

#### **UNFPA MYANMAR**

#### **Newsletter: Census Edition 2014**



# **Observers Report Myanmar Census Ran Smoothly, Except in Rakhine State**



YANGON — Independent observers of Myanmar's 2014 census offered largely favourable reports on how the exercise was conducted, at a debriefing on 11 April 2014, a day after the count ended. Highly critical reports from observers who went to Rakhine state were the main exception to the generally positive feedback presented.

One or two teams of observers visited enumeration sites in each of the country's 15 states or regions. Each team had one national member and one international, mostly data experts selected for their experience with censuses in other countries. The review meeting was organized by UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, which provided technical support and helped mobilize funding for the census. Senior officials from the Ministry of Immigration and Population (MoIP) and representatives of donor countries attended.

The observers' assessments and a summary prepared by UNFPA were preliminary, organizers stressed. A more conclusive report is in preparation. The teams observed 2,193 census activities enumerations in over half of the country's 74 districts, more than a third of its 330 townships, and 900 enumeration areas– 1.1 per cent of the total. Local census officials welcomed them and facilitated their work, the observers reported. In nearly all areas visited the data collection went smoothly, the observers said. They found the population to be informed about the census and willing to participate. Enumerators, who were mostly local schoolteachers, were seen as capable and adequately trained, and their administration of the 41-question census form as thorough and satisfactory. While the questionnaires were in Burmese language, the enumerators usually spoke the same language as the respondents.

Observers reported some shortcomings: most enumerators did not adequately explain the census or the principle of confidentiality. Answers to questions were often sometimes inferred. And while they observed, the presence of outside people during enumerations sometimes seemed intrusive. But these criticisms were described as secondary.

Rakhine state presented a different story. There, the witnesses observed that no one who wished to define their ethnicity as Rohingya was allowed to do so, contravening human rights principles. In many cases, enumerators asked about ethnicity first, and left without administering the questionnaire if respondents declared they were Rohingya.

Janet Jackson, UNFPA Representative in Myanmar, said the events in Rakhine state had cast a cloud over what was otherwise appears to have been a promising census, but that was a discussion for another day. Several of the donor country representatives also expressed disappointment.

Before the census began, the MoIP had agreed that everyone would be counted and would have the option to self-identify their ethnic group, even if it were not one of the 135 groups listed on the census form. But after violence broke out in Sittwe on 26 and 27 March targeting humanitarian organizations, authorities declared that "Rohingya" would not be accepted as a response to the ethnicity question which was a departure from the Government's agreement to conduct the census accordingly to international standards and human rights.



#### First Census questionnaires start arriving for data processing



NAY PYI TAW — Completed questionnaires for the 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census arrived at the Department of Population (DoP) on 23 April 2014, in Nay Pyi Taw, the nation's capital, as scheduled. First to arrive were trucks from the all of the 8 townships within the Nay Pyi Taw region, carrying 400 boxes filled with collected questionnaire forms from all of the 1,871 enumeration areas.

As the first truck rolled in, there was a visible sense of pride and excitement on the part of both the DoP staff receiving the first lot of questionnaires from the field and the Township Officers delivering the questionnaires. U Nay Win, Township Officer for Pyinmana Township said he was happy to finally deliver the questionnaires, a direct result of the hard work by his team and the enumerators in his township.

"These completed questionnaires are the result of hard work on our part, and the cooperation of the community on the other part. In my township we are all proud to have successfully executed this important activity without encountering any problems," said Nay Win.

U Htane Lin, Township Officer for Zayarthiri Township, shared similar sentiments. "The delivery of the questionnaires from my township gives a sense of accomplishment to my team. We now look forward to the census results after DoP processes the questionnaires," said Htane Lin.

Meanwhile, DoP staff were seen methodically receiving the boxes from each township, recording them and moving them to their allocated racks at the Census Centre within the DoP, where they will be temporarily stored before the commencement of sorting, counting and checking, steps that are important before the questionnaires can be prepared for scanning. The scanning is planned to start in mid May 2014.

Delivery of census materials from all the townships across the country to the Department of Population is scheduled for the period between 23 April and 4 May 2014, in time for the start of data processing activities. The delivery of the questionnaire forms was slightly delayed due to the Water Festival and the Burmese New Year break.



## Observers report that Chin census is going according to plan



FALAM, CHIN STATE — 46 International observers along with national counterparts carried out an important monitoring mission of this year's landmark Myanmar census which took place between 30 March to 10 April across all of the country's 15 states and regions to ensure that the population count, the first in over three decades was conducted correctly and according to international standards.

Werner Haug, a Swizz national and Co-Chair of the International Technical Advisory Board (ITAB) has been advising the Government of Myanmar and the UNFPA with the preparations in the run up to the census count. Mr. Haug is one of the 23 international observers' team and alongside his Chin national observer counterpart, U Johan Dawt Lian, they observed 38 enumeration proceedings in 3 townships of Chin State. The other observer teams were based in other locations throughout the country.

UNFPA met up with the two observers as they arrived in Falam Township for the last leg of the data collection exercise. "Before we sit in on an enumeration we first ask permission from the head of household. So far everyone has kindly agreed to let us observe the data collection in silence," said Mr. Haug.

He went on to say that "What we have seen until now is impressive and the census in Chin State seems to be well organized. We have not faced any difficulties so far and I'm sure the census in Chin State will be of a high quality."

When asked about how he compared the Myanmar census to other censuses he had observed, he stated that: "In Myanmar the communities are eager to participate. However this is not the case in most

other countries, where census taking is often seen as a burden. Here it becomes an event, which everyone seems to want to be part of. I also found that the quality of the enumerators were high, due to their five day long training."

In response to what he had found different from other data collections he had witnessed, Mr. Haug noted that "Women really are the face of the census. All the enumerators are women and they are doing an excellent job. They handled the questionnaire forms with great care, much more so than I have seen in other censuses... Women are also the caretakers of the households and in many ways they know more about their families, such as when someone was born or recent happenings in the communities. So they really are the face of the household. I find this impressive."

Chin is one of the poorest regions in the country with high levels of migration. According to Mr. Haug approximately one fifth or even one third of the population is currently living outside of the state. This means that many of the households are, to a large degree, living of remittances from outside. "It will be very interesting for the future development of the region to understand the migration pattern, as well as the household composition. I noted that in many households many have family members with diseases that keep many of the women at home to care for them. This can also result in families having many children."

"We don't have any accurate data so the census is going to be the used as the baseline for our future development of our country," said Johan Daw Lian, national census observer, who joined Mr. Haug in Chin State. Upon complication of their mission to Chin State, they joined the other 44 observers in Yangon to exchange their findings and draft recommendations and lessons learnt. This was jointly presented to the Government of Myanmar on Friday (11 April 2014).





#### Ethnic Gurkha Uses Right to Selfidentify in Myanmar Census



FALAM, CHIN STATE — On a glorious hilltop overlooking town an array of colourful flowers meets the eye and the sweet smell of burning incense fills your nostrils as you walk inside the temple grounds. On the right side and coming from deep inside the temple, you can just make out the sound of bells softly chiming.

Today is the birthday of the Hindu god Vishnu Ram. Inside the ornate temple sits U Beduram, 76, the spiritual leader of the Falam Hindu community. He is one of 65 ethnic Gurkhas living in Falam township. Like his whole family, he was born in Myanmar and has never set foot in Nepal.

U Beduram speaks several languages fluently, including local Chin dialect Lai, Gurka, English and Burmese.

Respondents to Myanmar's 2014 census are being asked to identify their ethnicity. Gurkha is not on the census list of ethnic groups, and authorities have suggested that Gurkhas use the category Nepali, since their forbears migrated from Nepal.

But U Bedu does not want to be classified as Nepali. "Both ethnicities are Hindu, but we are not the same, we are Gurkhas, not Nepali," he says.

"When the enumerator came to my house on 3 April, she asked me if I wanted to the listed as Nepali. I said no and that I wished to self-identify as Gurkha using code 914 on the questionnaire form under Others. That was all, and that is what I saw her write down," he says.

He stresses that it is important for him and his

community to be registered as Gurkhas. He hopes this will help bring better opportunities such as education for their children. Currently all the Gurkha children attend regular Chin language schools, but during the summer break, they study Gurkha language at the temple.

Ma Thian Len Ting, a 30-year-old primary school teacher, was the enumerator who interviewed the Gurkha Spiritual leader at the Falam Hindu Temple. She speaks both the Zomi Chin dialect and Gurkha.

"Most of the 140 households in my enumeration area chose to be listed as Chin ethnicity using the 401 code, but some did not want to be listed as such so I wrote them down as Others using the 914 code. Then there were no problems," she says.

Unlike many of her fellow enumerators, Ma Thian Len Ting did not have to travel to Falam Township's farflung rural areas. "I am happy there were no natural



disasters during the data collection, as we often have landslides in the area. And I'm glad I did not have to walk for miles into the hilly mountainous areas," she adds.

On Census Night, 29 March, Ma Thian Len Ting was at home with her family in Falam. Although she is an enumerator, she did not count her own family.

"Another enumerator came to my house and interviewed my father, as head of the household," she explains. She hopes that once the census count is over the data collected will show the correct size of the Myanmar population and that it will prove to be beneficial to the whole country. "This is what we were taught at the enumerator training."

# **Ethnic Pa-O Hope Census Enumeration Will Promote Development**



NAUNG KON, SHAN STATE — Women in wide hats toiled in the sun, laying gravel and rocks on a dusty roadbed to build the first semi-paved street through this sprawling village. At his house nearby, U Kay Pha sat with a census enumerator as part of an exercise that he hoped would help bring more development.

"My family and our community badly need a better water supply and access to electricity," said the 48-year-old father of six, who works as a casual labourer. U Kay Pha is a member of the Pa-O ethnic group (also known as the Taungthu or Black Karen), easily recognized by their traditional dark outfits and colourful headgear.

Some 9,000 Pa-O live in Naung Kon, which sits at the foot the Shan Mountains, not far from Myanmar's famous landmark, Inle Lake. The village is part of the Pa-O Self-Administered Zone within Shan State.

Daw Nan Aye Aye Nyunt, a 26-year-old primary schoolteacher, came to U Kay Pha's home to interview him about his family size and economic status. She was one of 160 enumerators carrying out the 2014 Myanmar census in the village. Between 30 March and 10 April, she was expected to enumerate 110 households.

"Prior to the census I visited all the households to tell people about the census and to let them know when I would be coming to enumerate them," she said. U Kay Pha had heard radio announcements about the upcoming exercise before she came.

Though her ethnicity is Shan and not Pa-O, she lives in the village and speaks the Pa-O language. "Most of the households in my area are Pa-O. If the head of household is Pa-O, I conduct the enumeration using their language."

In Hopong, capital of the Pa-O Self-Administered Zone, the zone's Chairman, U Khum San Lwin, said that accurate data generated from the census would be critical in steering Myanmar's political, economic and social development.

"The only data we have is based on unreliable projections," he stated in an interview. "Only when we have the correct statistics, will we truly know the nation's needs and be able to build what is required, with appropriate technology and investment from the international community. As our nation is starting her journey towards democracy, economic development is vital."

U Khum San Lwin noted that completing the census enumeration in the self-administered zone might run a few days behind schedule because of challenges in reaching some remote locations. The estimated 600,000 Pa-O living Shan State constitute the state's second largest ethnic group, after the Shan.



### Census Highlights Needs of People with Disabilities



KALAY, SAGAING REGION — Eight year-old Lalremurata is sitting outside his bamboo shack in a deprived area of town, waiting for the enumerator to come. When he sees her walking down the dirt road with her clipboard in hand, he quickly jumps to his feet and rushes to greet her. It is not every day the family receives a visitor and he's been told that she would be coming by today to enumerate his mother as Myanmar carries out its first census in over three decades.

At first glance eight year-old Lalremurata appears to be a normal little boy, who seems to spend most of his time wrestling with his two younger brothers, aged 4 and 5. He shrieks with joy as he stumbles to regain his balance, ready for another round of play fighting. But a closer look shows that Lalremuata is severely disabled: he was born without arms, and needs medical attention that his parents cannot afford.

Lalremurata's 29 year-old mother, Vanneihmawii, struggles to put food on the table for her family and often has to borrow money to make ends meet. The family survives on 2000 kyats or less than \$2 a day. "We can barely pay the rent," she says. "The house is not good for the children, especially Lalremurata as he needs special care, but at the moment it's all we can afford."

Both parents are casual labourers and do odd jobs, but work is scarce. They have had to forego medical care for Lalremurata, who attends regular school, as there is no special needs school in his neighbourhood. "Maths is my favourite subject in school," Lalremurata says. He wants to be a carpenter when he grows up, "so I can build a better house for my family."

"The teachers dare not scold him as he is disabled and he has had to repeat first grade. Because he is severely disabled, the teachers have built for him a special table and chair so that he can learn to write using his feet. Sometimes one of the teacher's will come to the house to give him special classes," says Vanneihmawii. "I hope the census will lead to a better future for us," she concludes.

Once the data collection is complete and the country's needs are identified, there are expectations that it will help bring much needed development, including better access to health care in rural and low-income areas as well as improved educational opportunities for children with disabilities.

Daw Mang Nuam Ciin, a 50-year-old primary school teacher who speaks Chin dialects Falam, Tedim, Mizo as well as Burmese, was the enumerator who conducts the census interview at Lalremuata's household. It is the last on her list to be enumerated for the day. She has already counted 110 households since the census began and has only 18 left.

"The census is very important. I hope the results will be useful for the township, but also for families and individuals. A census has not been done in over 30 years and we need data so the Government can improve social services, health and education," she says.

During the enumeration she has met many families living in poor conditions similar to Lalremurata's. "I feel sorry for them and I hope the census will help improve their lives."



### Former Foes Cooperate to Count Karen Areas for the First Time



THAN BYU ZAYAT, KAYIN STATE — "Up to now, we never had the opportunity to know how many people live in our part of the world," observed Gen. U Shwe Maung, commander of the Karen National Union's Brigade 6. Now finally at peace after decades of war, his territory in south-eastern Myanmar is taking part in a national census for the first time. "This census will give us information we need to plan the future of Karen state," he said.

The general accompanied Minister of Immigration and Population U Khin Yi and senior UN officials in Myanmar on a brief tour of enumeration activities in five villages, in an area controlled by the Karen National Union (KNU), on day nine of Myanmar's nationwide census.

After several months of discussions with the Government, KNU Brigade 6 agreed to cooperate in the census. One hundred sixty participants nominated by the KNU, mostly local teachers on their summer break, were trained as enumerators in mid-March and began collecting data from households a week later. By 8 April, they were nearly finished.

Several were observed by the visitors as they interviewed residents and filled in the census questionnaire. None reported any problems or misunderstanding of the questions. One said that on the question about ethnicity, most respondents had identified themselves as Karen, rather than one of the listed sub-categories of that group.

The warm welcome accorded to the Minister and his party was noteworthy. Just two years ago, the KNU and the Government were still at war, and locals frequently had to flee their homes to escape enemy attacks.

"Now we are no longer afraid, and we don't have to keep running away from soldiers," said a 19-year-old student who studies physics at Hpa-an University.

U Khin Yi is an Army veteran who was badly wounded in a 1978 battle that failed to drive out the Karen fighters. When the country's last census took place five years later, it could not be held in this KNU-controlled area, leaving tens of thousands of people uncounted.

Now that it is cooperating with the KNU, the Government has identified villages that were not even on its enumeration maps. The former antagonists are also collaborating on a massive road-building effort.

At a lunch with local residents U Khin Yi said the census would spur further development. "Getting counted for the first time," he said, "is a ray of hope for the people of this area."





# Karen minority representatives participate in enumerator training for nation-wide census



BILIN, MON STATE — One hundred and sixty participants from the Karen National Union, also referred to as the KNU, attended five days of enumerators and supervisors census training carried out by UNFPA and Myanmar's Ministry of Population, from 17 to 21 March 2014 held in Mon State exactly one week prior to Myanmar's first census in over thirty years.

The KNU participants, consisting of a mix of primary school teachers, university graduates and students, attended the week long training in Bilin Township in Mon State of south-east Myanmar. An additional 22 KNU participants attended the same census training in Hpa-an, the capital of Karen State. In total 380 KNU participated in the training sessions in various locations. The majority of people in Mon State are Burmese and a minority of Karen and Pa-O ethnic groups. Myanmar's country-wide census will take place from 30 March to 10 April 2014.

Phado Saw Tin Soe, KNU Associate Secretary of Thaton District, Mon State who attended the enumerator and supervisor training as part of the Bilin Census Supervisory Committee, said that "the census is important as we can get the accurate and crucial data from a region, a village, a town or a country through the census so that the government can move forward developing plans for the country." The KNU representatives received the same training as other enumerators and supervisors did across Myanmar. The training included theory as well as practical lessons needed to equip the census participants with skills to carry out the data collection.

UNFPA provided technical support for the development of the training curriculum and related instruction materials and provided funding for the three rounds of training sessions across the country involving master, district, enumerator and supervisor training. Technical assistance from Australia's Statistics Bureau and India's Census Bureau was also provided to improve the census training manuals and accompanying learning materials.

Ma Naw Kayk Dawhu, 35, KNU mother of 2 girls and trainee teacher said that "the census is very useful as it will help improve the future for all the ethnic people living in Myanmar." She went on to say that the "census training is crucial for the whole of the country."

The Karen National Union (KNU) is a political organization with an armed wing, the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) that represents the Karen people or "Kawthoolei" in Karen language, a minority ethnic group in Myanmar which is primarily based in Hpa-an, the capital of Karen State. The KNU entered in early 2012 into a ceasefire agreement with the Myanmar government after more than sixty years of conflict. The KNU enumerators and supervisors took part in the last round of three specially devised instruction sessions for the census dubbed "training of trainers".

The first round of training nation-wide, which started in late February, included 464 master trainers, the second round involved 7,200 district trainers in mid-March. Approximately 120,000 enumerators and supervisors across Myanmar took part in the third and final part of the training sessions.



# UNFPA attends enumerator and supervisor training in Ayeyarwady



KYANGOON, AYEYARWADY — Approximately 120,000 primary school teachers and supervisors from across Myanmar undertook five days of training devised by UNFPA and the Ministry of Population from 17 to 21 March 2014 as part of the final preparations before Myanmar starts its first census in over three decades.

In Kyangoon and Kangyidaunt in the Ayeyarwady region, also famously referred to as the "Rice Bowl of Myanmar," 384 enumerators and supervisors attended the week long training before they officially put on the census waistcoat, cap and clipboard to carry out the population count. The census will take place from 30 March to 10 April 2014.

The enumerators and supervisors trainings were the last in a series of three specially devised instruction sessions for the census dubbed "training of trainers". The first round of training, which started in late February, included 464 master trainers, the second round involved 7,200 district trainers in mid-March.

U Soe Oo, a 52 year-old district immigration officer from Kyaunggon, Ayeyarwady, who also participated in the 1983 Census as a student, said that there was a "big difference between the previous census and the upcoming census in terms of the public awareness campaign." He also said that in 1983 the data collection was carried out using the "de jure" methodology whereas the 2014 census will be using the "de facto" method, which is more appropriate for Myanmar, he added.

There are two definitions which can be used in conducting a census, the defacto or the dejure method.

The Myanmar census will use the de facto method which counts where persons are at a particular point in time. This particular time will be the Census Night – the night between the 29th and the 30th of March 2014. The de jure method counts only according to the place of normal residence.

Ma Myo Myo Aye, a 34 year old Enumerator (and primary school teacher) said that the census will lead to "big changes for Myanmar as it would help improve the socio-economic and housing conditions." When asked about if she was excited to be taking part in the census as an enumerator she said that "she was assigned, but wanted to volunteer herself."

UNFPA provided technical support for the development of the training curriculum and related instruction materials and provided funding for the three rounds of training sessions across the country involving master, district, enumerator and supervisor trainings. Technical assistance from Australia's Statistics Bureau and India's Census Bureau was also provided to improve the census training manuals and accompanying learning materials.

Daw San San, a 59 year-old, head mistress and supervisor from the Kangyidaunt census township committee also participated in the 1983 census as a student said that the "quality of training has improved since she participated in 83. "I am happy to see the positive chances. This census does not only focus on the demographic data, but also focuses on household data, which will help in the long run for the future development of the country. This time things are done more systematic and there is more sufficient training material, which makes a big difference."





# UNFPA supports distribution of over 800 tons of Census materials ahead of Myanmar's population count



YANGON — The last truck carrying census materials essential to carry out the nation-wide population count left the warehouse in Yangon on 26 March 2014. The warehouse witnessed bee-hive of activities over the past few weeks with loading and shipping of over 800 tons of census materials destined to various corners of Myanmar, covering all the 330 townships.

The materials mostly for publicity and enumeration included questionnaires, census handbooks, key messages, all these are in 10 languages and pamphlets in 17 languages, plus posters all of which have been disbursed nationwide as part of the Myanmar publicity campaign to inform the country on the upcoming census. The materials are an essential part of preparations to ensure the census proceeds smoothly.

An estimated 604 tons of other materials mostly questionnaires, instructions manuals, clipboards, caps, hand fans, pencils, pencil sharpeners, erasers, permanent markers, etc., have also been handed

de la constant de la

out to the approximately 120,000 enumerators and supervisors last week upon completion of their week long training sessions in time for the upcoming census.

U Win Myint, Deputy Director at Department of Population has overseen this major assignment, together with a very dedicated and hard-working team. It entailed the colossal logistical task of ensuring that all the census materials are packed and transported to right correct locations and townships across Myanmar.

"Every package is weighed and recorded by officers of the Department of Population before it is loaded onto a waiting truck and transported to its destination," said U Win Myint. He also explained how every single package regardless of its content and size, is carefully labeled with the name of which the state, district, and township. "Each package is labeled for tracking purposes. Particularly for distribution as many of the census items in one truck are meant for various locations," he added.

A second warehouse located in Nay Pyi Taw, the nation's capital, has also finished distributing its stock of materials.



## National bus tour hits the road to rally participation for Myanmar census



NAY PYI TAW — Myanmar's famous comedian and official Census Ambassador U Zarganar embarked, with a team of performing artists in the early hours of 2 March 2014 from Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar's capital also known as "The Royal City", on a 3 week nationwide bus tour to raise awareness on the upcoming Myanmar Census.

The national census bus tour will travel to 118 townships in Upper and Lower Myanmar, covering major cities as well as rural townships. The objective of the bus tour is to inform the general populations about the importance of the census and to encourage strong participation, when the country undertakes its first data collection in over 3 decades. The last time Myanmar conducted a census was in 1983.

"Today is a very good day, as it is the start of the national bus tour. This is the first time that we are taking part in a census and we will be touring in a census decorated bus," said U Zarganar.

"We are helping to create history for the benefit of my people and I for one am delighted to be a part of the census bus tour. It is very exciting," concluded U Zarganar as he stepped into the bus to commence the tour.

Upon arrival to the first stop on the route, in the city of Pyinmana, a logging town located approximately 3.2 kilometers from Nay Pyi Taw, the bus was greeted by more than 250 people whom had all turned up to learn more about the upcoming census and enjoy the 45 minute show which also featured a live performance by pop sensation He Lay.

To the catchy tunes of the re-make of the Unity song

also known as the census song the participants were introduced to a series of interactive activities testing their knowledge of the upcoming census as well as pose questions relating to the census. U Zargana told the excited crowd that "I'm here to address all concerns and reassure you that all your questions will be answered. I urge you all to participate in the census."

One of the census activities, which turned out to be a real crowd pleaser, involved the participants repeating and holding the official census slogan "Nation-wide census – Let's all Participate" for as long as possible in order to win an official census t-shirt or cap.

"It's really great. I'm really happy. I feel that the census is a good project which will benefit the country. I'm thrilled, pleased and proud of this event, said Daw Gyi Yie Lwin, a 56 year-old grandmother and Pyinmana resident.

Over a period of three weeks from 2-24 March the census bus tour is split into two teams with team leader U Zarganar covering Upper Myanmar with 50 stops including Lashio, Musal, Taunggyi, Loikaw, Hakha and Magwe to name a few.

The second bus led by Daw Swa Zin Htike, a popular Myanmar actress will travel to Lower Myanmar and visit 68 places including Taungoo, Bago, Kalaw, Myawaddy, Bogalay and Pathein.

As the national bus tour packed up and drove off to its next destination, U Kyaw Saw Lwin, a 32 year-old father of three said "When they ask us during the data collection, we will answer correctly and accurately. We will tell them about our living conditions as well as the problems that we have." Updates from the national census bus tour will be broadcasted daily on MRTV.





# Myanmar's President starts the count down for historic Census at gala bash in Nay Pyi Taw



NAY PYI TAW — Myanmar's President U Thein Sein signed off on the countdown for Myanmar's first census in over 30 years, to officially begin at the gala launch on 1 March 2014 in Nay Pyi Taw, the nation's capital.

Morethan 1000 high level dignitaries and invited guests from Myanmar's Government, Parliament (Hluddaw), political parties, religious and ethnic organisations, civil society, army (Tatmadaw) and armed groups, including Ambassadors, representatives from the international donor community and United Nations Populations Fund (UNFPA) and other UN agencies, witnessed President U Thein Sein give the seal of approval and inaugurate the upcoming 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census which ran from the 30 March to 10 April 2014.

H.E. U Thein Sein, President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar highlighted in his address the critical importance of the census and that "accurate statistics are essential for the current and future development planning and policies of our country." He emphasized that the census is of critical importance to Myanmar and that it is an activity which must not be hindered or delayed.

President Thein Sein also stated that the census would produce an accurate picture of the population, its composition and its living conditions. "The census will reveal the country's truly diverse demographic nature to the world, as a bright and prestigious image of a proud nation. It is an opportunity to mark a milestone in Myanmar's history with the combined efforts of our people...The information produced from the census is not only useful for the present government, but also for the future as part of our heritage."

The President concluded by urging everyone to participate and to provide accurate answers during the data collection. "The census is an event which requires the support of all people across Myanmar in order to be carried out successfully... The count-down begins from today."

Ms. Janet Jackson, UNFPA Myanmar Representative said that it was a historic day for Myanmar as it embarks on its first census in more than three decades. "Today marks the beginning of the census campaign and it is very emotional to think that in less than 30 days the first houses are going to be enumerated, and that the country after more than 30 years will be able to have complete, reliable and accurate data so they can push ahead with the ongoing development reform process."

She also stressed that UNFPA has for the past 18 months been working closely with the Government of Myanmar offering technical and financial support to ensure that the census will be conducted in compliance with international standards. "This is a very exciting time for all of us and tonight is as much a testament as it is a celebration which highlights that Myanmar is on the right path to securing a brighter future."

Saturday's gala launch also included live performances from many of Myanmar's popular artists, comedians, traditional ethnic dance groups and celebrities, including hip hop star Bunny Phyo, pop star R-Zarni, legendary singer Mar Mar Aye and many others.

A special flag hand-over ceremony involving all the Chief Minister's for Myanmar's 7 States and 7 Regions signifying unity, participation and the handing over of responsibility all leaders to sensitize communities and ensure the public have information and know about the census, was presided by Vice President H.E. Dr. Sai Mauk Kham. The last census took place in 1983.



