

## Building Peace

Peace is not easy to achieve, even among nations that are prosperous and have no rival ethnic groups. My home country, Burma, sometimes known as Myanmar, is not so fortunate. Eight ethnic groups make up the nation; the country has been suffering from conflicts between the majority group, the Burmans, and the seven minority groups since independence from Britain. Each minority is rebelling against the military government. These conflicts result in loss of lives and suppression of the country's development, and so, no peaceful progress can be accomplished. Civilians are afraid of the Burmese military and feel insecure in their own homes. The nation is in a state of disharmony. The causes of this disharmony are lack of communication, differences in temperament, disrespect, mistrust, unfairness, and selfishness.

To overcome these problems and achieve real peace, Burmese have to see themselves as one people instead of different ethnic groups. Perhaps we might start at the level of the Burmese family. Peace needs to begin from inside the family. The home is where children learn the foundations of their personality. Parents are the first models for children; children inherit much of their parents' characters. So, family must be the first place to start training for peace. Parents should not use violence nor tolerate it in the household. Parents need to learn to solve problems nonviolently and apply what they have learned to the family. Both parents and children have to be able to speak out about what they disagree on. This will build up the children's self-confidence, self-esteem and courage. They can then acknowledge each other's interests and are thus empowered to

Speak up for what they think is right. That way there can be peace in the family, peace that can be a model for peace in the larger community.

The next level for building peace is at the school level. Children bring to school the attitudes they have learned from their home. Teachers must take the responsibility to teach children from different groups and cultures to respect each other. They should communicate the concept that everyone there, whatever their ethnicity, is Burmese. Schools must teach that a country is like one big family. If children learn about their various cultures and their importance for each ethnic group, they will understand each other better. Good relationships will develop more easily and the nation can build peace and unity.

In government, every ethnicity should have significant representation. This is one way for the different groups to communicate clearly and build trust. Only then will every group be satisfied with the government. The government should be careful not to favor people depending on their ethnicity. All should feel like they belong and are part of the nation. All citizens must benefit from the resources of the Burma nation. The rich should have sympathy for the poor and help them. In fact, we all should speak out for weaker groups in our society and help them. We have to support each other to have peace.

Real peace is not a goal we can achieve quickly. Peace needs to be built on a firm and systematic foundation so that it will not easily collapse. The fundamental building block for building peace is the individual and the family. If we can succeed in building a strong foundation for this building block of the family, the other blocks will come together and we will have a strong and lasting peace. If we can practice all the above, Burma can become the land of true peace.