality and women's participation policy (2019-2022) and UEC strategic plan (2019-2022) that they developed, inviting CSOs to share their recommendations.

Additionally, there have been severe limitations placed on CSOs which prevented them from being able to carry out activities. For example, CSOs could not carry out voter education activities without the permission of the state and regional government in the 2016 and 2017 bi-elections. Further, there exists a communications gap between the UEC and regional government which makes it difficult to coordinate the role and participation of CSOs in elections. Shwe Yee Win also clarified that the only CSOs who can participate are those that are registered, which excludes multitudes of CSOs that lack legal registration.

In the Question and Answer section with the speaker, three notable questions captured the discussion.

Firstly, Shwe Yee Win was asked **how CSOs can promote free and fair elections in the coming year. She responded by saying that organizations must invest in providing quality voter education outreach and awareness campaigns in order to engage the electorate and ensure everyone knows their voting rights, candidate profiles, and political party platforms.** Secondly, she was asked about the connection that CSOs have with political parties. In response, she described how the connection between CSOs and political parties exists but needs to be strengthened. The speaker stressed there should be more regular communication and coordination between these two groups in order to advocate for comprehensive electoral legislative reform. **This will require that both CSOs and political parties educate themselves on election laws, bylaws, and procedures in order to articulate how the UEC should revise the current electoral framework to be more free and fair.**

Thirdly, the speaker was asked about the limitations of the UEC during the campaign period. In response, Shwe Yee Win highlighted that the UEC is often hampered during elections because there aren't clear guidelines in terms of the roles or responsibilities of each group involved in an election. The speaker recommended that the UEC develop codes of conduct for each of the unique groups involved in elections: political parties, election observers, international observers, and security forces (particularly the Myanmar Police Force).

The speaker highlighted the crucial role of CSOs to serve as agents of change in order to lift the country up to be more representative, accountable, and pluralistic. CSOs play a vital role in making the public more committed to democracy. In regard to elections in particular, CSOs have the ability harness 'people power' in order to instill democratic values throughout all areas and levels of society by ensuring elections are free, fair, and peaceful.

Shwe Yee Win highlighted that the positive impacts of having a strong civil society sector across the country include:

- **Creating a stronger, more transparent democracy**
- **Supporting and legitimizing the electoral process**
- **Contributing to reduction and prevention of conflict**

In order to achieve these impacts, however, she stressed the need for CSOs to be impartial, non-partisan, neutral, independent, and professional. Further, crucial stakeholders for CSOs to coordinate with include political parties and candidates, UEC and Electoral Management Body

(EMB) staff, national and local branches of government, media, donor community, electoral assistance agencies, and the electorate (voters and prospective voters).

Encouraging organizations to focus and coordinate their efforts, Shwe Yee Win highlighted some of the main challenges that CSOs will face in the 2020 elections:

- The independence of the UEC, and its ability to collaborate with other government bodies including the General Administration Department.
- The urgent need for transparent and effective electoral legal reform, electoral risk management, complaints tribunals, and election dispute resolution processes.
- Ability for voters to easily access quality civic education and voter education in advance of the elections.
- Lack of support to township sub-commissions and polling staff (two key roles at the ground level of elections).
- Widespread and damaging presence of hate speech and disinformation, especially on social media platforms.
- There are currently over 90 political parties, however they lack sufficient organizing and communication skills which hinder their ability to reach constituents and promote their platform.
- Transparency and accessibility of basic election information, including voter registration, candidates' profiles, election calendar, and poll locations.
- Conflict areas need extra attention as constituencies in these areas do not feel it is safe enough to vote at polling stations, which leads to low voter turnout. Further, internally displaced persons and migrant populations in conflict affected areas do not have the right to vote in elections which must be resolved.
- There needs to be a greater focus on inclusion within the election process, particularly in regard to voters who are women, persons with disabilities, and ethnic minorities. These populations need to be included in the entire electoral cycle, which includes the pre-election period (three years leading up to elections), election period, and post-election period (one to two years after elections).

In her concluding remarks, Shwe Yee encouraged CSOs to focus on voter education, campaign support and capacity building, electoral legal reform, and improving election observation practices (both short- and long-term observers, but in particular long-term observers as there are few organizations involved in this space).

Breakout Sessions

Adopting a new approach to the past two iPACE Conferences, participants had the opportunity to attend breakout sessions and interact in small group discussions with experts from three different areas of elections. The sessions detail the unique topics and discussions that were discussed in groups of approximately 30 participants each.

SESSION ONE: HOW TO ANALYZE INFORMATION IN THE MEDIA DURING ELECTIONS



Moderator: Myint Kyaw, Myanmar Journalist Network

Myint Kyaw focused on the challenges that journalists and media outlets face during elections. During the run up to the elections, there is a big push by candidates and political parties to leverage both conventional media sources (newspapers, radio, news websites) with social media platforms.

With the rise of social media, many websites and groups present themselves as legitimate news sources though they are not verified sources. This creates pressure for legitimate news sources that work to ensure facts are verified and supported with evidence. Voters are often swayed to support one candidate or issue because they consume biased or false information promoted by unreliable news sources. This is a particularly challenging phenomenon in Myanmar where social media is mostly dominated by Facebook and many Myanmar people utilize the platform to access all of their information. Certain pages like The First News, The Strange News, and Ginger Media use humor to grab people's attention, but much of the content posted is false or unreliable. Myint Kyaw expressed the dangers that this places on a society, especially in communities that are not media literate and lack the skills and knowledge to distinguish between real and fake news.

Another issue that reliable news agencies face is the spread of copyright material without the permission of the author or agency. Mizzima News agency, for example, has claimed that their stories are often shared via screenshots taken and shared by their readers. This can be very problematic as original authors and agencies are often not credited or referenced and narratives can be altered or twisted. Myint Kyaw and The News Council are working hard to combat this issue known as 'news stealing.' Additionally, The News Council is monitoring fake news by collaborating with information technology experts to compile lists of fake news agencies and providing them to the public. Myint Kyaw stressed that while the media sector can play an important role in combating these issues, it is essential for CSOs and government to also collaborate and contribute to the collective efforts.

The speaker emphasized that these trends will be particularly important to watch in the upcoming 2020 elections. In the 2015 elections, the prevalence of smart phones was lower than it is now. Today, communities across Myanmar are connecting to media, particularly social media, for most of their information and therefore need to be informed about how this information can impact situations on the ground. The threat of disinformation and fake news can be dangerous and lead to violence if the public is not aware of what is true and what is fake. In this situation, news and media agencies have a responsibility to follow professional standards and media ethics. CSOs can also play a crucial role to support these agencies by holding them accountable and advocating to the government for more comprehensive media laws.

In his closing remarks, Myint Kyaw reminded participants the importance of analyzing both conventional and social media related to the elections. He used the example of state-run media, specifically newspapers such as The Mirror and The New Light of Myanmar. It is estimated that these newspapers circulate 300,000 copies daily, whereas independent newspapers struggle to circulate 30,000 copies. The state-run newspapers can serve as a tool for the elections because the biases employed in their articles will favor the USDP over other parties.

Myint Kyaw urged CSOs to consider all of these issues and lessons learned from past elections in order to collaborate with media agencies to be better prepared for the upcoming 2020 elections.

SESSION TWO: IMPORTANCE OF OPEN DATA IN ELECTIONS



Moderator: Cing Don Nuam and Hsu Hla Phyu, Phandeeyar

Cing Don Nuam and Hsu Hla Phyu utilized technology to lead participants through online monitoring platforms from across the world. The speakers shared how tech developers in Myanmar have made significant strides since the 2015 elections in improving the collection, sharing, and analysis of data related to elections. With the increase use of smart phones and technology, Myanmar communities can access more information and resources. However, it is important that these communities are provided the tools they need in order to accurately interpret and analyze the information that they consume. Through Phandeeyar's role as a tech innovation hub in Yangon, the moderators shared how they are promoting open data and developing tools for activists and CSOs working on the ground to create a more transparent digital environment for all.

In the Question and Answer section, the moderators and participants discussed how rural communities with less reliable connection to the internet or cell phone reception could gain better access to the information they need. The moderators acknowledged that while urban and semi-urban communities currently have easier access to these online tools and resources, many of them can be translated into physical copies which continue to promote open data during elections.

SESSION THREE: TACKLING HATE SPEECH AND DISINFORMATION IN ELECTIONS



Moderator: Kyaw Htin, New Myanmar Foundation

In this third session, Kyaw Htin explored how CSOs can tackle hate speech and disinformation in elections by identifying effective strategies and solutions to prepare for the 2020 elections.

Kyaw Htin first reviewed how hate speech and disinformation have been utilized in recent elections to create divisions among communities. In 2015, hate speech related to different religious groups, mainly Buddhism and Islam, was prevalent both online and offline. There were also multiple issues related to information technology and the security of elections, for example, the UEC's website was attacked by a virus that hampered their ability to carry out their election duties. Further, in 2017 and 2018, individual candidates and political parties suffered synchronized attacks on social media with the apparent aim to harm their campaigns.

In 2019, many candidates carried out their campaigns using social media because of the advantages that it presented to connect with constituents. Most candidates use Facebook because it remains the most popular social media platform, is easy to use, economical, and can quickly reach a large number of potential voters. Despite these advantages relying on social media as the main outreach comes with its challenges. **For example, when using offline campaign strategies, there are rules and regulations prohibiting hate speech and disinformation. However, online campaigns do not have this legal framework, making it very easy for hate speech and disinformation to spread.**

There are common techniques that we can see perpetrators using to create hate speech and disinformation, including using incorrect information and presenting it as fact; recycling photos that are not applicable to the post/content; presenting old posts and information as if it were

current; using headlines or titles that do not match the content of the post, among many others. Perpetrators of disinformation are familiar with the habits of social media users and employ a systematic approach to take advantage of their preference to skim titles and look at alarming photos, rather than reading full articles. These systematic and well-orchestrated strategies are often difficult to trace back to the perpetrators as they are largely carried out on Facebook by using fake accounts and pages.

When the public suspects they are seeing disinformation or fake news, Kyaw Htin explained that there are three possible analyses: 1) the disinformation was unintentionally created by someone; 2) it was created intentionally by an individual or group; or 3) it was created by an organization with the aim to take coordinated efforts to spoil a political party or individual candidates reputation, dignity, etc.

When asking ourselves what we can do to prevent the spread of hate speech and disinformation, Kyaw Htin encouraged CSOs to be actively involved in fact checking, conducting media literacy trainings, and sharing information and resources about cyber and communications laws so that the public is aware.

There is still major concern around these issues for the 2020 elections as they have not been resolved.

CSO Fair

CSO Representatives: International Idea, Generation Tree, Myanmar Network Organization for Free and Fair Elections, National Youth Congress, New Myanmar Foundation, Panna Institute, Phandeyyar, People's Alliance for Credible Elections

CSOs hosted participants at their respective booths to discuss their work related to the 2020 elections. Participants used this opportunity to network among the CSOs represented to learn ways they could get involved and volunteer in their efforts, in addition to taking resources back to their communities.







Remarks from the United States Embassy in Burma

SCOT MARCIEL, AMBASSADOR, UNITED STATES EMBASSY IN BURMA



Ambassador Scot Marciel opened his remarks by sharing that the United States has long been a supporter of Myanmar and the people's aspirations for more democracy, peace, and prosperity, including through elections. **He shared that the building blocks of democracy include free and fair elections, an independent and strong parliament, a strong justice system, good governance, independent media, and a strong civil society sector.**

He stressed that the strongest and healthiest democracies are those that have a thriving civil society sector because it demonstrates that the democracy is built from the bottom up, rather than only from the top down. National leaders undeniably have an important role to play in establishing a strong democracy, but there needs to be a well-informed and active public for democracy to work.

Civil society plays a very important role in achieving this balance through providing civic engagement, promoting public awareness, and advocating for the needs of communities at the grass-roots level. In his travels across Myanmar over the last three and a half years, Ambassador Marciel has met with CSO leaders from a variety of backgrounds and communities. He has experienced first-hand how the day-to-day work of CSOs is far from easy and that they face many challenges, frustrations, and setbacks. He reflected that this is not only the situation for CSOs in Myanmar, but also in the United States as well as in countries around the world. Civil society groups have an opportunity to highlight the policy weaknesses of government and hold government leaders accountable to provide more effective service to the public.

While it can be difficult at times, governments should see civil society as a source of ideas, because those ideas are needed to move countries forward towards greater prosperity and success. Collectively, the unified voices of CSOs in Myanmar have the potential to make these positive and effective changes.

Ambassador Marciel expressed his appreciation for the hard work and dedication of civil society organizations and reaffirmed the U.S. Embassy's commitment to continue working with them in order to build a strong and healthy democracy in Myanmar.

Panel Discussion

Looking Towards the 2020 Elections



MODERATOR: ZEYA THU, THE VOICE JOURNAL

Panelists: Sai Ye Kyaw Swar Myint (People's Alliance for Credible Elections), Zin Mar Oo (Myanmar Network Organization for Free and Fair Elections), Nay Lin Soe (Myanmar Independent Living Initiative)

This panel explored how CSO leaders and their communities are preparing for the 2020 elections, including the challenges they encounter, expectations for the elections, and overall recommendations for how the CSO sector can coordinate efforts.

Moderator Zeya Thu asked panelists to share their reflections on the differences between the 2015 general elections and coming 2020 general elections.

Sai Ye Kyaw Swar Myint, responded that the 2015 elections aimed simply to accomplish some positive change, while the 2020 elections will measure the quality of democracy, elections, and accountability of political parties.

Nay Lin Soe shared this opinion by adding that most voters in Myanmar focused on change for the 2015 elections and that the 2020 elections will have a greater focus on inclusiveness of all communities in the Myanmar society. There is serious competition among candidates, which will make these elections difficult for both the candidates and voters. Among the total reported population of 2 million persons with disabilities, he estimates that one million will turn out in next year's elections.

Zin Mar Oo commented that she hopes the coming 2020 elections will be freer and fairer in comparison to previous elections because the public elected the NLD government and expect the current government will support CSOs to actively participate in the electoral process. **She suggested that youth are interested in participating in elections according to their experience with the activity "First Time Youth Voters for 2020" but they have concerns such as lack of trust, lack of confidence and low access to election information.**

Sai Ye Kyaw Swar Myint added that in order to have free and fair elections, the following criteria must be met: 1) Transparency (i.e. access to accurate information); 2) Inclusiveness (i.e. informed decisions that are based on free access to media); 3) Accountability (i.e. electoral legal reform); 4) Participation (i.e. public and CSO participation in electoral process and electoral reform process); and 5) Security (i.e. highlighting the right to vote for internally displaced persons (IDP) in current armed conflict areas and five million refugees in Thai-Myanmar border).

Pivoting to the theme of access to information, Nay Lin Soe shared that political parties and candidates themselves have the responsibility to share timely information of the candidates, including their profile and policies of parties to the public. Critically, this information needs to be available in multiple languages and available to persons with disabilities. This will empower voters to be more informed when they go to the polling stations.

Relatedly, Sai Ye Kyaw Swar Myint highlighted that one of the most serious challenges for elections is that there is no exact election date. This is just one example of how CSOs and political parties must be proactive in order to achieve electoral reform. He stressed that CSOs have the bargaining power when coordinating with candidates and political parties, but they must coordinate efforts to achieve policy reform and hold elected officials accountable once they are elected into office.

Nay Lin Soe shared his findings on the participation of persons with disabilities in parliament – three disabled persons were elected in three Regional Hluttaw, but no person with disability was elected to the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw. He described how facilities and preparation of most polling stations are still not accessible for persons with disabilities, which prevents them from participating in elections. He highlighted the need for equality and that there is ‘nothing about us without us’ in relation to advocating for the rights of persons with disabilities.

As final take home messages, the panelists offered the following:

- **Zin Mar Oo: Make sure to participate in the 2020 elections.**
- **Sai Ye Kyaw Swar Myint: The role of CSOs is very important and needs to be strong and proactive. Through collective action, CSOs can promote civic engagement and the accountability of political parties.**
- **Nay Lin Soe: Ensuring that elections are inclusive is not a ‘need to do’ but rather a ‘MUST DO.’ We must work together to avoid discrimination, increase inclusion of all people, and consider both majority and minority issues.**

Conference Closing Remarks

MAHN THAIK TUN, IPACE TRAINER

Mahn Thaik Tun, iPACE trainer and active member of Myanmar’s civil society sector, closed the one-day conference by reflecting on the important points raised by the aforementioned distinguished speakers, CSO fair representatives, U.S. Embassy officials, and breakout session moderators – learning from the lessons of the 2015 elections in order to inform activities and organization for the 2020 elections; increasing media literacy training programs for communities at the ground level; ensuring that there are sufficient media monitoring mechanisms and groups to identify and stop the spread of fake news and disinformation; promoting the distribution of election information in ethnic languages in order to reach all communities across the country; and stressing the benefits and importance of open data.

Through conferences such as this, in addition to regular courses and alumni activities, iPACE looks forward to continue supporting CSOs in their efforts to build a strong and inclusive democracy across Myanmar, especially in this pivotal year of the upcoming 2020 elections.

IV. Conference Agenda

Civil Society in Myanmar's 2020 Elections

INSTITUTE FOR POLITICAL AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT (IPACE) CONFERENCE 2019

September 19, 2019 | Freedom Hall, American Center Yangon, Myanmar

8:30–9:00 am **Registration**

9:00–9:15 am **Welcoming Remarks**

Andrea Welsh

Director, IPACE, World Learning Myanmar

Deborah C. Lynn

Public Affairs Officer, United States of America Embassy in Burma

9:15–10:15 am **Keynote Presentation: *Role of CSOs in Myanmar's Elections – Lessons Learned from Previous Elections***

The keynote speaker explores the pivotal engagement of civil society organizations in elections since 2010, highlighting challenges and successes which can offer important lessons for CSOs in the coming elections.

Shwe Yee Win

Peace and Justice Myanmar

10:15–10:45 am **Networking and Tea Break**

10:45–12:00 pm **Breakout Sessions**

Participants have the opportunity to choose one session to attend.

Session One: *How to Analyze Information in the Media During Elections*

Moderator: Myint Kyaw, Myanmar Journalist Network

Session Two: *Importance of Open Data in Elections*

Moderator: Cing Don Nuam and Hsu Hla Phyu, Phandeeayar

Session Three: *Tackling Hate Speech and Disinformation in Elections*

Moderator: Kyaw Htin, New Myanmar Foundation

12:00–1:00 pm **Lunch Break**

- 1:00–2:20 pm **CSO Fair**
CSOs host participants at their respective booths to discuss work related to the 2020 elections.
- CSOs representatives: International IDEA, Generation Tree, Myanmar Network Organization for Free and Fair Elections, National Youth Congress, New Myanmar Foundation, Panna Institute, Phandeeyar, People's Alliance for Credible Elections
- 2:20–2:50 pm **Refreshments and networking**
- 2:50–3:10 pm **Remarks from the United States Embassy in Burma**
- Scot Marciel**
Ambassador, United States of America Embassy in Burma
- 3:10–4:45 pm **Panel Discussion: *Looking Towards the 2020 Elections***
- This panel explores how CSO leaders and their communities are preparing for the 2020 elections, including the challenges they encounter, expectations for the elections, and overall recommendations for how the CSO sector can coordinate efforts.
- Moderator:*
Zeya Thu
The Voice Journal
- Panelists:*
Sai Ye Kyaw Swar Myint
People's Alliance for Credible Elections
- Zin Mar Oo**
Myanmar Network for Free and Fair Elections
- Nay Lin Soe**
Myanmar Independent Living Initiative
- 4:45–4:55 pm **Closing Remarks**
- Mahn Thaik Tun**
iPACE Trainer
- 4:55–5:00 pm **Conference Closing and Group Photo**

V. Bios of Presenters



Ambassador Scot Marciel was confirmed as the U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of the Union of Burma on February 9, 2016 by the U.S. Senate. Ambassador Marciel arrived in Burma on March 25, 2016. Ambassador Marciel previously served as the Department of State's Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs from August 2013-February 2016. Prior to his return to Washington, he served as Ambassador to the Republic of Indonesia. He was also Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, where he was responsible for relations with Southeast Asia, and as Ambassador for ASEAN Affairs. Ambassador Marciel, a career member of the Senior Foreign Service, joined the Department in 1985. His assignments include Director of the Office of Maritime Southeast Asia, Director of the Office of Mainland Southeast Asia, and Director of the Office of Southeastern Europe. Ambassador Marciel also has served in Vietnam, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Brazil and Turkey, as well as in the Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs' Office of Monetary Affairs. Ambassador Marciel grew up in Fremont, California. He is a graduate of the University of California at Davis and the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. Ambassador Marciel and his wife, Mae, have two daughters.



Deborah C. Lynn, in advance of assuming duties in August 2019 as Public Affairs Officer at the Embassy in Yangon, Deb recently completed her Burmese language studies. Prior to that, Deb served as the Deputy Director of the Africa Office at the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations from April 2016-January 2017, then as Acting Director until April 2018. Other overseas diplomatic assignments include managing public diplomacy programs in Indonesia, Kabul, Afghanistan, and Russia. She was also detailed to the International Staff at NATO headquarters in Brussels, Belgium to serve as the Senior Media Operations Officer for Afghanistan Issues. In Washington, she managed the press and outreach functions of the State Department's refugee bureau. Additionally, she served consular tours in Tbilisi,

Georgia; Kyiv, Ukraine; and Frankfurt, Germany. She is proficient in Bahasa Indonesia, Russian, and German. She has received the Department's Superior Honor Award four times. She holds an M.A. in Global Studies from the University of Denver and B.A. in English from Rockhurst College. Her daughter Madison studies Architecture at the University of Kansas, and her son Ethan will attend Princeton University beginning this Fall.



Andrea Welsh is an international development practitioner with over nine years of experience in Latin America, Africa, Central and South Asia. Andrea currently serves as the Program Director for World Learning's Institute for Political and Civic Engagement (iPACE) based in the American Center Yangon. In this role, she leads the overall management, strategic planning, and technical approach of the program. This experience builds upon two years in Myanmar in which she has served as a Field Coordinator in Rakhine State and Fulbright Public Policy Fellow at the Ministry of Education in Nay Pyi Taw. Andrea holds a bachelor's degree in International Studies and Spanish from the University of Oregon and a master's degree in Global Human Development from Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service.



Shwe Yee Win spent most of her years (12 years) on Myanmar Democratic Movement and development sector. She has a variety of experiences such as research, advocacy and political engagement. She founded Peace & Justice Myanmar (PJM) civil society organization in January 2014. PJM has been engaging in civic education, civic engagement, voter education and electoral reform sectors in collaboration with local and international actors. PJM successfully conducted election observation in the historic General Election (2015) and in the 2017 by-election. Currently, she participates in three main pillars: Electoral Legal Reform and long-term observer of Electoral Management Body; Civic Engagement; and Member of Women. She is also a member of the Peace and Security Technical working group chaired by the Department of Social Welfare.



Myint Kyaw started to work as a junior reporter at Myanmar Dana business magazine in late 2003. Then he wrote local news story and business feature for Myanmar Dana until late 2007. In early 2008, he served as a standing freelance journalist, contributing to some weekly papers and The Irrawaddy online until 2008. He joined the Visiting Scholar Program of the Journalism School at the University of Berkeley California from 2008 to 2009. In 2010, he co-founded the Yangon Press International news group with other colleagues. Then he served as editor in chief of Yangon Press International until May 2012. In September 2012, he started as journalism trainer, conducting basic journalism training in the Myanmar Journalist Network, as a local co-trainer in Conflict Sensitive Journalism trainings 2012 to 2013. He was elected as general secretary of Myanmar Journalist Network in September 2012 and continued to serve in this role until August 2015. He has also been a member of the Interim Myanmar Press Council September since 2012, and also served as a member of newly elected Myanmar News Media Council 2015 till now. Currently, he is working as the Head of Training at the Myanmar Journalism Institute.



Kyaw Htin is the Program Director of New Myanmar Foundation (NMF) organization, and working as the Mission Director and Database Manager of Election Education and Observation Partners (EEOP), a domestic election observation coalition founded by NMF in 2014. He has been involved in election observation since 2015. He is also a leader of the research team in his mother organization and has participated in other survey research projects, especially in governance and local governance reforms. He took on the responsibility as mission director, coordinator, database manager and trainer in the 2015 General Elections, 2017 By-elections and 2018 By-elections in Myanmar. He also joined as an international observer to the IEO Mission to Cambodia Communal Elections conducted by the Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL) in 2017. He led the election monitoring core team for local and municipal elections in Myanmar, such as Yangon City Development Committee (YCDC) and Mandalay City Development Committee (MCDC) elections. He is currently leading efforts in tackling hate speech and countering disinformation for upcoming elections, including the next general elections 2020 in Myanmar.



Cing Don Nuam graduated from Randolph College in 2016 with a B.A. in Economics; she is currently working as the data community coordinator for Tech for Change team in Phandeeyar. Since then, she has been organizing data-related trainings and events as well as mentoring training participants. Prior to joining the organization, she worked for two years as a research assistant for an r4d project organized by the Centre for Development and Environment (CDE), University of Bern.



Hsu Hla Phyu has been working in Phandeeyar as Program Associate dealing with Data Manipulation and Visualization. She holds a bachelor degree in Computer Engineering with specialization in IT networking. Besides her background, she is involved in a number of data and mapping projects in Myanmar.



Sai Ye Kyaw Swar Myint is the Executive Director of People's Alliance for Credible Elections (PACE) and Board member of Tagaung Institute of Political Studies (TIPS). From 2011 to 2013, he worked as the Political Engagement Director at Yangon School of Political Science. From 2010 - 2011 he worked at Nyein (Shalom) Foundation as a Political Parties and Campaign Analyst in Election Observation Project, and a curriculum development consultant and trainer in civic education project. He received his bachelor's degree in Geology from Taunggyi University in 2001.



Zeya Thu is the publisher and CEO of the Voice Journal, a leading news publication based in Myanmar. He has 15 years of professional experience in Myanmar journalism, politics and economy. As an author of five books and a columnist, he is a regular commentator on Myanmar politics and economy in the local and international media. He is the chairman of the board of directors at the Myanmar Journalism Institute, an independent institute founded by local media groups that provides quality journalism education. He is an advisor to Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies, a major foreign policy think tank affiliated with Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Zeya Thu graduated as a Civil Engineer from Yangon Technological University in 2002 and holds a Master in International Development Studies (2006) from Chulalongkorn University in Thailand. Aiming to support economic development of Myanmar, in 2012 Zeya Thu co-founded “Myanmar Development Partners,” a social enterprise that is providing financial service to low-income families, micro and small businesses. At the request of successive governments, Zeya Thu has been playing an advisory role in the discussion of fiscal federalism in the peace process.



Zin Mar Oo, is the Executive Director of Myanmar Network Organization for Free and Fair Elections (MYNFREL). MYNFREL is a non-profit organization, with a vision that democracy will thrive in Myanmar society, working to strengthen democratic representation through safeguarding free and fair elections and supporting well-informed participation of citizens in the electoral process and it was founded in June 2010 as Ad hoc Network to observe 2010 general election. She has been serving on Civic and Voter Education and Election Observation tasks at MYNFREL about six years since 2014. Currently, she is leading the First Time Youth Voters for 2020 project which aims to promote youth engagement in electoral process, as country-wide program in coordination with the Union Election Commission (UEC) and International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES). Previously, she also worked as a course instructor and trainer for Civic and Voter Education courses at Institute for Political and Civic Engagement (iPACE), as a Media Monitor at the

International Republican Institute (IRI) and as volunteer and trainer at several organizations.



Nay Lin Soe, a person with wheelchair, is the Executive Director and Co-Founder of Myanmar Independent Living Initiative (MILI), and is also a Board Member of Myanmar ICT Training Centre Foundation. He has been a disability rights champion leader for over 16 years and involved in 16 countries' disability rights movements. His expertise has also contributed to several regional dialogues on disability rights and political participation held in Asia and the Pacific and United States. He has a lot of engagements with the Election Management Bodies, Parliaments, Government ministries and several other stakeholders at national level. He received, the Role Model Award from Minister of Social Welfare in 2011, the Charles T. Manatt Democracy Award from United States of America in 2016, the Disability Rights Champion Award from Myanmar Disabled People's Network in 2016, and the Outstanding Award from KANAUNG Association in 2017.

VI. About World Learning in Myanmar

For 85 years, World Learning has worked to create a more peaceful, sustainable, and just world. Our education, development, and exchange programs help people find their voices, connect with their communities, and strengthen the institutions that form the backbone of a democratic society. With our support, these emerging leaders tackle critical global issues like poverty, conflict, and inequality.

Since 2003, World Learning has supported community development efforts in Myanmar by implementing training, networking, and organizational strengthening programs and providing technical expertise for the U.S. Embassy's American Center in Yangon and Jefferson Center in Mandalay. Alumni of our Myanmar programs have gone on to start their own community-based organizations, won small grants from the U.S. Embassy in Burma, earned Fulbright Scholarships, run for public office, and started new schools.

The Institute for Political and Civic Engagement (iPACE), a program of World Learning, is an educational resource for Myanmar's emerging democratic leaders to develop and increase their knowledge and practical application of fundamental democratic principles while promoting civic engagement to foster more representative and accountable governance. iPACE designs and implements intensive civic education through thematic courses, mobile clinics, and networking and advocacy events at the American Center Yangon and the Jefferson Center Mandalay. Since 2012, iPACE has trained more than 3,000 participants representing over 1,100 CSOs, 44 political parties, and 10 labor unions. Our alumni come from all states and regions in Myanmar, 49 ethnicities, and every major religion in the country.

iPACE is made possible by a generous grant from the U.S. Embassy in Burma.