

GLOBAL DAY
OF PRAYER FOR
BURMA
— 2021 —



A FAMILY IN KAREN STATE RADIOS TO DETERMINE BURMA ARMY POSITION AS THE MILITARY HAS INCREASED ATTACKS THERE IN THE PAST YEAR, FORCING MANY FAMILIES TO FLEE THEIR HOMES

FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear friends,

Thank you for your prayers and love for the people of Burma. Burma has now faced over 70 years of civil war, death, displacement, injustice and sorrow. But we don't give up praying because God has not given up and we see in our own lives how God answers prayer and does the impossible.

We are told by Jesus to be persistent in prayer, not give up and pray that God's kingdom will come on earth as it is in heaven. Every time we pray and we obey Jesus we feel His presence and we are part of His kingdom on this earth regardless of the other kingdoms around us.

God works through prayer, first to change our own hearts and to guide us in what we are to do, and then to bring change to others. Daniel in the lions' den prayed to God for help and it took time but help did come. There have been many good changes in Burma because of people's prayer, love and action. We keep praying for Burma because the war goes on and there is a need for that to stop. There is a need for justice, freedom and reconciliation.

During the past year the Burma Army increased attacks in Arakan State, western Burma, displacing over 70,000 Buddhist Arakan people



From left to right: Peter, Suuzanne, Sahale, Karen, and David Eubank in Karen State, 2020.

while at the same time preventing over one million Muslim Rohingya from the same state from returning. The Rohingya were attacked in 2017 and forced to flee to refugee camps in Bangladesh where they live in squalor with very little likelihood of change. In northern Burma attacks against Kachin, Shan and Ta'ang continue with over 100,000 displaced. In eastern Burma in Karen State there is a ceasefire but it is regularly violated with the killing of men, women and children.

There was an election in November 2020 but the military retains final power and attacks continue. In spite of this we do not give up and we thank you for caring enough to pray for God's will and for the people of Burma to be free from oppression from the military and government. When we dedicate ourselves in prayer and action those things that we pray for begin to come true in our lives and the lives of those around us. This is because this is God's world and God works with us to make this world good. We thank God that He forgives, leads, empowers, and uses us and gives us joy to do His will in His name.

Thank you for being in this with us and for the presence of God we feel through your prayers.

God bless you,

Dave, family, and Christians Concerned for Burma and the Free Burma Rangers





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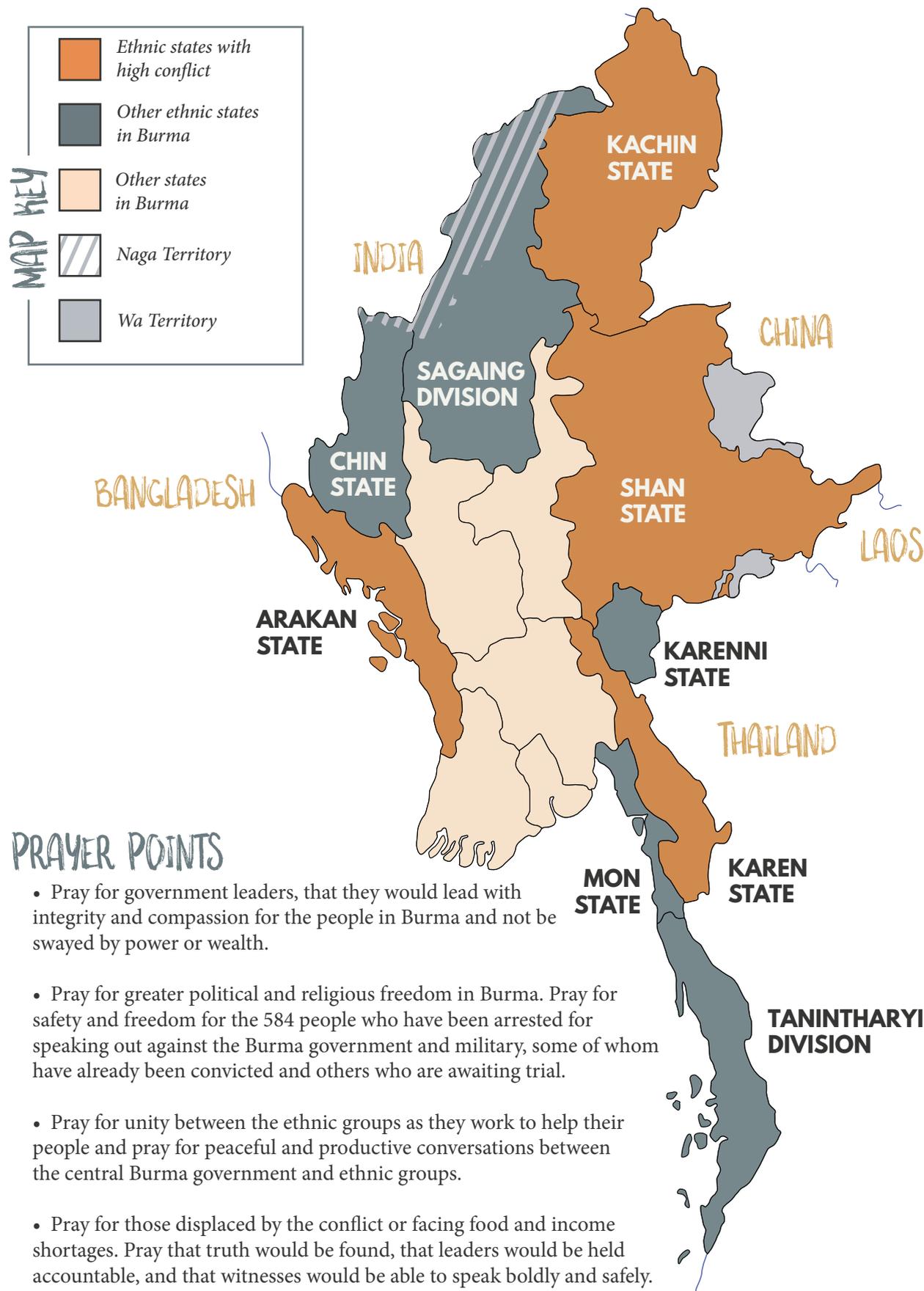
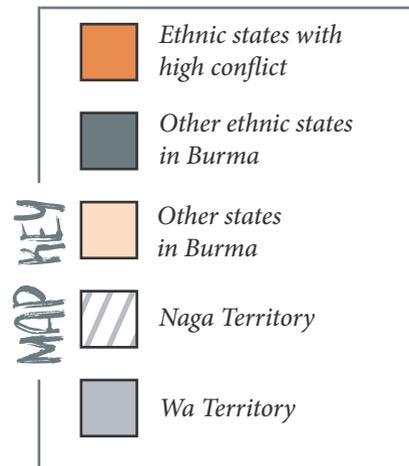
26 VOICES FROM EASTERN BURMA

The Global Day of Prayer for Burma happens every year on the second Sunday of March. Please join us in praying for Burma.
For more information, email info@prayforburma.org.

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Photo captions for pages 3 and 4:
1) Karen and Peter Eubank with Naw Yu Mer whose husband was killed by the Burma Army on March 31, 2020. 2) A Karen medic checks a patient during a relief mission 3) Karen villagers flee a Burma Army attack in 2002 (see story on back cover) 4) Displaced Karen villagers sing during a children's program in the jungle 5) Villagers and relief team members celebrate a new church in Karen State 6) COVID-19 awareness posters hanging outside a house in Karen State 7) The remains of Womah Village, Chin State, after the Burma Army bombed it on March 17, 2020. 8) The impact of a Burma Army strike in Paletwah City, Chin State, on April 22, 2020. 9) Relief team workers host a children's program in the Pa-Oh Self-Administered Zone in southern Shan State.



PRAYER POINTS

- Pray for government leaders, that they would lead with integrity and compassion for the people in Burma and not be swayed by power or wealth.
- Pray for greater political and religious freedom in Burma. Pray for safety and freedom for the 584 people who have been arrested for speaking out against the Burma government and military, some of whom have already been convicted and others who are awaiting trial.
- Pray for unity between the ethnic groups as they work to help their people and pray for peaceful and productive conversations between the central Burma government and ethnic groups.
- Pray for those displaced by the conflict or facing food and income shortages. Pray that truth would be found, that leaders would be held accountable, and that witnesses would be able to speak boldly and safely.

2020 ELECTIONS PROVIDE LITTLE PROGRESS

AN OVERVIEW OF BURMA'S RECENT ELECTION

Although Burma (Myanmar) held elections in November 2020, these did little to resolve decades-old conflicts, or address the concerns and aspirations of the country's ethnic nationality communities. This year, the very difficult situation of many ethnic people was exacerbated by the Coronavirus pandemic, which has severely impacted rural livelihoods (as well as reducing remittances from nationality migrant workers in Thailand and other neighboring countries).

Of the country's Ethnic Political Parties (EPPs), only the Arakan National Party (ANP), Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD), Mon Unity Party (MUP), Kayah State Democracy Party (KSDP), Ta'ang National Party (TNP) and PaO National Organization (PNO) won significant numbers of seats in the 8 November elections. Parties representing Karen, Chin and Kachin communities performed poorly.

Unfortunately, the polls have resulted in a perception, including among some international stakeholders who are keen to back the government, that ethnic groups in Myanmar are not interested in ethno-nationalist politics, and that 'ethnic concerns' are of secondary importance for most people. The NLD's landslide victory also creates an impression of strong government legitimacy, including in conflict-afflicted, ethnic nationality-populated areas. However, this is not an accurate perception.

EPPs did poorly in the elections because polls were cancelled (by the Union Election Commission) in many armed conflict-affected, ethnic nationality-populated constituencies, which might have been expected to vote for ethnic parties. Furthermore, millions of ethnic nationality migrant workers in neighboring countries (particularly Thailand) were denied the right to vote, while mostly Burman migrants from elsewhere in Myanmar were allowed to vote in ethnic areas, after only three months residence. Ethnic communities were further disenfranchised through Rohingya people being denied citizenship and the right to vote, or to contest elections.

In contrast, the NLD governing regime enjoyed the power of incumbency, using

Coronavirus pandemic relief to bolster support, while EPPs were largely unable to campaign due to pandemic restrictions. Also, the ethnic vote was split in constituencies with more than one EPP (and sometimes more than one EPP representing the same ethnic group). In addition, strong 'brand loyalty' to Aung San Suu Kyi was reinforced by widespread perceptions that the NLD is the only party which can stand up against the military, while Myanmar's 'first past the post' electoral system disadvantages smaller parties.

A key element in the success of Kayah and Mon parties was mobilization of the community in protest against heavy-handed NLD government policies (for example, erecting statues of General Aung San in state capitals, without consulting local people). It is also important to recognise that the SNLD in particular seeks to represent all nationalities in Shan State.

Particularly in areas where the polls were suspended, armed conflict continued in 2020 - with the Myanmar Army conducting large-scale offensives against the powerful Arakan Army in the west, with numerous violations of civilian human rights. The latter part of the year saw a lull in fighting with the Kachin Independence Organization in the north. However, in other areas where ceasefires are supposedly established, such as Karen State in the southeast, the Myanmar Army nevertheless launched attacks against civilians and harassed the Karen National Union (KNU), including the destruction of a number of local coronavirus surveillance checkpoints.

In this context, the KNU and other Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement signatory groups continued to press for a political settlement to decades of armed conflict. In the August 2020 Union Peace Conference, the government and Tatmadaw agreed to continue the peace process beyond 2020, including political dialogue, which will be essential to address long-standing ethnic demands. However, many actors and observers fear that, encouraged by their election win, Aung San Suu Kyi's party may be unwilling to do more than pay lip service to ethnic demands for federalism.

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COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS HINDER RELIEF

Despite getting a later start to confirmed cases, Myanmar is no exception to the ongoing spread and challenges of COVID-19. Communities throughout Burma created posters as a way to raise awareness about the virus and educate people about prevention and management practices. International organizations donated test kits and worked with the Ministry of Health and Sport (MHS) to prepare for and combat COVID-19.

From left to right: villagers prepare posters in Nagaland, northern Burma; a woman, living in an urban slum in Yangon, receives a food donation from a local organization; a COVID-19 screening point burned down by Burma Army on May 6, 2020, at War Tho Ko Village, Karen State.

On March 23, 2020, Myanmar confirmed its first two positive cases yet total cases wouldn't peak until later in the year. By Jan. 25, 2021, the MHS reported that of the 2.3 million samples collected to date, nearly 138,000 had tested positive for COVID-19 and just over three thousand people had died from the virus. According to the Coronavirus Resource Center at Johns Hopkins University, the number of new cases and new deaths peaked in October 2020, with totals reaching just over 39,000 new cases that month and 927 deaths. However, the statistics may not be a full representation of the country as many places, especially those beyond central Burma, are hard to access and have limited health resources capable of collecting and testing samples.

In Burma's ethnic states, limited access to COVID statistics mirrors limited access to healthcare for villagers. Fewer healthcare options are often a result of conflict or oppression by the central government. For villagers under attack by the Burma Army, COVID concerns were secondary to their concerns for daily living needs and safety from the attacks.

Travel to Arakan State had already been limited due to the conflict well before the virus arrived. Once it did, the lockdowns and travel restrictions purportedly intended to curb the virus actually caused more problems as health workers and NGOs, already struggling to deliver basic supplies to people displaced by the conflict, attempted to address the additional needs created by the pandemic.

For the Rohingya, fear and anticipation of COVID-19 created more unique problems. After fleeing genocide by the Burma Army in 2017, over 700,000 Rohingya settled into hastily constructed refugee camps in southern Bangladesh.

Organizations working in the camps increased public awareness efforts to educate the refugees on what the virus was and what to do if they suspected exposure. New medical wards were constructed and medical care shifted from routine vaccines and primary healthcare to COVID-19 prevention and preparations. The shift created large gaps in healthcare, especially in vaccine programs like ones for MMR in children. Thankfully, there have been no major outbreaks in the camps and so organizations are returning to

routine medical care and vaccination programs.

On the opposite side of Burma in Karen State, the Karen National Union (KNU), an ethnic armed organization, tried to inform and protect their populations by establishing COVID checkpoints, only to be met with opposition by the Burma Army who burned down checkpoints set up and run by the Karen Health and Welfare Department (KDHW). On June 15, 2020, Burma Army LIB 20 Battalion Commander Lt. Col. Soe Htun Win told Karen workers at the Hsaw Hti Wa Koh Law Te COVID screening point to take down the point. If they didn't, the Lt. Col. would come back and destroy it. On Dec. 28, 2020, the Burma Army seized the KDHW Maw Day screening point in western Karen State. Villagers saw the destruction as a sign that the Burma Army and central government had no interest in helping civilians in remote areas.

Responses to the virus have once again showcased the military's and central government's willingness to use even a public health threat to further their oppressive program of power consolidation and profiteering at the expense of the people.



RISKING DEATH FOR A BETTER LIFE

In 2017, the Burma Army launched a genocide campaign against the Rohingya forcing over 750,000 people to flee into neighboring Bangladesh. Once there, the Rohingya were put into refugee camps that had been built quickly and with little sustainability. Despite repatriation talks between Bangladesh and Burma, no progress has been made to ensure the Rohingya are able to safely return to Burma. For now, nearly one million Rohingya remain caught in the camps, struggling to rebuild their lives.

Article contributed by Partners Relief and Development.

They are stripped of their citizenship, their land, their culture, and their most fundamental human rights. Now they are risking their lives to seek refuge across the sea. In April 2020, several hundred Rohingya refugees were discovered starving and dehydrated in boats bound for Malaysia.

What makes one so desperate that they would risk death to find a better life?

The Rohingya people's story goes back through decades of mistreatment and oppression. After fleeing violence and oppression in their home in Myanmar, the Rohingya are forced to live in squalid camps in Bangladesh, without hope or a future. They leave camps by boat because they have no choice. They yearn to breathe freedom, to thrive.

Mohammed Arfat, a Rohingya activist and peacebuilder, put it this way: "Our people want nothing more than to be free, so they are willing to try anything to find a better life – no matter the risk. We have nothing left to lose."

Mohammed Arfat lamented the perils faced by his people, calling on the international community to come to their aid: "People jump onto these boats despite knowing the risks. When will this end? How long will the world watch as other human beings die at sea in this horrible way? Don't we have the right to live on land?"

"PEOPLE JUMP ONTO THESE BOATS DESPITE KNOWING THE RISKS. WHEN WILL THIS END? HOW LONG WILL THE WORLD WATCH AS OTHER HUMAN BEINGS DIE AT SEA IN THIS HORRIBLE WAY? DON'T WE HAVE THE RIGHT TO LIVE ON LAND?"

"My request to world leaders and to policymakers is to think of us Rohingya as your brothers and sisters. We need your help – and so do the hundreds of Rohingya still adrift at sea. The entire international community is responsible for the trafficking crisis, because all humans deserve protection regardless of their citizenship status."

The vulnerability of the Rohingya people is compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, which daily threatens the communities packed into camps and boats. Fear of spreading the virus has made life even more difficult for our Rohingya friends, as distributions of food and supplies from many aid organizations have slowed or halted altogether.

Lockdowns resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic have made seeking safety outside of Myanmar even more difficult and treacherous. Most Rohingya boats arriving to Thai, Malaysian, and Indonesian shores are simply pushed back to sea by local authorities.

Fortify Rights reported the Malaysian authorities' actions towards one group of Rohingya arriving by boat:

On April 16, Malaysian authorities located another boat of more than 200 Rohingya and forced it back to sea around 10:30 a.m. The Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF) said in a statement that the RMAF and Royal Malaysian Navy "prevented [the boat] from entering the country's territorial waters" and that "such aerial maritime surveillance operations will be intensified." Rohingya continue to face genocide and other

international crimes in Myanmar, and migration routes available to them remain deadly. There are more than a million Rohingya refugees in refugee camps in Cox's Bazar District, Bangladesh, where the government continues to restrict Rohingya access to the internet and mobile-phone communications, increasing public health risks and the potential of COVID-19 transmissions.

Malnourished, dehydrated, and at the brink of death, boatloads of Rohingya refugees are turned away to die at sea. This happened in 2015, and thanks in part to coronavirus fears, it's happening again today.

When boats packed with starving refugees are pushed back to sea, it's essentially a death sentence.

We join voices like Arfat's, calling for immediate and sweeping protections over Rohingya refugees. Until the international community makes the Rohingya people a top priority and holds governments accountable for their actions against them, we will keep praying, teaching, distributing, healing, and hoping. We will fight to ensure that their lives on land are better than risking their lives at sea.

Using COVID-19 as an excuse to deny safety to some of the most defenseless and abused people in the world is unacceptable. Especially in times like these, we must not live in fear of the refugee and the foreigner, but stand in solidarity with those most helpless and desperate.

Let us not be driven by fear, but pour out love in our actions.

WESTERN BURMA

AFTER ROHINGYA GENOCIDE, BURMA ARMY TARGETS ARAKAN VILLAGERS

In western Burma, the escalating conflict between the Arakan Army and Burma Army has been disastrous to local populations in both Arakan and Chin states as civilians are caught in the crossfire. Many civilians have sought refuge in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps throughout the area, but the influx of people has depleted the resources of the camps.

On 19 Oct. 2020, a 6-year-old boy was killed when an artillery shell exploded in his neighborhood. His father and a woman were injured in the same blast and taken to the hospital.

ROHINGYA FACE RELOCATION TO UNINHABITABLE ISLAND

Three and a half years ago, in 2017, the Burma Army launched a campaign of genocide against the Rohingya, a predominantly Muslim population, and over 700,000 Rohingya villagers fled into southern Bangladesh in the space of three months. They joined the already-existing population of Rohingya refugees that had sought refuge just across the border, with around 69,000 having fled in 2016 from lead-up violence. Today, more than one million people live in a densely-packed complex of refugee camps that is the biggest in the world.

Little progress has been made regarding the return of the Rohingya to Arakan State. Their homes and land in Burma have been destroyed or occupied, they've been refused citizenship, and Arakan State remains insecure and unstable amidst continuing conflict. In Bangladesh, the government has increased pressure

Opposite page: Satellite views of Bhasan Char show completed construction of barracks-style housing for Rohingya refugees who will be relocated to the island. Satellite image accessed on 7 December 2020.

on the refugees and increased security measures to confine them to the camps. Larger camps are now surrounded with fencing and require identification papers to travel in or out. The ID requirement severely limits travel and access to needed jobs or medical services outside the camps.

With little hope of the refugees being able to return to their homes any time soon – in late 2019, a repatriation agreement between Burma and Bangladesh failed – the Bangladesh government has begun implementing another relocation plan, in hopes of ‘decongesting’ the Cox’s Bazar area. The Bhasan Char island relocation plan was first introduced in early 2017 in response to the initial wave of refugees from late 2016, and accelerated as those numbers surged in late 2017. Despite near-universal disapproval from rights groups in the international community, on December 4th, 2020, the Bangladesh government moved the first group of Rohingya, over 1600 people, to the remote island on the northern edge of the Bay of Bengal. It is unclear if these were voluntary or forced relocations.

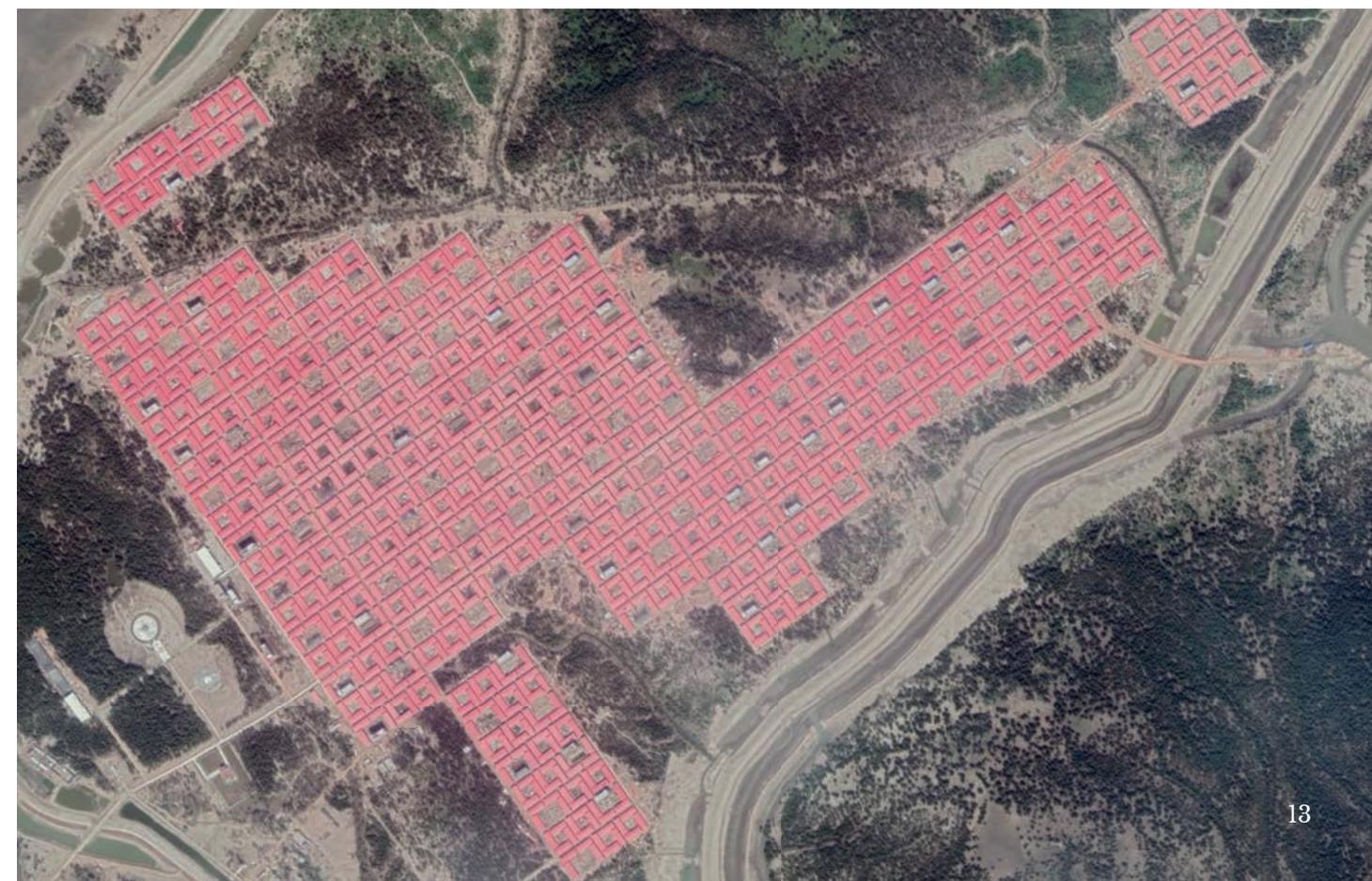
Located due west of Chittagong, Bhasan Char (also known as Thengar Char) is a small island

that surfaced less than 20 years ago, formed from Himalayan silt that washes into the estuary of the Meghna River. Monsoon season often leaves parts of the island completely submerged. The government of Bangladesh has reportedly spent US\$350 million to make the island habitable for up to 100,000 people, though journalists and Rohingya leaders have been denied access to assess its viability. One Bangladeshi government official stated that, once there, the Rohingya would not be allowed to leave the island except for repatriation or resettlement.

After visiting the island in 2019, Yanghee Lee, former UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Myanmar, said that, “Ill-planned relocation, and relocations without the consent of the refugees concerned, have the potential to create a new crisis.”

CHIN VILLAGERS REMAIN DISPLACED AND CHALLENGE BURMA ARMY OVER LAND RIGHTS

Despite the ongoing fighting between the Burma Army and Arakan Army, some areas of Chin State have seen decreased fighting. IDPs



This page: After fleeing Burma Army attacks, Chin villagers gather wood and set-up living areas in the jungle.

Opposite page: Rohingya refugees draw water from the newly installed pumps in their refugee camps in Bangladesh.



in Sami IDP camp had hoped that the decrease in fighting would allow them to return to their home. However, the Burma Army has not granted permission for the IDPs to return to their villages. Still in IDP camps, the villagers do not have income sources and face a lack of fresh food because of the lack of income. Groups like the World Food Program help provide rice to the villagers.

Villagers in Paletwa Township and other parts of Chin State face similar problems as restricted travel and blocked transportation have led to a lack of available food and supplies. Villagers also report income losses as they are unable to travel to sell goods or cultivate land because of troop movement near their land. Travel by bus to Paletwa Town has stopped and any other transportation going there requires special permission.

In addition to the food and income losses, villagers face legal battles with the Burma government over land rights. The Burma Army continues to take villager land through a confusing legal system or through ignoring land certification documents. Locals face harassment by military and local police if they try to protect their land or take the military to court.

U Kyak Hla, a 56-year-old Chin farmer, is one such villager who has been working to reclaim his land. In 2018, U Kyak Hla's land was taken

by No. 6 Signal Battalion even though he had documents certifying he was the landowner. In December 2019, U Kyak Hla won his court case against the battalion.

Then, on March 27, 2020, the army tried to fence his land and take control of it. Again U Kyak Hla showed his land certification and that he had won the December 2019 case. In response, Burma Army Captain Myo Min Oo filed a suit against U Kyak Hla in the Kale Myo District Judicial Court and had the Kale Myo District police call U Kyak Hla and pressure him for more verification.

More concerning is the number of civilians who have died in the course of the conflict between the Arakan Army and the Burma Army, which has spilled over into Chin State. More than 80 civilians, including women and children, were killed in Chin State in 2020, many from airstrikes and indiscriminate firing that impacted in villages.

The continual loss of civilian life due to indiscriminate violence by the Burma Army in conflict areas, along with violation of land rights and denial of basic freedoms in non-conflict areas, demonstrate the determination of the Burma Army and central government of Burma to consolidate their power wherever and however they can, not for the benefit of the country but for the benefit of those in power.

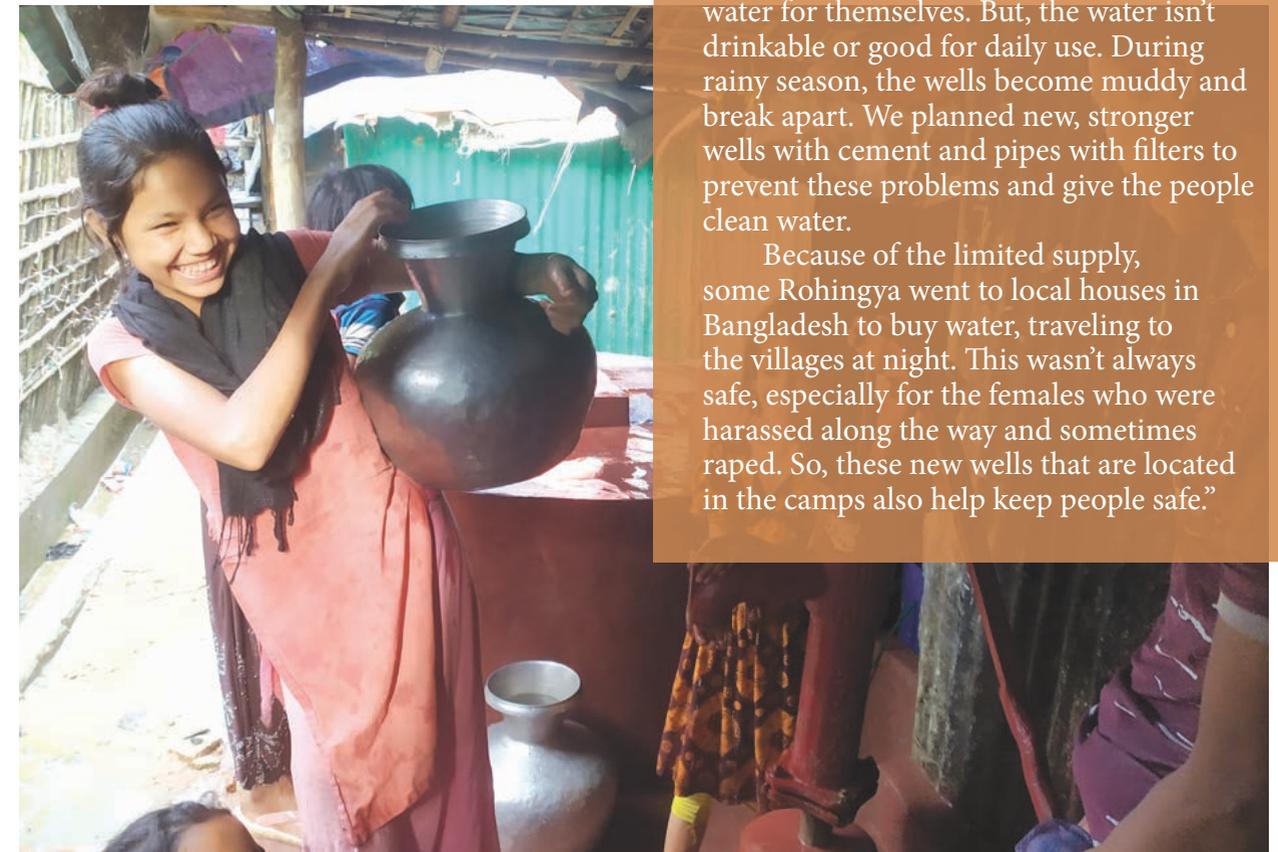


GIVING SAFETY THROUGH WATER PUMPS

In 2020, a team of Rohingya relief workers installed 15 water pumps and wells throughout three Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh. The pumps now serve 537 families in the camps. Here's what one of the workers had to say about the work:

“During the summer, water reservoirs in the camps become dusty and dry up and the people have to dig small wells to get water for themselves. But, the water isn't drinkable or good for daily use. During rainy season, the wells become muddy and break apart. We planned new, stronger wells with cement and pipes with filters to prevent these problems and give the people clean water.

Because of the limited supply, some Rohingya went to local houses in Bangladesh to buy water, traveling to the villages at night. This wasn't always safe, especially for the females who were harassed along the way and sometimes raped. So, these new wells that are located in the camps also help keep people safe.”



VOICES FROM WESTERN BURMA

Civilians in Chin State were repeatedly forced to flee as Burma Army jet fighters opened fire in villages across Paletwa Township. The escalating conflict between the Arakan Army and Burma Army has been disastrous for local populations as civilians are caught in the crossfire. On March 15, 2020, a quiet Sunday afternoon was disrupted as Burma Army jet fighters tore across the sky, dropping bombs into civilian-occupied villages in Paletwa Township. Below are two survivor accounts from the attack.

DAW KHIN TIN OO

“I am from the Mit Sa Nit Village in the Paletwa Township of Chin State. We arrived at Sami IDP Camp on March 15, 2020, after Burma Army jet fighters flew over our village and dropped bombs on us. I have eight children and my husband was killed by the bomb when it was dropped on our home. When the bomb dropped on our house my husband and I were standing together, and when the bomb fell it touched him and now we are separated forever. I tried to gather my children together and get them to safety because the jets were still dropping bombs on the village. My kids kept asking where their father was. We fled to the jungle and then to Sami Camp. But still, we are not safe. My daughter is five months old and I cannot produce enough milk. We do not have money to buy milk so she cries out of hunger. My children still hope their father is not dead. They cry for their father and want to leave to go find him but I know he is dead. I saw him die. I am afraid we will starve. We cannot leave this camp, and without help, this camp will run out of food and we will have nothing to eat.”

MAR LAH

“On March 15, 2020, at 3:00 p.m., Burma Army jet fighters suddenly dropped bombs on our villages. Nine villagers died and twelve were wounded. When the bombs dropped it was chaos. Houses around us burned to the ground, we cannot see because the smoke, we cannot find each other. It is so loud I can only hear my own voice but feel like I can hear the dead cry out. We are all very afraid and flee to the jungle because the planes kept circling and dropping bombs. We had to flee in the dark and use no lights so the Burma Army could not see us moving. We flee from March 15 until the evening of March 16. We flee with our children and we had no food until we arrived at the Sami IDP Camp. Now we face trouble at the camp. We do not know who to trust and fear both the Burma Army and Arakan Army as we think more fighting will break out. We cannot work or make money and there is not enough food at this camp. All we can do is hope and pray for donations.”



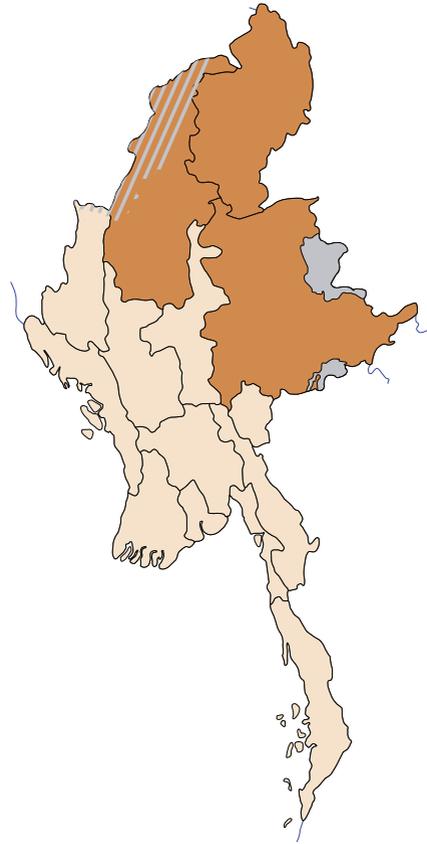
From top to bottom: A newly-constructed IDP camp for IDPs in Chin State; mortar remains from a Burma Army attack in Western Burma; Burma Army jets fire into villages in Western Burma. Photos above from Spring 2020.

DAW THEIN (REDACTED)

“In March 2019 (couldn’t remember the exact date), my husband U Maung Than Nu, 45 years old, was arrested by the LID 55 and LID 22 of Burma Army. In the village there are 3-4 people were divided for the grouping to guard the village. They found that name lists of 27 people and they arrest the people according to that list. Before the arrest, men and women of the entire village were forced to gather in the middle of the village. The women were separated and forced to take off their shirts and to sit under the sun. The villager were sun dried since 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. in the evening. When my family came to see the detainees at the police station no. 1 in Sittwe, they did not see my husband anymore. No one can tell where he left off and where he died. Nobody came to talk. I don’t know who to tell and where to report or complaint of it. As I don’t have my own house and land, on the other hand I lost my husband. In this situation I have no idea even how to survive.

“Even though I want to go back to my village I do not dare to go now. I want to urge that to make judgment according to the truth and justice regarding with the case of my husband’s death.”

NORTHERN BURMA



This year saw much of the fighting continue and shift to northern Shan State where elements of the Kachin Independence Army, Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), and Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) continued to engage Burmese Army units as they fight a back-and-forth war of small unit actions. Overall, in 2020 there were around 110 small unit engagements between the Burma Army and ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) reported in Kachin and northern Shan states, and relatively few of these were in Kachin State.

The majority of the fighting continues to be in Kutkhai Township of Shan State where the area saw over 44 reported firefights, mortar strikes, and mines struck in 2020. Nearby Theinni and Muse townships each had over a dozen reported clashes. Fighting in other townships was sporadic throughout the year with occasional mines, firefights and mortars between the sides. Of the identified Burmese Army units in the fighting, the most heavily engaged units were the 99th and 88th Light Infantry Battalions (LIB) which operated in Shan State for the entirety of 2020. Of recent note are engagements between the TNLA and Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army-South (RCSS/SSA-S) in Namtu Township, Shan State, that took place in early December.

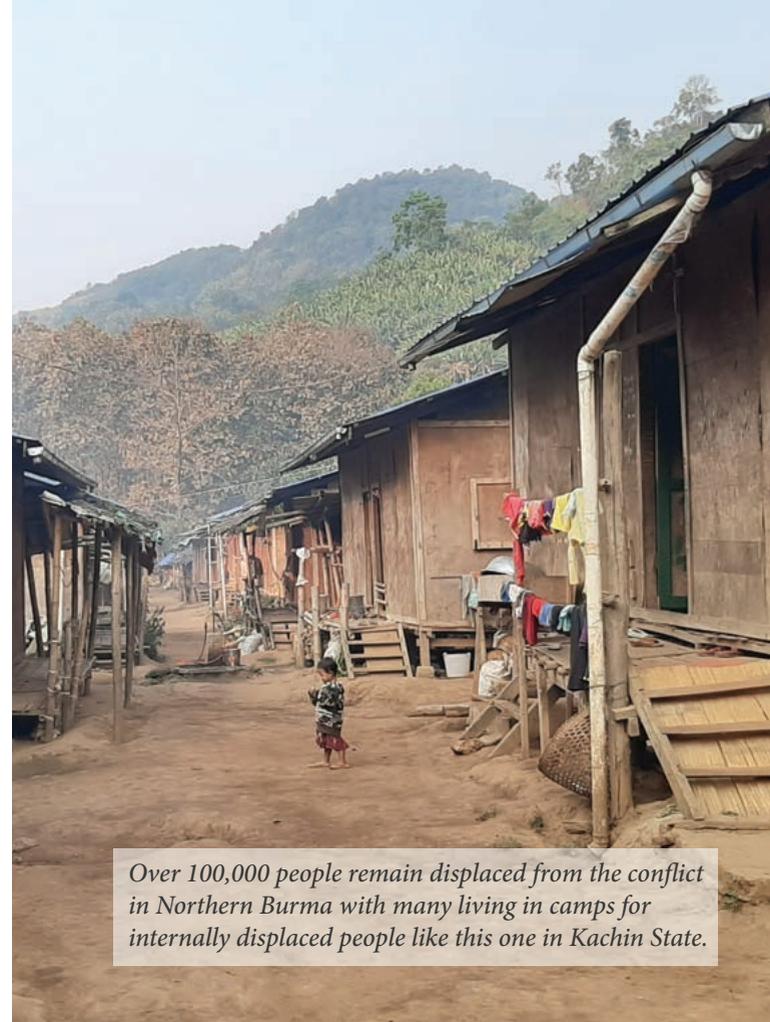
Mining activities that are unregistered or have legal permits to operate have continued to be the target of detainment and extortion from the Burma Army as mining workers, equipment

and managing officers face detainments, fines, and equipment confiscations.

In regards to aerial reporting, there has been an uptick in Burma Army drones that have been conducting reconnaissance in Kachin and Shan states, specifically four sightings that have been reported in 2020 among the usual MAF helicopter and fighter flights. In January there were reports of a Chinese fighter that flew over parts of Kachin State and also of a Chinese reconnaissance drone as well.

RELIEF TEAMS PROVIDE SUPPORT TO REMOTE NAGALAND

Nagaland, officially known as Sagaing Division, is considered one of the most remote and isolated regions of Myanmar – but that designation mostly reflects the attention it receives from the government. The villagers of Nagaland live largely without access to services, assistance or development from the government. This is felt most acutely in the education and health sectors. Relief teams who visited Nagaland this year reported that



Over 100,000 people remain displaced from the conflict in Northern Burma with many living in camps for internally displaced people like this one in Kachin State.

in some cases they were bringing the first outside help these villagers had received.

Several of the villages had no schools, including primary schools, and no healthcare provisions, including even a village healthcare worker. In the absence of economic and educational opportunity, many villagers have turned to growing poppy to produce opium, which has been socially destructive and led to widespread addiction in Naga communities. Despite these needs, the team had to work around travel restrictions to provide help and education.

That help included putting up COVID 19 posters to educate the local people on how to avoid spreading the virus, giving out cleaning supplies and, in the monsoon season that lasts approximately from May until September, giving out plastic to shelter from the rain. The teams did a winter mission as well and handed out blankets to villagers.

While Sagaing Division has not been as directly affected by the rampant conflict in Burma, the villagers there suffer the effects of government mismanagement and lack of opportunity.

NEW BELIEVERS IN WA STATE

While most of the Wa ethnic group in Burma are animist and while there has been oppression of Christians in northern Wa State including banning Christmas celebrations, many are still deciding to follow Jesus. When we asked why, the new believers said, “We decided to become Christians when we noticed that Christian villages were cleaner and there was more honesty and less stealing. Most of all we saw the evil spirits do not bother them. Since we decided to follow Jesus the spirits do not bother us either!” During December 2019 and January 2020, one Wa pastor baptized 174 new Wa believers. The pastor has served the Wa people for over 30 years and, with the help of others throughout those years, has helped establish 77 new Wa churches in southern Shan State.



LABANG TANG, AGE 82

"We ran in 2012. We heard the sound of gunfire, mortar shells landing near the village which fought between KIA and Burma Army. We were afraid of that. We left our properties. We just needed to escape so we did not take extra clothes with us. I stayed first in Namlim Pa. We fled on foot as Burma Army chased us. We arrived at Mangau Village and were sent by Chinese logging trucks to Bumtsit Pa.

In 2013 we arrived at Bumtsit Pa. We stayed in tarpaulin tents donated by UNICEF. It was very hot and unhappy. We suffer with kitchen smoking a year in a tent. I stay with my daughter-in-law and grandchildren.

We can now stay in the house donated by KMSS. We raised breeding livestock and crop and rice field when we were at hometown. The cattle released into the jungle. Burma Army might kill and eat all. We cannot go to check as the Burma Army soldiers stay nearby and in the village. I have not been to check even once since I fled from the village. I will not return because we do not know where the landmines were planted. Some went to check their home and others dared to stay.

I miss my village as I grew up there. We left all our properties behind. Burma Army established camps and positions in Namlim Pa Village, Banghtan Village, Mangau Village, and Loihkam Village. They destroyed all chairs and long chairs of the Namlim Pa church.

I cannot work now for my living as I am old. I cannot run. I ran four or five times. Sometimes I think about that I do not want to run again in my life. Sometime I think of it. I want peace. I would like to request the world help to stop this war."

DTA

In Burma as elsewhere, education is often the first casualty when a community experiences widespread economic hardship, addiction, or abuse within families. To help ensure children have access to education and the support needed to finish school, families with the option sometimes send their children to live at boarding homes, often referred to as youth hostels. These homes provide safe living spaces, community support, and educational opportunity for vulnerable children.

Dta, pictured at right, is one such child. When she was 13 she went to live at a hostel for Wa children in northern Thailand and now takes care of the girls' dormitory there. Her story is not just a testimony to the impact youth hostels and caring communities can have, but also an inspiration to children in similar situations.

My name is Dta, I am 19 years old and have lived at the La'Wah Hostel for six years. I came when I was 13 because my parents were in debt and could not support me. My dad has had a drug and alcohol problem since I was a child. My parents got divorced and no one could take care of me. I stayed with my grandma for a while, but she was

"I THINK THAT I CAN HELP OTHER CHILDREN SUFFERING FROM DEPRESSION BECAUSE I KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE TO FEEL LIKE YOU ARE NOTHING AND HAVE NOTHING."

getting old. My grandmother was very violent to me. One time I accidentally broke a pot. My grandma became angry and hit me so badly that the space between my pinky finger and ring finger was torn apart. She used the pot to hit my head many times and my back was really injured. This stayed in my heart. I just wanted to escape this situation.

I really loved it when I came to the hostel, but I had to adjust. The older kids would tell me to do a lot of things that I didn't want to do. Sometimes I felt like I didn't want to stay at the hostel. So I had to learn how to be patient here otherwise I would have to return and stay with my grandma, which was not an option. The first year here I became lonely. I cried every night and started to miss my parents. After one year, I went to a Christian camp and started to get to know Jesus. I had an opportunity to serve Christ. There was another camp and I got another chance to serve. I continued volunteering to serve at Christian camps.

Since I have grown up I've had depression. I thought about suicide many times. Coming to stay at this hostel protected me, it is a safe place for me. This hostel is a safe zone that God prepared for me. I feel better now, I don't use any medicine for my depression. Through the church and hostel, I've also gotten to know Jesus. The opportunities to volunteer at the camps were only open due to the hostel. I opened my heart to Jesus there. I

realized how hurt I was in the past. God helps me in everything that I do in this life.

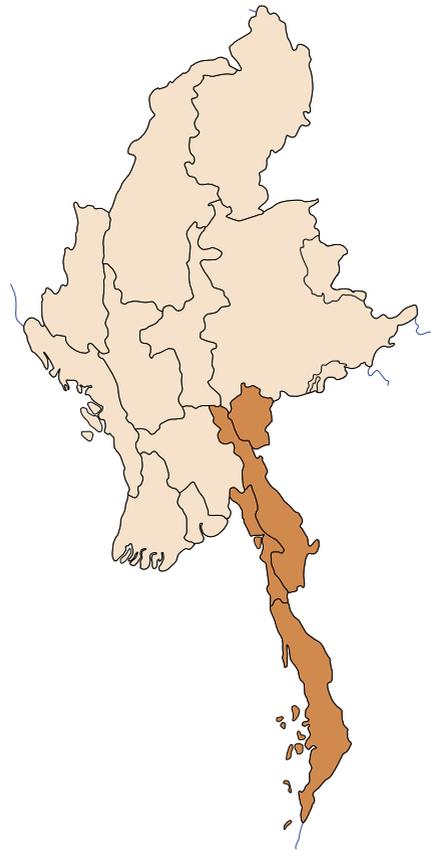
When I reached grade 9, my parents did not want me to continue studying but I wanted to go to high school. I didn't know what to do but I prayed to God. My teacher soon told me that they would pay for all of my school expenses including my uniform and textbooks. I knew God was watching me and taking care of me.

The hostel is my family. Through God, I am provided a safe place to sleep, eat, and study. If I had to stay outside, (of the hostel), I would have to fend for myself on the streets. I would not have the Christian community that I have here. Sometimes there are some regulations at the

hostel, but they are all for our safety. Before I came to the hostel, I was always afraid of public speaking, but now I lead the worship team and even teach the Bible to the younger kids here.

Many times in my life I wanted to commit suicide, sometimes I tried to hurt myself because I thought I was nothing. Since living here, I know that God has a plan for me, I don't know how he will use me but I have faith. I want to continue studying the Bible and psychology. I think that I can help other children suffering from depression because I know what it's like to feel like you are nothing and have nothing. I don't know where God is calling me to, but I know for sure God is going to use me to serve his Church.





EASTERN BURMA



Clockwise from left: A KNLA post burned down by the Burma Army in February 2020; Karen villagers hiding in the jungle after fleeing the Burma Army; Burma Army trucks on the move in Karen State.



In Karenni State, the smallest state by population, villagers and the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), an ethnic armed organization, are preparing for more troop movement and clashes with the national military as the Burma Army has been building up troops in the state. Villagers reported a troop increase in Burma Army battalions 72 and 428 along with an increase in tensions after the 2020 election due to the increase of ethnic Karenni representation within the national government. Despite the increasing tensions, the KNPP remains committed to the peace process.

Amidst the election tension, the central government is also mobilizing villagers to build two agricultural production roads in Demawso

Township, Karenni State. While it may seem convenient for local transport and crop trade, it also makes it easier for the Burma Army to quickly move troops and supplies for a strategic advantage.

Karen State saw a similar rise in tensions in 2020 as skirmishes between Burma Army and Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) troops increased. While the Karen signed the now-expired National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) with the Burma Army in 2015, villagers reported at least 30 mortars fired into civilian areas by Burma Army units in March 2020 alone, along with multiple instances of civilians being targeted and killed by Burma Army soldiers.

Much of the tension centers around Burma Army road construction projects in northern Karen

State, especially their desire to connect the eastern border on the Salween with central Burma, going straight through northern Karen State. Without agreement from district leaders, it was a violation of the NCA for the Burma Army to build new roads or improve old ones, and the KNLA treats undesired construction as an act of aggression.

In Kler Lwe Htoo District, despite the vocal opposition of both villagers and their leaders, the Burma Army has proceeded with road construction, resulting in reduced freedom of movement for villagers and increased threat from Burma Army troops.

In Mu Traw District, which has strongly resisted any kind of Burma Army activity, the military has instead terrorized civilians. The

examples below are all in the vicinity of Burma Army camps or old car roads in Mu Traw District.

Saw Dee Kah, age 63, was helping with a funeral on Jan. 3 when he and a friend were shot by Burma Army soldiers who had been hiding in the jungle following a skirmish with KNLA troops earlier that day. Saw Dee Kah was shot once through the collarbone and once through his side. His friend was hit with a bullet that went straight through his leg. Both men survived. The Burma Army then came out of hiding, beat a witness and arrested him without any cause.

On Feb. 5, 2020, 367 villagers fled Burma Army attacks near Wa Kaw Hta and Ta Ko Der villages. The military had fired 81mm and 60mm mortars into and near the villages, forcing the

Clockwise starting at immediate right: Mae Kaw Law Village, now abandoned after troops from Mae Way camp attacked the village and forced villagers to flee; Mae Way Burma Army Camp; A Karen teacher continues the math lesson on a log after the villagers fled into the jungle, Spring 2020; Karen villagers protest Burma Army shellings and military presence on 6 Jan. 2021; A relief team moves on horseback through the beauty of Karen State, Spring 2020.



"THERE IS NO PEACE WITHOUT JUSTICE AND JUSTICE HAS TO BE BASED ON MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING AND RECOGNITION OF THE RIGHTS OF EVERY PERSON."
-KARENNI PARLIAMENT MEMBER AND FORMER RELIEF WORKER



villagers to flee into the jungle. Among those who fled were 36 students and three teachers from Wa Kaw Hta Village who continued their exam prep by using logs as chalkboards.

One month later, on March 5, Burma Army soldiers killed Saw Maw Aye Than, a 23-year-old forest worker, in Dwelo Township. Saw Maw Aye Than was riding a motorcycle with two other forest workers near the Burma Army Mae Wai LIB 338 post. The Burma Army fired from 200 meters away with clear visibility from the camp to the road. One bullet passed through Saw Maw's abdomen from left to right and three bullets struck his left thigh. The forest workers fled and were able to find

medical treatment, but Saw Maw died while being transported to a hospital.

Then, during the early morning on March 31, Burma Army soldiers shot at Karen villagers who were carrying supplies on the Saw Mu Plaw car road in Luthaw Township. Twelve hours later the soldiers fired again, forcing villagers to flee and abandon their loads which included diesel meant for plowing rice fields. Two of the villagers, a husband and wife named Saw Thet Mee and Naw Yu Mer who fled during the second shooting, went missing. Naw Yu Mer returned home early on April 1 but her husband remained missing. Karen soldiers went to search for Saw Thet Mee, ultimately using

binoculars to avoid the Burma Army presence on the road and to locate his body. The 54-year-old had been shot and killed while carrying betel nut to trade for rice as Burma Army attacks in 2019 prevented him from growing enough rice to eat in 2020. He left behind his wife and five children.

Amidst the conflict, Karen villagers continue to face food scarcity problems. Those who have been displaced by the Burma Army were unable to plant and tend to their crops. Rainy season flooding followed by drought conditions further added to their food scarcity. Others face challenges as the government no longer allows villagers to farm on government-claimed land without paying a fee.

In Kler Lwe Htoo District, where there is more central government and Burma Army control, these challenges affect over 80% of the villagers as they rely on farming as their source of income and food.

The Karen continue to work for peace and for freedom to live in their own land, including trying negotiations with the central government. Yet, the Burma Army and central government have used the agreements to further control, oppress, attack and terrorize villagers when the Karen leaders refuse to agree to their demands. Still, like other ethnic groups, the Karen remain. They have not given up and have continued to hang on to their land and their way of life.

VOICES FROM KAREN STATE



SAW WEI HTOO

“My name is Saw Wei Htoo. I am 73 years old and I am Christian. I am from Som Mer Plaw. I have run from the Burma Army my whole life, you can see I even have a scar from a mortar on the side of my forehead from the Burma Army. In 1979, the Burma Army shot mortars down into my village, Som Mer Plaw. I was hiding with my family in a shelter we dug under the house. Even now, the Burma Army still attacks us. Two months ago the Burma Army shot mortars down into this village. I had to run into the jungle to escape the Burma Army who tried to capture me. The Burma Army prevents us from working and farming sometimes, they have even burned my house before. I pray for peace in Burma and Karen State and for Karen people to have freedom in their land. For me, peace means having enough food. If you have peace, you are able to live your life freely. We have been abused by the Burma Army for so many years, we want to have our own freedom and peace in our land.”

NAW K'YOE PAW

“The Burmese have come to my area and threatened us by shooting big guns. We have had to run many times because of the Burma Army. In March, the Burma Army attacked us. The Burma Army tried to send their supplies up to their camp, when they got frustrated by the Karen Army, the Burma Army shot mortars down into our village. I was in my house when I heard the mortars, I left and hid in a shelter under the house with all of my children. When we hear guns, we immediately find our children to hide so that we can save their lives. We have to tell our children to not make any noise and to be patient and wait until it is safe. I am scared for my children because I worry they will get scared and cry and make a lot of noise. Thanks to blessings from God, no one got hurt and every house has a shelter to hide from the Burma Army when they shoot at us. I hope that Karen people can freely work and live their lives in the future without being in any danger from the Burma Army.”

“WE LIVE AND SLEEP IN FEAR OF THE BURMA ARMY. IF THEY JUST LEFT US ALONE WE WOULD BE FINE, BUT THEY TORTURE AND KILL US. THEY FORCE US TO BE LABORERS FOR THEM... I HOPE THAT THE BURMA ARMY WILL GO BACK TO BURMA AND LET THE KAREN LIVE PEACEFULLY IN THEIR LAND.”

SAW PEH

“My name is Saw Peh from Tee Baw Key Village. I have had to run from the Burma Army since I was 12 years old. The Burma Army has killed the villagers and tortured Karen people. Even now I have to run to escape from the Burma Army. Around three years ago the Burma Army came down into our village and burned our homes, everyone had to run to another village to escape. Two months ago there was fighting, I did not run but I prepared my things to run. Sometimes the Burma Army will burn our rice, this area has to face a lot of persecution from the Burma Army. We just want to have peace so that we can work and farm without fear. In 1976, the Burmese Army came aimed to shoot at Karen villagers, not the soldiers. Again in 1998-2000 the Burma Army heavily attacked and killed Karen people. Until today the Burmese Army oppresses and kills Karen people. We are afraid of mortars and big guns. People who live here have a tough life. If it is possible please come back and help Karen people however you can. We just want our kids to have a good life, and have the freedom to work and live in peace.”

NAME WITHHELD

“Twenty years ago the Burma Army shot my brother. My brother had to travel to Thailand for treatment. Two of my brothers have died by the hands of the Burma Army. One was just a villager, a farmer who captured by the Burma Army and never seen again. Our other brother went to battle against the Burma Army and never came back. Now we just live and sleep in fear of the Burma Army. If they just left us alone we would be fine, but they torture and kill us. They force us to be laborers for them. When we were young our parents tried to explain to us that the Burma Army was bad, but we still didn't understand why they wanted to hurt and kill us. All we knew was to run. The Burma Army would come and burn our house and kill our pigs. The Burma Army burned my house three times. One time someone took a photo of what the Burma Army did to my home and posted that to social media. After that, the Burma Army was quiet and did not attack us for a short time. I hope that the Burma Army will go back to Burma and let the Karen live peacefully in their land.”

Opposite page: Karen villagers protesting Burma Army presence and construction in Karen State.

RESCUED AND REUNITED

In June 2002, in Karen State, Burma, four battalions of Burma Army were closing in on a group of 96 displaced people who were fleeing for their lives, and the small Free Burma Ranger relief team helping them. Earlier, the soldiers had burned villages and killed 12 people, including eight children. The fleeing group stopped in a small clearing to pray and decide which way to go. At that moment, a member of the Karen resistance came out of the jungle.

He said, “Don’t go the way you’re thinking of going. The Burma Army knows that’s the way you’re going to pick because it makes sense. They’ve already set up ambushes. Instead, go straight at them, through the open rice fields. It seems more dangerous, but the Burma Army commander in front of us is very afraid. He believes you are 96 Rangers, led by a small group of special forces out to attack him. He has pulled his troops in and he is hiding in his camp. You can go by him.”

The group prayed and decided to follow the soldier’s advice. A small boy had lit a candle and held it in the palm of his hand. A six-year-old girl squatted next to him and his family was around them. The Rangers circled around and prayed. Then, with the knowledge of real and present danger but with the confidence that God was leading them, they went forward.

By the time they reached the edge of the jungle, dawn had come. The sun lit the sky as the bedraggled group emerged into open rice fields. Just beyond the fields was the Burma Army camp. It seemed inevitable the army would see them and attack. The Karen soldiers, who were helping guide them, and the Rangers encouraged the villagers to “keep spread out, keep spread out” in case the army started shelling.

They all made it. As the sun set, they were safe across the border and the families settled down in a refugee camp. They praised God together and thanked Him for the miracle.

Years later, in 2019, Dave, who had been with that group of Rangers, received an email from a girl named Moon.

She said, “I don’t know if you remember me, but I was six years old, squatting by my brother as he held a candle and as you prayed for us to safely escape the Burma Army. Our family later moved to America. God has given me a husband who is a refugee from Nepal and also a new follower of Jesus. We have two children and it’s a huge blessing. I saw the FBR documentary and I thought, ‘You’re alive! I want to meet you!’”

They met and had a beautiful reunion in North Carolina, thanking God.



Dave and Peter Eubank with Naw Moon, her husband, and their two children during the North Carolina reunion, 2020.