



THE CATHOLIC CHURCH
IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

MEETING WITH H. E. CHARLES MAUNG CARDINAL BO, ARCHBISHOP OF YANGON (RANGOON) ON 24 MAY 2016 IN BRUSSELS

His Eminence Charles Maung Cardinal Bo became Burma/Myanmar's first ever Cardinal in 2015. For years, he has long been one of the most outspoken voices for human rights, religious freedom, inter-religious harmony, peace, reconciliation and justice in the country. He is one of the main defenders of the Muslim Rohingya minority in Myanmar and a vocal critic of the unbridled human trafficking that plague his country. On 24 May 2016, COMECE Secretariat, Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Aid to the Church in Need and Missio - Pontifical Mission Societies – organised an event in which Cardinal Bo briefed MEPs from different political parties and other civil society actors, including media, on the current challenges in his country, followed by a discussion.

Myanmar has newly recovered democracy after over half century of military dictatorship. Although the religious majority adheres to Buddhism, it is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country, with longstanding history of hospitality and welcoming culture. Many challenges have to be faced currently by the new government and the people of Myanmar, as Cardinal Bo has mentioned in his intervention: lack of justice in the distribution of benefits produced by natural resources, a widespread poverty, a massive drug production (as the top second world producer of opium), human trafficking as well as poor access to education and healthcare, and not less, the complex situation where the right to freedom of religion and conscience is not fully respected by State and non state actors. Particularly worrying is the situation of the Rohingyas Muslim minority suffers persecution and they are not even considered as citizens of the country. His Eminence also expressed his worries concerning the new laws on the “Protection of Race and Religion” that are limiting the possibility of conversion to non-Buddhist denominations and inter-faith marriage.

Cardinal Bo highlighted also that in order to overcome all these challenges, Myanmar needs the EU and international community's support to reinforce democracy, protecting and promoting human rights for all, fighting poverty by developing education and health care systems and preventing ethnical and religious conflicts, and promoting justice, dialogue and reconciliation. In this context, the Catholic Church, as one of the most important actors in the defense of human rights and the promotion of common good in Myanmar, is promoting peace and reconciliation through interreligious dialogue and advocating for equal citizenship and equal rights for all. *“We are Easter people -said Cardinal Bo - a new dawn has arisen. There is hope in Myanmar”.*

José Luis Bazán and Irmina Nockiewicz