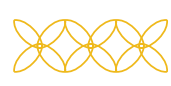




# The Influences of Religion in Southeast Asia (Part I)

- *Interviews of Ko Htike (Center for Diversity and National Harmony), Imam Moustapha Sarakibi (Board of Imams Victoria)*
- *Infographics about Religions in Southeast Asia*
- *Member Highlights: Australian Multicultural Foundation & Zamboanga-Basilan Integrated Development Alliance Inc. (ZABIDA)*
- *Funding Opportunities*





## Topic Background

*Throughout the month of August, SEAN-CSO's campaign focused on the influence and impact of religion in Southeast Asia.*

While religion usually functions to bring people together, in recent years religious intolerance has been on the rise. This month's newsletter highlights different cases of religious intolerance throughout Southeast Asia. Our hope is to shed some light on the causes of these tensions, offer some solutions for countering intolerance, and showcase the work of individuals and organizations that are promoting tolerance and improving social conditions in their societies.



## Profiles

### Ko Htike

*Nay Lin Htike (Ko Htike) is a senior program manager at the Center for Diversity and National Harmony (CDNH) based in Yangon, Myanmar.*

CDNH is involved in diversity management and the promotion of social cohesion and peace. The organization focuses on building platforms on which people from different communities can join together and find joint solutions, then, from their own positions of power and leadership, they can lead those initiatives in order to promote greater tolerance of diversity. Ko Htike is currently leading a project called the Rakhine Transformation Project (RTP). They establish locally owned, locally led entities within Rakhine State to spearhead the promotion of social harmony and positive diversity management.

While CDNH is not ostensibly an interfaith organization in its work it focuses on building better relations between Myanmar's Buddhist and Muslim communities. Ko Htike believes that the promotion of religious tolerance is very important and that it should be led by the national government (highest form of authority) in partnership with regional governments, local governments, religious leaders, NGOs, IGOs, CSOs, and local communities.

In 2015, CDNH created a civic education scheme. CDNH provides many different educational institutions with this civic education curriculum. They also train teachers so that they can incorporate different teaching methodologies and better deliver the curriculum to the students. Whilst the curriculum that CDNH developed has not been



integrated into the government education system, a lot of civic education schools, monasteries or monastic schools as they are called, are using it alongside the existing government curriculum. Whilst it is too early to know what kind of long-term impact this curriculum will have on the education system, Ko Htike is optimistic about its potential.

***“Religious intolerance should not be tolerated. Whenever the opportunity arises, we should work hand in hand in the fight against religious intolerance.”***

Ko Htike strongly believes that religious intolerance should never be ignored or blithely accepted. Rather, whenever the opportunity arises, we should work hand in hand in the fight against religious intolerance. It is also crucial to remember, Ko Htike says, that core religious teachings champion love and kindness. If you read Buddhist scriptures or the Quran for example, you will find messages encouraging followers to be peaceful and live in harmony with the natural and social environment. The reality is, Ko Htike, argues, that religions are based on love, not hatred.



## Imam Moustapha Sarakibi

***Moustapha Sarakibi is an imam living in Melbourne, Australia. He is currently an executive director for the Board of Imams Victoria (BOIV) and manages all of the operational affairs of the BOIV.***

He is also active as an Islamic leader at the national level and is involved with the Australian National Imams Council (ANIC) where he serves as the secretary. Apart from his work at BOIV and ANIC he is engaged in ministering to university students. He leads the Muslim chaplaincy program at Melbourne University and conducts Friday prayers at the university mosque.

The BOIV is the oldest Imams council in Australia and was established in 1984. An union of imams in Victoria BOIV is well-recognized as a peak body for Muslim religious leaders. Imam Moustapha emphasized that even though Australia is a secular country in which state affairs and religion operate in separate domains, religion continues to play a significant role in the lives of many people and many Australians are religiously oriented. He points out that if you drive around Australian cities such as Melbourne, you will come across a great number of places of worship. Adelaide, the capital city of South Australia, is even

known as the “City of Churches” because there are so many historic churches across the city.

While religious intolerance has always existed, Imam Moustapha noted that after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States of America Islamophobia in Australia became more noticeably more pronounced. There was a lot of panic within the Muslim community in the wake of the 9/11 attacks because there were so many incidents of verbal and physical abuse towards Muslims. In particular, women who wore the hijab faced the most discrimination because they could be easily identified as Muslim. As a consequence, efforts to increase religious tolerance really ramped up in the years after 2001.

***There are many ongoing Muslim initiatives in Australia aimed both at promoting religious tolerance in general and in facilitating in the rehabilitation of Muslims drawn into extremism.***

There are many ongoing Muslim initiatives in Australia aimed both at promoting religious tolerance in general and in facilitating in the rehabilitation of Muslims drawn into extremism. The BOIV runs a pioneering initiative called the Community Integration Support Program (CISP) which works with people who are in prison for terrorist related convictions. The BOIV provides opportunities for mentoring and religious education. The BOIV’s work with CISP and other programs aims to counter and break down the influence of extremism.

Apart from these targeted programs the BOIV is also involved in a range of low-key initiatives designed to build social cohesion. For example, “Share a Plate with your Neighbour” is a BOIV initiative that has been running for a number of years. During Ramadan, imams encourage community members to set some food aside, knock on a neighbour’s door, and offer them food. During Eid, BOIV hosts a multicultural Eid

festival that is open to everyone. The fact that there is lots of tasty food to share is always well-received. But at the same time as people sharing food BOIV supporters also pass out pamphlets designed to break-down barriers and to help people learn about Islam and the commonalities that exist between the different faith communities in Australia.

Imam Moustapha emphasized that the BOIV and other organizations do this kind of work to show that the Muslim community, just like any other community, is concerned about broader Australian society. These modest, friendly, initiatives, serve to break down the barriers that became more noticeable after the al-Qaeda terrorism attacks last decade and the more recent violence associated with ISIS. Many of these initiatives come directly from local communities and have been very successful. Imam Moustapha says that he knows that there is still much work to be done, but these initiatives have produced real change and he is proud to be a member of such a strong multicultural society.





# Infographics about Religions in Southeast Asia



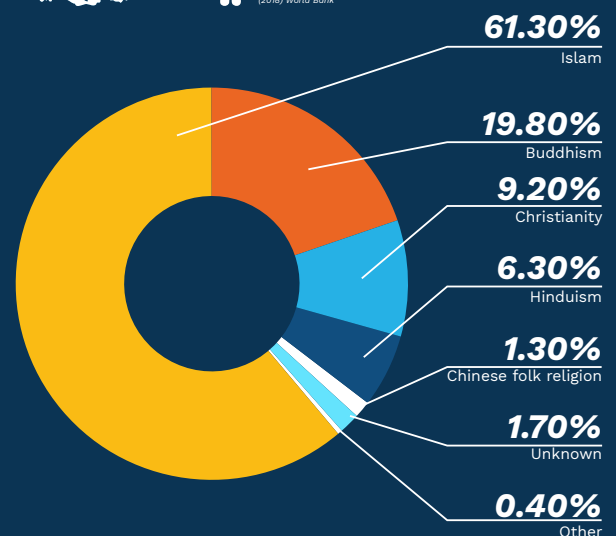
## Malaysia

Malaysia is a Muslim-majority nation with Islam being introduced via traders in the 12th century when the last Hindu King Mudzaffar Shah converted and adopted the religion while in power.

The majority of practicing Buddhists are members of the Malaysian Chinese population, with a minority population of Theravada Buddhists, Malaysian Indians and Sri Lankans. Christianity was initially introduced in the 7th century via trade. The Portuguese then brought Catholicism in the early 16th century and the Dutch brought Protestantism in the late 17th century. Sarawak is the only Christian majority state in the country.



Population:  
**31.54**  
million  
(2018) World Bank



## Philippines

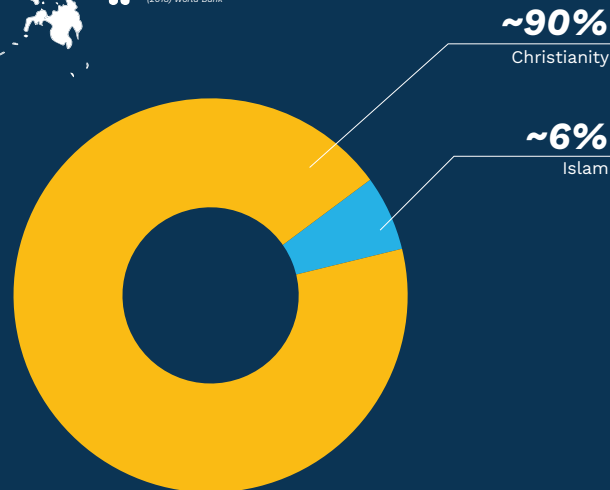
Christianity was introduced with the arrival of the Spanish in 1565. Islam had already come to the Philippines by that point and there was a substantial Muslim population in Mindanao, Sulu, Cebu, and Luzon. However, Spanish colonizer Miguel López de Legazpi began Christianizing the country and attempted to eliminate any Islamic influence. However, he was unsuccessful, which is why there are still Muslim communities on the islands of Mindanao and Sulu.

Over time, the Hispanic Christianity introduced in the 16th century mixed with local religions and beliefs and became what is referred to as Filipino folk Christianity. When the United States invaded the Philippines, Protestantism became more pronounced, but since then the Catholic majority has reclaimed its spot on top.

The Philippines is the largest Christian majority nation in Southeast Asia.



Population:  
**106.7**  
million  
(2018) World Bank



## Indonesia

Indonesia is the world's largest Muslim majority nation. In most places throughout the country, one can hear the "call to prayer (azan)" five times a day.

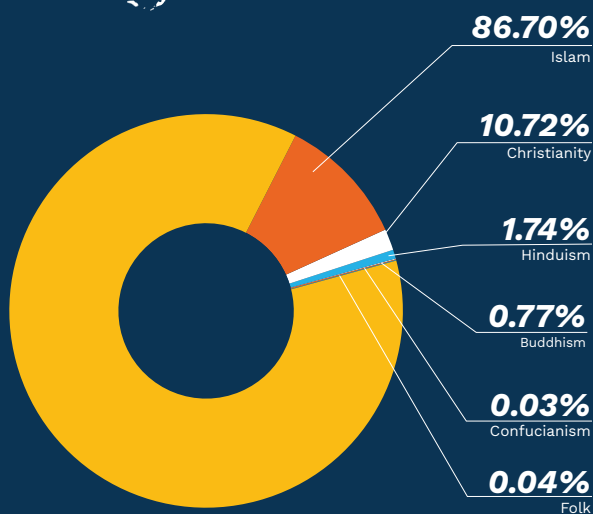
Like in other Southeastern Asian countries, the form of Islam that is practiced in Indonesia has been influenced and mixed with local, especially Javanese, beliefs and practices.

While the majority of Indonesians are Muslim, there are some islands where the majority of the population is not. For example, the population of Bali is predominantly Hindu and the population of Flores is predominantly Roman Catholic.

The Indonesian government recognizes six official religions: Islam, Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism.

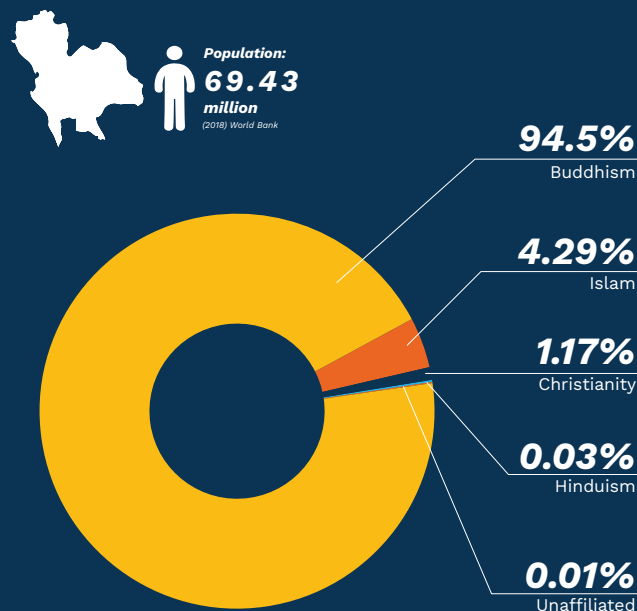


Population:  
**267.7**  
million  
(2018) World Bank



## Thailand

Buddhism initially came to Thailand from South Asia via present-day Sri Lanka. It has survived as the majority religion, despite becoming a minority in many other countries in Southeast Asia where it once dominated. Most Thai Buddhists are followers of Theravada Buddhism, with a small percentage of the Thai Chinese population maintaining Chinese Buddhism. The Buddhism that exists in Thailand is mixed with Brahmin rites from Hinduism and local Thai beliefs and practices.



### Source:

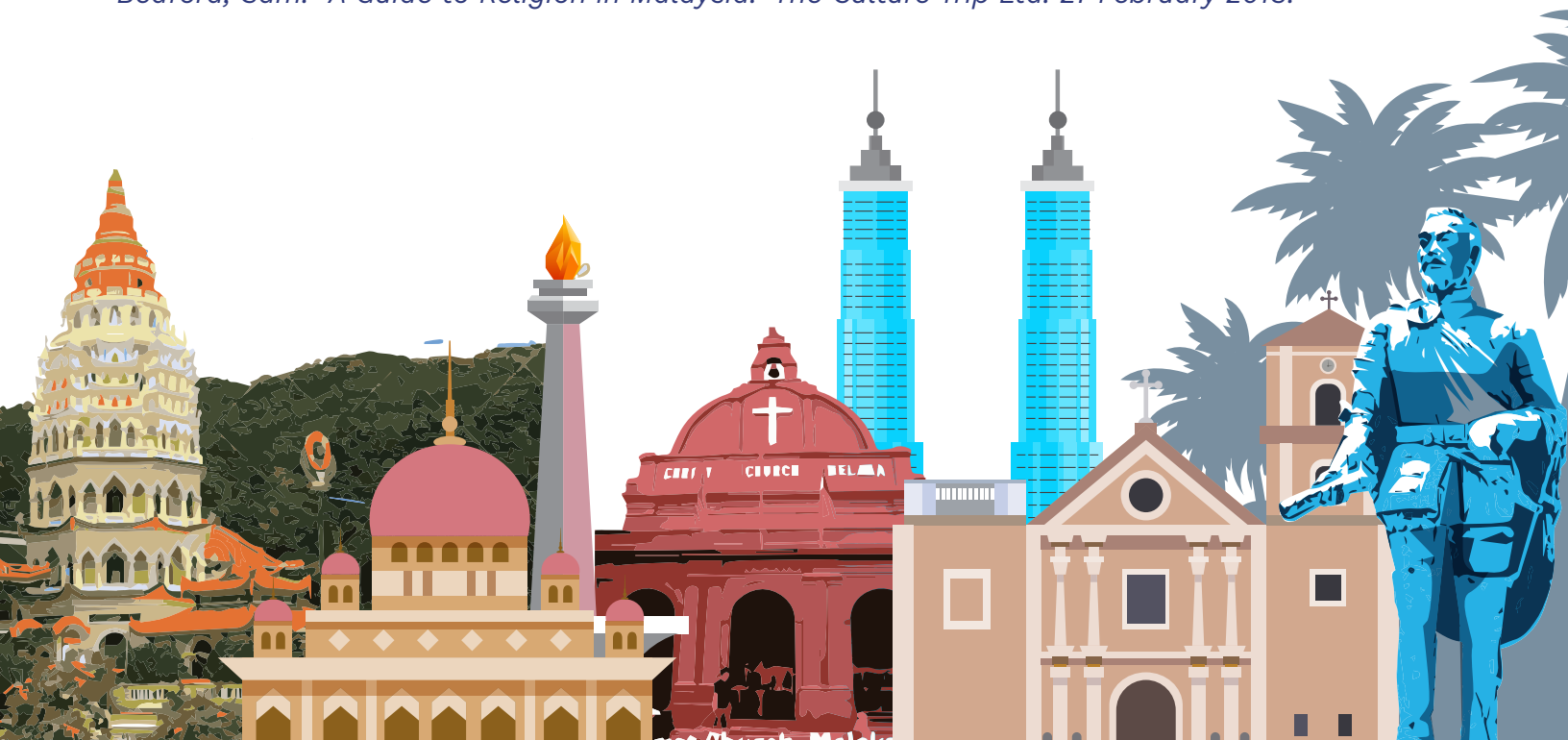
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## Member Highlights



### Australian Multicultural Foundation (AMF)

*from Australia*

The Australian Multicultural Foundation is a federally recognized organization based in the state of Victoria. As set out in the AMF website, the aims and objectives of the foundation are as follows: cultivate in all Australians a strong commitment to Australia as one people drawn from many cultures and by so doing advance its social and economic well-being; the promotion of an awareness among the people of Australia of the diversity of cultures within Australia and the contribution of people from all cultures to the development of the country; and the spread of respect and understanding between all cultural groups through any appropriate means.

AMF strives to achieve these goals by tackling issues of national significance and developing programs in consultation and in partnership with other organizations. Since its formation, AMF has worked hard to increase tolerance by focusing its attention on improving inter-community relations, social justice, and

utilizing cultural links overseas. As part of the Australian Commonwealth Department of Social Services Mutual Understanding, Support, Tolerance, Engagement and Respect (MUSTER) initiative, AMF has developed a National Youth Leadership Program. For this program 10-12 people, aged 18-28, were selected from each state and territory for the program. There was also a 2 day Leadership training workshop and a post-training phase where groups used their newly acquired knowledge and skills to design and implement local initiatives.

The National Youth Leadership Program is just one of many initiatives that AMF has developed and supported in the hopes of encouraging Australian citizens to be more open and accepting towards each other. AMF champions the idea that embracing diversity is a necessary part of any successful and just multicultural society.





## Zamboanga-Basilan Integrated Development Alliance Inc. (ZABIDA)

*from the Philippines*

The Zamboanga-Basilan Integrated Development Alliance Inc. (ZABIDA) is a consortium of four non-government organizations in the Philippines: Katilingban sa Kalamboan, Inc. (KKI), Peace Advocates Zamboanga (PAZ), Reach Out to Others Foundation (ROOF) in Zamboanga City, and Nagdilaab Foundation Inc. (NFI) based in Basilan. All four organizations are dedicated to improving the quality of life for disadvantaged sectors in Zamboanga City and Basilan.

ZABIDA aims to increase social and institutional capacities of community partners to effectively govern and manage their own affairs; provide community partners with more access to basic services; provide assistance for community undertakings such as livelihood and employment generation activities; improve the sustainable utilization and management of ecological resources; and enhance capacities of local communities, civil society organizations,

and government sectors in peace-building and conflict transformation.

Since 2007, the alliance has created and supported different initiatives that align with their objectives. There have also been efforts to promote religious tolerance and celebrate diversity. This year, for example, solidarity meal packs were given to Madrasah Awladul Islam located in Barangay Sangali. The meal packs were given as a gift to mark the first night of Eid al-Adha. The exchange was proposed by Hassan Soberano, 2020 Young Peace Weaver awardee from Sangali National High School.

Over the past thirteen years, ZABIDA has demonstrated its commitment to supporting underprivileged communities. Today the alliance is as strong as ever and its members continue to work tirelessly on various projects and programs to increase human security.

## Funding Opportunity

The UN Women 2020 Asia-Pacific WEPs Award

▶ [bit.ly/WEPsAPAC](https://bit.ly/WEPsAPAC)

Call for Proposals: Countering Abusive Litigation Through Effective Responses to SLAPPs in the Global South

▶ [bit.ly/SLAPPs-INCL](https://bit.ly/SLAPPs-INCL)

Call for Proposals: Staying Resilient Amid the Pandemic in Southeast Asia

▶ [bit.ly/SEA-Junction](https://bit.ly/SEA-Junction)

2021 Conrad N. Hilton Humanitarian Prize

▶ [bit.ly/Hilton-Foundation](https://bit.ly/Hilton-Foundation)

## Updates

● SEAN-CSO currently **has**



● All SEAN-CSO social media is **followed by**



● SEAN-CSO posts focused on PVE **receive**



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Also check our website:

 [sean-cso.org](https://sean-cso.org)

## Synergy in Harmony

Walk together for a better world



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If you have stories, research, or programs focused on Preventing or Countering Violent Extremism, contact us at:

[sean-cso@peacegen.id](mailto:sean-cso@peacegen.id)