

## HUMAN FREEDOM INITIATIVE

### *Liberty and Leadership Forum*



GEORGE W. BUSH  
INSTITUTE



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Extending freedom, which is essential to lasting peace and prosperity at home and around the world, by developing leaders in emerging democracies, standing with those who live under tyranny, and fostering U.S. leadership through policy and action.

## BACKGROUND

The Liberty and Leadership Forum is an innovative educational and training program that equips young leaders with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed during a democratic transition. The goals of the program are to foster democratic political currents, cultivate networks of individuals unified around a common vision, and prepare men and women for increased leadership in countries where transitions to freedom are occurring.

The selection of Burma (Myanmar) for the first three classes of the Liberty and Leadership Forum builds on the legacy of President and Mrs. Bush in standing with Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi and the brave men and women of Burma's pro-democracy movement. While Burma recently embarked on a path to democracy, the country's destination is not yet guaranteed. One key to success is ensuring that today's young democracy advocates in Burma are prepared to be tomorrow's political and civil society leaders.

While there are often many short-term training opportunities in countries where a political opening has just occurred, longer-term sustained engagement with emerging leaders in these societies is rare. The year-long Liberty and Leadership Forum helps ensure that participants are gaining the needed knowledge and skills and that the program's intended impact can be achieved.

## PROGRAM IMPACT

The year-long program includes more than 115 hours of training around three pillars of study: the principles of liberal democracy and economic freedom, lessons from other democratic transitions, and practical leadership and management skills. Leading scholars and experts from SMU and other universities provide world-class instruction.

**"For me, this is an opportunity to try to encourage and inspire future leaders, and I'm looking at a future president. I really believe that given encouragement – and that's what we are doing, encouraging – these graduates will continue to transform Burma."**

**- President George W. Bush**

The program has three components:

1. **U.S.-based summer seminar:** An initial three-week visit to the United States gives participants first-hand experience of life in a mature democracy. Young leaders participate in an intensive seminar in Dallas on the three pillars of study. An experience tour of Washington, DC, highlights key themes.
2. **In-country trainings:** After participants return to their country and begin applying their learning, in-country trainings help reinforce knowledge and skills introduced in Dallas.
3. **Capstone experience and graduation:** At the end of the program year, Young leaders return to Dallas for a final week of site visits and job shadowing to demonstrate key program principles and leadership skills in action. At the conclusion of the week, participants graduate from the program and join the alumni network.

Since the launch in 2014, nearly 300 young leaders from across Burma have applied to participate in the Liberty and Leadership Forum. Fifty-seven men and women have been accepted to the program, including former political prisoners, a member of parliament, journalists, doctors, educators, women's rights advocates, and other emerging civil society leaders. Representing the religious and ethnic diversity of the country, the young leaders share a common vision for a society rooted in peace, prosperity, and democracy.

## NOTABLE FELLOWS

Program participants are continuing to advance as leaders and contribute to Burma's transition to democracy. For example:

**Wai Wai Nu** spent seven years as a political prisoner in Burma because of her father's pro-democracy political activism. Since her release from prison in 2012, Wai Wai has dedicated herself to working for democracy and human rights, particularly on behalf of marginalized women and members of her own ethnic group, the minority Rohingya population. She is the co-founder of Justice for Women and the founder and director of the Women Peace Network Arakan. Since joining the Bush Institute's Liberty and Leadership Forum as a member of the inaugural class, Wai Wai has been named to BBC's list of Top 100 Women (2014), featured in international media, and invited to the White House and the U.S. Congress, and named a top 100 global thinker by Foreign Policy Magazine (2015).

**Yan Htaik Seng** is a youth activist and journalist from Burma. Working for BBC Media Action, he contributes to a bi-weekly youth radio show called "Bright Young Star," which reaches 3.2 million people across the country. The program focuses on topics important to young people, including education, health, democracy, and relationships. Yan is also among the creators of a new BBC radio series, "The Teacup Diaries," which aims to bridge ethnic and religious divides in Burma. After Cyclone Nargis in 2008, Yan volunteered in the worst hit area of the country. The experience transformed the way he saw life and his role as an emerging leader in his society.

For more information about the Liberty and Leadership Forum, please contact Jieun Pyun.

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