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Press Release

“Making Kayah State a must-see destination for cultural and community tourism”

A fourth National Conference on Communities and Tourism (NCCT) will be held on 6th to 8th June in Loikaw, Kayah State, and opened by the Kayah State Chief Minister. The conference will bring together tourism businesses, guides, and community-based tourism (CBT) groups from across Myanmar with a particular focus on those working in tourism in Kayah State. Altogether around 300 participants are expected from the tourism sector as well as government officials, development partners and independent experts. The conference is being organized by Hanns Seidel Foundation, Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business (MCRB), Myanmar Responsible Tourism Institute (MRTI), and International Trade Center (ITC) with the cooperation of Ministry of Hotels and Tourism and Kayah State Government.

The theme of this year's conference is **“Decentralization, Destination and Development”**. It has been chosen because the new Tourism Law empowers state and regional governments in Myanmar to build an enabling environment for responsible investment in tourism in their region and destination management.

In organising the conference, Achim Munz, Resident Representative of Hanns Seidel Foundation said *“This is the fourth conference we’ve jointly organised on communities and tourism. This year we’ve worked more closely than ever with local community and the government, and in particular regional Civil Society Organizations that have been engaging with local development in Kayah State. They are keen to see tourism provide jobs, income, and opportunity for the peoples of Kayah State, as an alternative to logging, mining and other industries which have been damaging the environment”*.

“Their enthusiasm makes total sense: under the 2018 Myanmar Tourism Law, as well as Schedules 2 and 5 of the 2008 Constitution, decisions on tourism planning and permitting are increasingly decentralised to the State/Region level. That means that local authorities and local businesses and communities can now work closely together to market and manage their destination and ensure that it is developed sustainably. Active local destination management will be essential to conserve the environment and cultural values that will bring in the visitors to Kayah State. This conference will share experience on how to do that. We are bringing together successful tourism businesses and community initiatives from across Myanmar, as well as international expertise”.

Through destination management and marketing, including through conferences and events such as food and cultural festivals and fun-runs, destinations can raise their profile and branding and bring in more visitors, and income throughout the year.

Vicky Bowman, Director of MCRB said: *“Whenever we hold these conferences, we’re keen to raise the profile of the host location, and maximise the income for local businesses - hotels,*

restaurants, community and cultural tours, souvenir sellers and taxi drivers. We encourage participants to stay on or arrive early, and enjoy what Loikaw and Kayah State has to offer at the start of the 'green season'. For the 4th National Conference on Communities and Tourism, we expect at least \$50,000 will be injected into the local economy thanks to the presence of around 200 visitors, as well as 100 local participants.

Inspired by five years of successful partnership on responsible tourism with Germany's Hanns Seidel Foundation (HSF), Vicky added "*There's a saying that's often attributed to the first German Chancellor, Otto von Bismarck: "Laws are like sausages — it is best not to see them being made". Well, we wish he was still alive to attend the 4th NCCT in Loikaw! He would be able to participate in the lively discussions we will be having about the new Tourism Law and how to make a reality of decentralisation*".

"Von Bismarck would also be able to visit the kitchens of the local Kayah restaurants for a "Kayah Sausage Experience". Cooking classes are just one of the innovative community tourism products developed with support from conference partner ITC. We hope these will inspire communities across the country who are attending this conference to develop new tourism products back in their villages".

To help conserve the environment, the Conference will use MCRB's 'green meeting guidelines'. Refillable aluminium water bottles will be provided to all participants and water dispensers will be available at meeting venues. This will avoid use of an estimated 2,000 0.5litre bottles.

Background

1. Hanns Seidel Foundation, Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business (MCRB) and Myanmar Responsible Tourism Institute (MRTI) have organized three Conference on Communities and Tourism, in Naypyidaw on December 2015 and June 2017, and in Kalaw in June 2018.
www.myanmar-responsiblebusiness.org/news/communities-and-tourism-conference-2018.html
2. The full agenda for the conference and the details of the organizers are available here.
3. MCRB's green meeting guidelines are available here
www.myanmar-responsiblebusiness.org/news/battle-to-beat-plastic-pollution.html

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