

Rice Bowl

MISSION



Global Mission's Myanmar Newsletter

December 2021



Myanmar Suffers Under Cruel Military Regime

For much of the past year I have begun my comments about Myanmar by saying something like, "It has been a difficult year due to the military coup that occurred on February 1st." Unfortunately the same is true of this newsletter as there has been very little good news to share since the coup unfolded.

The coup ushered in a new era of military rule which was met with a massive civil disobedience movement throughout the country. This peaceful movement has continued but there has also been a move towards armed resistance. So there are now many Peoples Defense Forces (PDF's), civilian groups that are involved in armed resistance against the junta. Many of the PDF's include teenagers and young adults who have joined out of a deep sense of injustice that their right to democracy has been denied them. As there is no support coming from the international sector, they see no option but to take up arms and fight for their freedom. This results in retaliation from the army with often devastating consequences. The Chin State where many members of the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar live has seen significant violence. This photo shows several fires in the town of Thantlang, where there has been fighting between the army and the local PDF. The fires were allegedly lit by the army and is a tactic they have used elsewhere on many occasions. Thantlang has been abandoned by its 8,000 residents who have fled to other areas of the Chin State or to the Mizoram, just across the nearby Indian border.

Read more inside ...

(Continued) ... Another region which has been very badly affected is Mindat, where residents have also had to flee. It is too far to the Indian border for them (see the map below), so they have largely sought shelter in other villages.

In summary, the normal routines of life are on hold as people focus on survival and staying safe (Covid-19 continues to be a factor in their daily life as well). It is difficult getting funds to Myanmar for humanitarian aid as the situation is not yet stable. However we have been able to get some funds to the church for Covid-19 relief, support for PCM staff and families, and for the digital scanner for the PCM's Agape Hospital.

Partners Zooms meetings

International church partners have continued to meet via Zoom to get updates on the situation in Myanmar, make arrangements to get funds there, and to offer moral and spiritual support through prayer. In the most recent meeting on October 25th, the following information was shared by the PCM General Secretary Rev. Ramthanga, and their Moderator Rev. Ling Zaw. Zaw reported on Victoria Synod, his home area. Mindat is the main church in Victoria Synod which the other churches all depend on, but everyone has fled to villages away from Mindat due to the fighting. It is too far to get to the Mizoram so they are sheltering in remote villages or under temporary shelters. They cannot buy any food so they rely on support from the villagers and from outside. Zaw has been in contact with the villagers and asked them to support the Internally Displaced Persons from Mindat. Those who help are buying rice for them if they can. But it is very difficult to buy it, and then also to transport it to the villages.

Ramthanga shared that the PCM's Agape Hospital is still functioning and has been active throughout the fighting and the covid outbreaks. During the covid spike in June and July some staff stayed there day and night to meet the needs of the crisis. Doctors have now returned to Yangon and other cities but local staff are available and it appears there are enough staff to meet the needs at Agape. So the ministry of Agape Hospital has been very important for the community through these challenging times.

Ramthanga also shared that due to the crisis in the Chin State, many pastors have no income. He made a request for interim support to meet this need and so we are planning a grant to cover pastors salaries in the Victoria and Hakha synods for two months.

Online websites to help stay informed include Irrawaddy.com, Myanmar-now.org

For those reading this online, read about the conflict in Thantlang here, <https://bit.ly/3cQUdsx>



Map of Chin State Showing Thantlang and Mindat

On the left is a map of the Chin State which is in the northwest of Myanmar. The Mizoram, where many Chin people also live, lies to the west across the Indian border. Here you can see the relative closeness of Thantlang to the border; and how much further Mindat is from the border. The townships usually have a major centre that carries the same name as the surrounding region/ township.



Protests in Mindat after the coup. The town has now been evacuated with most residents fleeing the fighting.

Funds sent:

Although it is difficult getting funds to the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar in the current circumstances, in the past few months we have been able to get funds sent for oxygen supplies at Tahan's Covid-19 relief centre; support for staff and families of the PCM who have lost income due to the current crisis; a scholarship fund for a post-graduate theology student, and further instalments towards completing the purchase of the digital scanner for Agape Hospital. We also intend to send \$7,000 as a grant for pastors salary support in the Chin State, in response to the request mentioned on the previous page. Thank you to our donors who are continuing to financially support our partnership with the PCM.

New Principal at Tahan Theological College Hopes for a Better Year in 2022

Tahan Theological College has a new principal, Rev. Awma, and Global Mission Director Phil King had a meeting with him and former TTC mission partners Wayne and Helen Harray via Zoom recently. Although the current situation means that all classes are suspended, Awma is making plans to continue to develop the college, and we hope that donations held for TTC will make a positive contribution to these plans once work can get underway again. It is hoped the political situation will stabilise and that the college may be able to reopen in 2022.

Covid-19 claims the death of two more PCM Pastors

A third wave of Covid-19 hit Myanmar with devastating effect in the middle of this year. Our July newsletter carried news of the deaths of two leading pastors, Revs Ring Liang Thang and Za Nei Thang. Soon after that, former TTC Principal Rev. Lalchung Lura (below left) and Zo Synod Executive Secretary Rev. Nang Lien Hang (below right) also succumbed to the virus. We extend our deepest sympathy and prayerful support to all who mourn. The PCM held an online memorial service for Rev. Lura, which Wayne, Helen and Phil King were able to attend.



Rev. Lalchung Lura



Rev. Nang Lien Hang

What is the New Zealand Government Able to Do to Advocate for Democracy in Myanmar?

New Zealand's Ambassador to Myanmar Steve Marshall (currently still in New Zealand) shared the following information to explain how the New Zealand Government is responding to the crisis in Myanmar. At the multi-lateral level the New Zealand Government has made its position clear and continues to make statements against the junta (our Foreign Minister Nanaia Mahuta expressed our Government's concerns again in a meeting with the ASEAN General Secretary recently). But the reality is that in a situation like this, statements don't achieve much. We don't have any leverage with the junta. So the Government is supporting humanitarian and civil society organisations through the United Nations, and Red Cross. Through these organisations New Zealand is negotiating with border countries for cross-border corridors for the provision of humanitarian aid (on the Thai and Indian borders). However this has to be sent in surreptitiously as the Tatmadaw (Myanmar Army) will still not negotiate and allow for this. International diplomatic efforts are ongoing but it looks like there is still a long way to go before we see a return to democracy in Myanmar.

(The following information was first shared on Council for World Mission news and is on their website, cwmission.org. The masks were donated by the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea)

Presbyterian Church of Myanmar (PCM) Conduct Mask Distribution Campaign

When the third wave of the COVID-19 hit Tahan, Kalaymyo in Myanmar in June 2021, The Presbyterian Church of Myanmar (PCM) organised a public mask campaign, to encourage and support the continued use of mask-wearing.

Volunteers were deployed to several locations to distribute 30,000 adult masks and 8,000 children's masks. While giving out masks, each group used a microphone and amplified soundbox to announce and emphasize the importance of and how to wear masks.

Office staff visited Pinkhung Village while Theological Board staff reached out to Christian villagers in Tahan Bazaar. Mission Board staff covered Letpanchaung village, the second most populated Christian village after Tahan.



This public outreach of the PCM General Assembly Covid Response Committee follows the free distribution of test kits, medicines, and medical equipment such as PPE to the local Covid task forces around Kalaymyo and Tamu Townships in August.



These photos show volunteers from the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar distributing masks to grateful members of their communities in Tahan and Kalaymyo

As we enter the season of Advent, let us continue to keep in mind the people of Myanmar who are suffering under a brutal and unjust military regime. While there seems very little we can do to help, they are extremely grateful for our moral support, our prayers, and our advocacy for their freedom. It means a lot to them to know that their Christian family around the world remembers them and upholds them in prayer. Please continue to remember the Presbyterian Church and all peace-loving citizens of Myanmar who long for a restoration of their freedoms and rights as we celebrate Christmas this year.

Thank you to everyone who financially supports our partnership with the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar. Donations are always welcome and allow us to achieve more.

Online donations can be made to 02 0500 0086963 10. If making a new donation please send an email with contact details for receipts to katrina@presbyterian.org.nz

For more information please contact Global Mission Director Phil King, phil@presbyterian.org.nz