



SPEAKER 1: H.E. DAW SANDA KHIN

ALL-INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATION FOR SAFE-GUARDING CULTURAL HERITAGE IN MYANMAR

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Meeting with villagers at the Pyu Ancient Cities

**WORKSHOP ON  
THE HERITAGE OF ANCIENT AND URBAN SITES:  
GIVING VOICE TO LOCAL PRIORITIES  
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## ABSTRACT

Safe-guarding cultural heritage is part of the daily life in Myanmar through social and religious activity. Recognising this strength, we purposefully reached out to all sectors of villages and cities during the nomination process to inscribe the Pyu Ancient Cities on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2014. Activities took place in town halls, in schools and at local fairs to encourage and listen to the voices of young and old from villagers producing traditional crafts, to archaeologists and shop-keepers keen to promote Myanmar cultural heritage. This movement has blossomed today, with new heritage trusts coming forth in ancient cities and urban areas across Myanmar. The paper describes some of these activities and the resulting changes in public awareness.

## BIODATA

Daw Sanda Khin, born in 1961, holding a master degree in Chemistry from Yangon University in 1985, worked at the Chemistry Department in Yangon University, Yangon and Sittwe College, Rakkhine State, as an assistant lecturer from 1986 to 1994.

Being keen on research, she joined the Department of Archeology as a research officer in conservation section, and was gradually appointed as the Deputy Director-General of Department of Archeology, National Museum and Library.

After training on conservation in Thailand and Japan, she took on a management role in conservation, preservation and protection of Myanmar ancient cultural heritage particularly in Pyu Ancient Cities, Bagan, Bago and Mon State. She writes articles, short stories and research papers, and was given the National Literary Award on Myanmar Culture and Fine Arts in 2007 for her book on *Bagan Images of Mural Paintings* in a Myanmar and an English Version.

She was appointed as the Rector of National University of Arts and Culture in Yangon from 2010 to 2011. Since 2011, she has been selected as the Deputy Minister for Culture.

Being the Chair of PYUCOM, she has devoted her life on implementation of Three Pyu Ancient Cities for the World Heritage in 2014. Moreover she has been selected as the Secretary of Committee for Management of Three Pyu Cities patronized by the Vice President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar. Recently she is also undertaking the vice chairman of Committee for Management of World Heritage List for Bagan Archaeological Area and Monuments.

She is married with one son.

## CONFERENCE PAPER

### ALL INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATION FOR SAFE- GUARDING CULTURAL HERITAGE IN MYANMAR

Daw Sanda khin

Deputy Ministry for Culture, Myanmar

As you know, each and every nation has its own unique outstanding cultural heritage. Myanmar is no exception: we are a nation rich in culture: both tangible and intangible. Safe-guarding cultural heritage isn't every citizen's responsibility? Somehow, in our own way, we all safeguard our legacy.

We in Myanmar can begin with our traditional way of life. We are a nation of many languages and faiths. Safe-guarding our diverse cultural heritage is part of the daily life in Myanmar through many forms of social and religious activity.

The majority of our population is Buddhist, with people in cities and villages throughout the nation actively supporting the *sangha*, monasteries and pagodas. Buddhism is a central legacy within our past, present and future heritage.



*Figure 1 Group photo with youth associations at base of the ancient Pyu Baw Baw Gyi stupa*





*Figure 2 Ceremony for young boy to into a monastery*

Of the plentiful cultural sites in Myanmar, our Pyu Ancient cities became our very first World Heritage List inscription, international recognition of their universal significance in preserving an exceptional record of the early days of Buddhism in Southeast Asia. We hold this as a great success since the nomination process for the three Pyu Ancient cities was accomplished within a short period of two years. One of the main reasons for our success is quite simple: it is nothing but ‘all-inclusive participation’ as I have put in the title of my paper.

As you know, all-inclusive participation has been widely accepted and practiced in almost all the nations on earth today. Only through all-inclusive participation, achievement can be gained in a short time and sustained for a long time.

Thus during the nomination procedure for Pyu Ancient cities, being the Deputy Minister for Culture as well as one of the many Myanmar citizens, I accepted the leadership role for this mission. My first step was setting up Pyu COM, the Pyu Coordination and Management Committee with participants from many ministries and social organizations. This now meets on a quarterly basis with the results disseminated and implemented cooperatively.

The Department of Archaeology was the focal department for the nomination process, yet, in order to gain all inclusive participation, we encouraged respective and related ministries to be actively involved. Experienced local experts like historians, archeologists, engineers, and architects as well as local community groups and individuals whole-heartedly took part in compiling information for our nomination dossier.

During the nomination process, we had a lot of challenges over the course of the year; we had several negotiations requiring new levels of coordination among us. Moreover, to be honest, local and international experts had a lot of heated discussions and negotiation to work through and reach an agreed solution, each contributing through their own experience. Also since some of our local experts

are in their 60s, 70s, 80s, we needed to be sensitive in fulfilling their needs. Providing our care to them, as a token of gratitude, is also part of our cultural tradition.

Logistics were also a challenge as the three Pyu Ancient Cities are far apart some 400 kilometers away from each other.



*Figure 3 Young and old at heritage discussion, Beikthano ancient city*

It would have been impossible to accomplish our mission without the participation of the local community. We knew for a fact that we must not leave them behind; they needed to be part of our process. Academic experts by themselves cannot work it out. For example, we have legal historical records, yet, the oral story handed down by generation to generation also plays a vital role in our cultural heritage. Appreciation of the value of local respected elderly people and community, and gaining their interest, motivation and active participation are the key to our success and safeguarding of our legacy, the heritage of humanity.

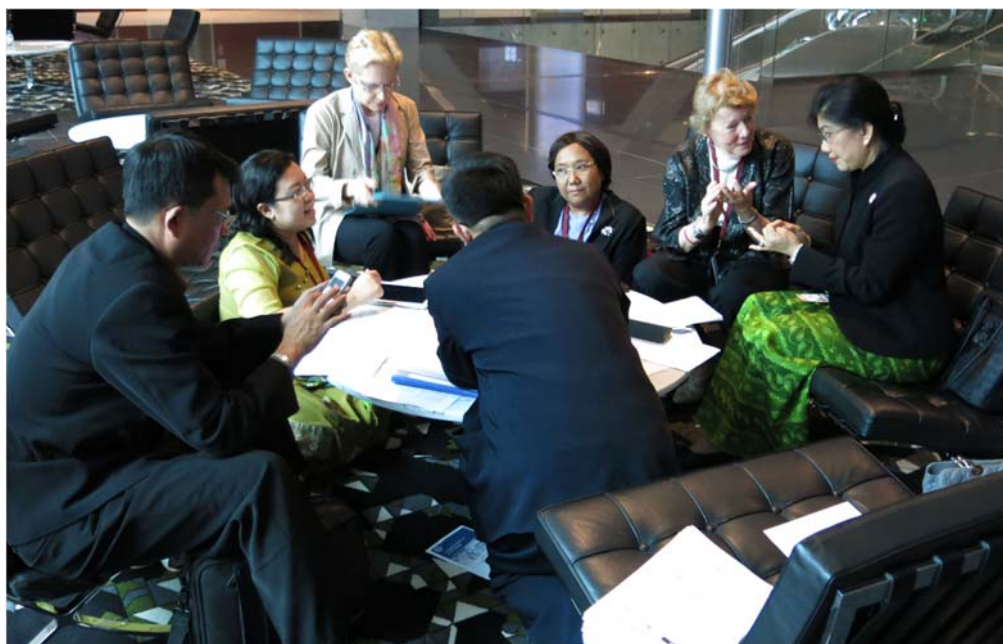
Thus while preservation, conservation, research, GIS and inventory were being carried out and the Nomination Dossier being prepared, activities took place in town halls, in schools, and at local fairs to encourage and listen to their voice of young and old. The team led by myself, went to the frontier, the local community residing in and around each Pyu city. Both formally and informally, we were sharing and raising awareness on the value of our heritage and encouraging them to protect their legacy. Last but not the least, we encouraged them to take part in each sector.

Most of the local community of our Pyu Ancient Cities has to work hard to fulfill their basic needs. So at first they could not and were reluctant to spend time for their heritage due to the lack of awareness. Therefore, I myself met them and explained about the consequences of being inscribed. I talked about how much we can be proud of our legacy, the various upcoming job opportunities with our local products and their talents through theory and practice. Despite the heavy duty and tight schedule at work, our team tried to find more time with them in the village. I even introduced international experts to them. Our endurance, determination and thorough explanation started to pay off: the local community started to realize the meaning and value of their legacy. As a result, with the cooperation of the city and villages in and around the Pyu Ancient Cities, heritage trusts were set up. They actively took part in the nomination process. The awareness program went on month after month and is still continues today among all walks of life: school boys and girls, university students, artists and even celebrities.



*Figure 4 Village children at Sri Ksetra*

Since 2012, we have carried out a lot of activities: in spite of the pre- decision indication of the World Heritage advisory body that we might have to wait, activities were carried out. Asking for and gaining suggestions, we received guidelines and advice from well-experienced local and international experts, explanation and clarification for our nominated property in light of previous World Heritage Convention, discussions, plenary sessions. We were able to give clarification to responsible persons at the UNESCO Head office in Paris.



*Figure 5 Heated discussion with International Experts at 38th Session of World Heritage Convention, Qatar*

The team, led by myself, including local and international experts who were deeply involved in the process, academic experts and our Department of Archaeology staff, the local community from Pyu Cities all marched to 38<sup>th</sup> Session of World Heritage Convention in Qatar. To be honest, we contributed quite intensely continuing through heated discussion to provide clarification. At last we succeeded: our legacy, Pyu Cities was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List with the positive vote of nations around the world.

Conference draft. Please consult the author when citing.





*Figure 6 Welcome on our return home from Doha*

Through analysis of this success story, we have gained a lot of benefits. First having realization of the value of all - inclusive participation from all walks of life. My greatest joy, is their attitude has changed: from indifference to the sense of shared ownership and responsibility.



*Figure 7 Encouraging local production of handicrafts*

It is not the end! It is just the beginning. We have a long march for the sustainability of our cultural heritage of humanity and leading our local community to job opportunities for their sustainability after UNESCO recognition. As the local community value their property and start practicing the standard rules and regulations, it has brought a beneficial impact for the sustainability of the Pyu Ancient Cities sites. At the same time, the State has provided aid for the local development and enacted the law regarding safeguarding cultural heritage. With the growth of tourism, the local community has found more opportunities.



*Figure 8 Village Children at Halin*

Here, I am glad to share with you; we have been carrying out such activities in other heritage sites. From this workshop, on behalf of our heritage, our Myanmar, I would like to express my thanks to those from international associations and organizations who encouraged us.



*Figure 9 School children after talk at village secondary school*

I would like to conclude my paper here thanking to you all for your attention. I look forward to cooperating with you for the future sustainability of our common cultural heritage of humanity.