

Rice Bowl

MISSION



Global Mission's Myanmar Newsletter

July 2021



It has been a stressful and upsetting period in Myanmar since the military coup in February. In the early days there was an initial burst of energy from hundreds of thousands of Myanmar's citizens who peacefully opposed the coup and formed a civil disobedience movement, with large numbers of public servants refusing to work under military rule. This has given way to resignation and despair in the face of indiscriminate violence from the army and a lack of any significant international reaction. On top of this, a third wave of Covid-19 has surged through Myanmar, causing enormous upheaval and completely overwhelming their very under-resourced health system. Members of the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar have been deeply affected in all of this, with residents of Mindat, and others in the Chin State being driven from their homes and now living as internally displaced persons (IDP's) within their own country; and many others suffering from Covid-19. We are sending funds for the purchase of oxygen cylinders and other support to help meet immediate needs. Details of more news, and how you can contribute to our support can be found inside.

Mindat Residents Forced to Flee Their Homes

Thousands of residents of Mindat in the Chin State have had to flee their homes as a result of violence and aggression from the army. Some lived temporarily in the forests and most have moved on to other villages or are taking shelter in camps for internally displaced people. Mindat is where Global Mission Director Phil King attended a General Assembly in 2018, and where the PCANZ's Petra Malcolm taught at Victoria Boarding school later that year. PCANZ congregations have also raised funds for the school there, so we have learnt of these developments with a heavy heart. A few weeks ago Phil King received an email from Rev. Bawi Zaw, a pastor in Mindat whom we supported through his doctoral studies. He described in graphic detail the trauma his community had experienced, and said that he was with a community of 500 who were staying at what he described as "a war runners camp." So far it has proven very difficult to get aid through to this region but we will be supporting whatever efforts the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar is involved in to help with this crisis.



Residents of Mindat township have fled to the forests and camps for the internally displaced to try and find shelter from the violence that has erupted in their area. They had to flee carrying only the clothes they were wearing.

PCM Loses Leading Figures in Covid-19 Outbreak

In July we received the very sad news that the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar had lost two leading ministers to Covid-19 as a new outbreak swept through the region of Tahan/Kalaymyo. We mourn the loss of former General Secretary Rev. Ring Lian Thang and Associate General Secretary Rev. Za Nei Thang, (pictured below in 2019). Ring Lian Thang visited New Zealand and attended our General Assembly in 2014, and was well-known to many PCANZ members who have visited Myanmar. Global Mission Director Phil King sent a message of condolence and some funds have been donated to support the families of these two men. Due to the overloaded and under-resourced health system, Covid-19 victims need to buy oxygen cylinders and treat themselves at home. Coupled with a lack of oxygen supply these circumstances have undoubtedly contributed to the high death toll. Please pray for the bereaved families and for all those in Myanmar who are faced with the double crises of life under a brutal military regime and raging Covid-19.



Fundraising Appeal For The Presbyterian Church of Myanmar—Please Lend your Support

Below is a letter received from the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar General Secretary Rev. Ramthanga, describing the critical times they are living in and appealing for support. We are currently in negotiations with the PCM and other international partners finding ways to safely transfer funds to Myanmar to help meet their immediate needs. If you feel you can contribute to this appeal, please donate online to the Global Mission account. In order to receive a receipt, please send an email to Katrina Graham, katrina@presbyterian.org.nz confirming your donation and giving your name and contact details. Thank you for your support.

Global Mission account number: 02 0500 0086963 10

Reference: Myanmar Appeal

“Carry each other’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.” Galatians 6:2



Presbyterian Church of Myanmar
General Assembly Office
Tahan - Kalaymyo

Regd.: No. 138

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July 22, 2021

Dear coworkers in Christ,

Greetings to you in the precious name of our Lord Jesus Christ. I hope you are doing well in the midst of global crisis post by COVID -19 pandemic.

As you might already know, we faced a lot of difficulties in Myanmar since the military overthrow the civilian government and launch the coup in February and these difficulties are doubled by the spread of COVID-19 third wave. It is wide spread first in Kalay areas and Chin State. However it is now spreading rapidly in the other cities such as Yangon and Mandalay.

Needless to say that the Junta is a hopeless, the soldiers go to the civil volunteers to ask for Oxygen. The situation in Myanmar this time is very bad enough. Many died of oxygen shortage, is still dying every day and seems would die in this present situation. The challenge in this time for the Church is much more than our effort as the funds of the Church are stuck in the bank. Some local congregations are taking action by forming COVID Response teams and Agape Hospital is standing with the community to respond the pandemic. The Presbyterian Church of Myanmar (PCM) is struggling enough for its employee's monthly salary. Therefore we, the PCM is urging our partners to support us in prayer and any means that they could do. At this time, our needs are finance (in cash), face mask, test kits, PPE forms, and Oxygen related devices (i.e., Oxygen Generator, Oxygen Concentrator, and Oximeter).

I write this letter knowing that every nations and churches are facing challenges of their own amid the pandemic. It would be very grateful for PCM if you could have a kind consideration upon this request.

In his precious name,

Rev. Ramthanga
General Secretary

Fundraising event for Myanmar

Members of the Myanmar community in Wellington recently held a fundraising event (photos below) to raise awareness and support those who are suffering under the military regime. Many ethnic groups joined together, reflecting the diverse nature of the Myanmar community in New Zealand, and the deep concern they have for events in their home country, where many of them have family members enduring significant stress.



Petition to Support National Unity Government

A New Zealand-based advocacy group, "Democracy for Myanmar Working Group New Zealand" has a petition before the New Zealand Parliament asking that House of representatives recognise the National Unity Government (democratic politicians who were ousted by the military regime on February 2nd) as the legitimate Government of Myanmar. If you are interested in supporting this petition, which closes on August 9th, the link is here, https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/petitions/document/PET_112068/petition-of-democracy-for-myanmar-working-group-new-zealand



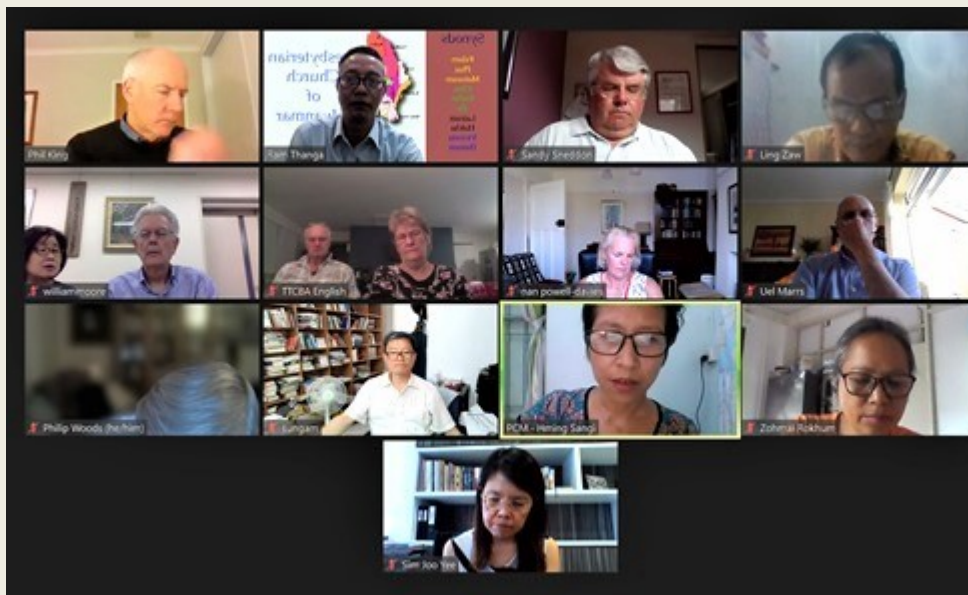
Refugee Sunday at St. James Presbyterian Church, Whanganui

On Refugee Sunday (June 20) Rev. Mo Morgan invited Global Mission Director Phil King to St. James Church in Whanganui, accompanied by members of the Myanmar Chin community from Wellington. Pastor Frank Parte, Muana and Sanga shared about life in Myanmar, their journey to New Zealand as refugees and their life here now. They also helped the congregation understand the impact of the coup and Covid-19 in Myanmar now. Pictured from left,

Muana, Rev. Mo Morgan, Rev. Frank Parte, Sanga, and Rev. Phil King wearing a traditional Hakha Chin jacket.

Maintaining Contact with The Presbyterian of Myanmar Church Leadership

In spite of earlier reports of internet blockages and unreliable power sources, contact with the Presbyterian Church leadership in Myanmar has remained possible. Former mission partners in Myanmar Wayne and Helen Harray and Global Mission Director Phil King have been in regular contact via WhatsApp messaging and occasional Zoom meetings. This has also included other international partners. These Zoom meetings have been a great source of encouragement and support to the PCM in the midst of ongoing challenges to their way of life. On each occasion Moderator Rev. Ling Zaw, General Secretary Rev. Ramthanga, and Womens Secretary Hming Sangi have updated us on the current events in Tahan/Kalaymyo and the Chin State. We have discussed ways to send funds, and shared in prayer together. At the most recent Zoom meeting, Rev. Zaw reported that the army is blocking aid being sent to internally displaced citizens in the Chin State; and Rev. Ramthanga informed us about the current Covid-19 outbreak. Partners from Korea and Scotland hope to send facemasks and supporters in the Mizoram (on the India border) are sending oxygen cylinders. After the Zoom meeting had finished, Rev. Ramthanga sent a WhatsApp message to say that shots had been fired in the streets, the first time this had happened since April, confirming that the situation is far from stable.



The way we communicate today:

Partners from New Zealand, Scotland, Japan, Ireland, Wales, USA, South Korea, India and Singapore take part in a Zoom meeting with Presbyterian Church of Myanmar leaders

Wayne and Helen Harray's Mission Service in Myanmar Concludes

Due to the dual impacts of the military coup and Covid-19, Wayne and Helen's term as Partners in Mission at Tahan Theological College was formally concluded on June 30. It was an unfortunate and premature end to work that had achieved so much and held great promise for the future. Helen served as Head of Department for the BA English programme, and Wayne was TTC's farm manager. They have continued to maintain regular contact



Wayne and Helen with fellow Tahan Theological College staff member Zohmai Rokhum at the Graduation Dinner in March 2020

with staff and students at the College and the relationships will remain; but their formal roles have concluded. However, we hope to continue sending funds for TTC's farm project, and information will be sent to donors in the near future about how this project will be managed and options for continuing to support it. We thank Wayne and Helen for their commitment to the people of Myanmar and with them, pray that the community of TTC will remain safe and that circumstances will change and allow a return in the future.

Nurse Aid Course Graduation

The PCM Women's Secretary Sangi sent us a report on the nurse aid student who was sponsored by Global Mission. In spite of all the troubles, Man Deih Nuam from the Zo Synod was able to graduate from her course in May, achieving second prize in her class. Sangi sent us further information about the current situation, saying "PCANZ has supported many women financially for many years for basic tailoring and nurse-aid training. We have trained many young girls and women from different synods. They are very useful and active in their own places using their ability from their self-supporting training. Even now, as you may be aware that Chin State, especially Mindat area is in danger and many villagers are still running away to the interior part of the forest villages. They left their belongings at home and some are in need of food, shelter and clothing. People from different places donated some fund and some hand me down dresses for people. As some of the tailoring trainees are also running away with others, these young tailors are also very much active among these people for taking care of their health. We are very pleased to hear about the outreach ministry of these young women. This is because of our hopeful and ceaseless prayer to God. Keep on praying for us."

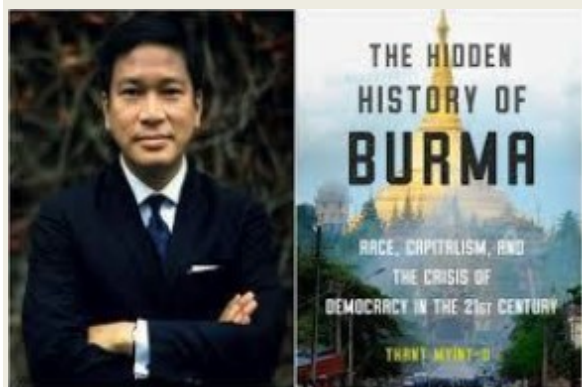


PCM Womens Secretary Hming Sangi with graduating nurse aid student Man Deih Nuam

The following information about respected Myanmar commentator Thant Myint-U is shared from a newsletter published by UnionAid, a New Zealand charity which supports the democracy movement in Myanmar.

In his 2019 book *The Hidden History of Burma*, US-born historian, former diplomat and former presidential special advisor Thant Myint-U describes a country at breaking point. In this article below he outlines four strategies for a better outcome, but says:

"There is no magic bullet, no single set of policies that will solve the crisis in Myanmar. That's because the crisis isn't just the result of the February coup; it is the outcome of decades of failed state building and nation building and an economy and a society that have been so unjust for so long to so many."



Link to the article: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/burma-myanmar/2021-06-11/myanmars-coming-revolution>

And here is a link to an interview with Kim Hill on Radio New Zealand <https://www.rnz.co.nz/national/programmes/saturday/audio/2018803420/thant-myint-u-what-will-become-of-myanmar>

(I recommend finding time to listen to this interview - it's about 20 minutes long – ed).

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 the PCANZ Finance Administrator Katrina Graham, katrina@presbyterian.org.nz)

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