

# Rice Bowl

## MISSION



Global Mission's Myanmar Newsletter

September 2024



The village of Pin-khone-lay which was torched by the Myanmar military forces in April. The military attacks and loots villages, burning houses and forcing people to flee. This has become the reality for many victims of Myanmar's civil war. Churches have not been spared and many have been destroyed. More photos of this destruction are inside.

In preparing the content of this newsletter it has been hard to know where to start. Usually a Global Mission newsletter will share good news stories and give examples of positive developments among our partner churches. But since the previous Mingalaba newsletter in December last year, the situation in Myanmar has not improved and so the mood of this newsletter will be similar to that. However, there are some minor exceptions to this and we need to take heart from those; and also recognise the resilience of the Myanmar population and the resourcefulness of the church in responding to their multiple and prolonged challenges. In the past few months we have sent funds for development work at Tahan Theological College; provided scholarships for nurse aid students, and been a key part of an international ecumenical group providing advocacy and prayer support for the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar in their country's ongoing crisis. In the midst of despair we must hold on to hope. Read on for more information.

## Examples of the Destruction of Villages

Messages shared on a WhatsApp group give updates on events that are occurring in and around the Tahan/ Kalaymyo area, the Chin State, and other locations where PCM members live and serve. These often describe airstrikes on villages, and the Myanmar military's modus operandi of torching houses and forcing villagers to flee elsewhere. When homes are not burnt, they are often looted. These are the conditions many innocent civilians are being forced to endure. These photos give some examples.



The cover page of this newsletter showed the burnt village of Pin-khone-lay. These photos show destruction of the Presbyterian church in Sadaw village. Nothing is spared from the Myanmar military's attacks when they target villages they suspect are harbouring members of the ethnic armies and peoples defense forces (PDFs).



200 homes were destroyed when Pin-khone-lay village was attacked. Families lost everything as their homes were burnt to the ground. The photos above show the destruction of the Presbyterian manse, and Rev. Lairingvunga inspecting what was left - none of his possessions could be salvaged. This is the home village of former PCM General Secretary Rev. Ramthanga—tragically, his family home was destroyed. The Presbyterian Church of Myanmar has provided food and shelter for Internally Displaced Persons who have suffered in this and similar attacks; and they also provide a donation to help church members who have lost their homes and possessions, to try and help meet some immediate needs.



Above: Earlier this year there were fears of a major outbreak of fighting in Tahan, and residents were urged to flee. Some would go as far as Mizoram (India) where many Chin refugees are living.

Right: Rev. Ramthanga shared news of the impact of a midnight airstrike on the town of Khampat in April. Three people died and more than ten were seriously injured.



Left: The Presbyterian Church of Myanmar (PCM) established a crisis committee to help meet the needs of the large numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs) that were arriving in Tahan seeking safety and shelter due to fighting in their villages. As well as providing food and accommodation, they also formed a medical team. Here members of the team are seen giving medical checks to IDP's who were being sheltered in Tahan. The PCM is one of a number of churches in Tahan that has offered their facilities to provide temporary shelter to hundreds of IDP's.

Right: The impact of the civil war in Myanmar is being felt here in New Zealand, which is home to thousands of refugees from Myanmar. Earlier this year a Chin family in Lower Hutt heard the news that their son and brother lost his life in a skirmish with the Myanmar military close to Tahan. Members of the family are holding photos of their brother Ngaihzuala.



### The Impact on Children

One of the tragic outcomes of the conflict is the impact on children. In July we received word that the ten year old daughter of PCM pastor Rev. Hrin Lawm Thang had been injured after a bomb blast hit her school. Her name is Ma Kim. She sustained head injuries and was in hospital for several weeks. She is now home and recovering. This is an example of the collateral damage of the ongoing civil war that is afflicting the country. Continue to pray for children and families caught in the midst of the fighting and disruption.

### Presbyterian Church of Myanmar (PCM) Partners Meet on Zoom

Global Mission Director Phil King chairs the PCM Partners roundtable meetings which take place on Zoom every few months with the leaders of the PCM and several ecumenical partners. The meeting hears from the PCM leaders about the current situation in Myanmar, how the church is responding, and discerns ways in which it can help. The most recent meeting was held in August, where the meeting heard about the ongoing crisis conditions in the country. Fears about forced conscription have caused many families and young adults to flee from their homes, in order to avoid being forced to join the army. Due to the breakdown of Government education, the PCM has established 45 community schools with over 5,500 students attending. These schools are staffed by teachers who are paid an honorarium for their service. This is one example of the church's resourcefulness in meeting community needs. They are also active in supporting internally displaced persons who have been forced to leave their villages due to fighting.



Above: Members of the PCM Partners roundtable meet on Zoom every few months to hear from the PCM leaders and discern ways to continue supporting the church in the crisis conditions in Myanmar. Partners from ecumenical bodies and churches in Ireland, England, South Korea, Taiwan, the USA and New Zealand share in these meetings.



Left: Members of the Agape Hospital project team met in Yangon recently for a solidarity visit with PCM leaders and to consider further options for developing the PCM's Agape Hospital.

### Agape Hospital Relocation

An important ministry of the PCM is Agape Hospital. The Government health system is collapsing and the need for private hospitals is even greater now. Agape is small and under-resourced and has struggled to meet the needs of their community in the stressful conditions caused by the civil war; so a team led by the Council for World Mission and the PCM Partners roundtable group has been exploring the possibility of developing Agape hospital with help from other NGO's and Asian Christian hospitals. This team recently paid a solidarity visit to Yangon to meet with PCM leaders and continue their discussions about the possibility of taking the project forward. (Although many regions in Myanmar are unsafe, Yangon is currently more stable, which made this visit possible). The current thinking is that Agape Hospital could relocate to the site presently occupied by the PCM Childrens Centre. This would give them more buildings in which to function and more land area to expand in the future when conditions permit.

### Myanmar - Victory in Sight for Democracy?

Earlier this year a seminar was held in Wellington on whether democracy can be restored in Myanmar. The guest speaker was Steve Marshall, the former New Zealand ambassador to Myanmar. He gave an overview of what is happening in Myanmar and explored the question of what kind of future might be possible if and when the current civil war, or revolution as some are calling it, eventually gives way to more peaceful conditions. Steve currently works for the Joint Peace Fund based in Bangkok and has a good awareness of the current situation. A summary from this lecture can be found here, <https://www.presbyterian.org.nz/sites/default/files/gmo/myanmar/The%20Hope%20of%20a%20Victory%20for%20Democracy%20in%20Myanmar.pdf>.



## News from Tahan Theological College (TTC)

TTC Principal Rev. Awma summarised the current situation at TTC. After weeks of upheaval earlier in the year, he said there are currently no signs of threat or disruption to the College as the previous instability has settled in the meantime.

He expressed gratitude for the support of PCANZ Global Mission and the Presbyterian Church of Ireland for the solar power project which has improved conditions at TTC, enabling it to function more effectively now without disruption to their power source. Students experience fewer interruptions to their routines, the use of fans in the classrooms has made the learning environment more comfortable, and students can study in the evenings due to the provision of solar-powered lights. However, a major challenge to the college is the very high rate of inflation which makes budgeting and meeting expenses very difficult.

Most of the students are from homes in or close to Tahan as it is unsafe for students to travel from other areas, including the Chin State. Also, many families and students have relocated elsewhere to avoid fears about forced conscription. While this is a real concern, there have been no signs that this law is being enforced in the Tahan/Kalaymyo area to date, although there have been some rumours about it.



### Solar Power Project

A major project that PCANZ has supported at TTC this year has been the installation of solar power. This has been a joint project with the Presbyterian Church of Ireland. These photos show some of the work that has been achieved, and a thanksgiving service for the project attended by staff and assembly employees.

### TTC Fencing Project

We have previously sent funds for a perimeter fencing project at TTC to secure their land and avoid encroachment. This has been an ongoing work and earlier this year it included the installation of a sliding gate on a new entrance. Unstable conditions have meant the fencing project has taken a long time but the benefits will accrue as the project is completed and effort can go into farm production.



### TTC Newsletters

TTC produces a bi-monthly newsletter with an English translation. These have been uploaded to the Global Mission website and can be read here,

<https://www.presbyterian.org.nz/national-ministries/global-mission-office/#ttcn>

## Nurse Aid training feedback

Global Mission once again provided scholarships for nurse aid students in the past year. Due to high inflation and the unstable conditions limiting numbers, only two students were able to attend the course. There were occasional disruptions due to outbreaks of violence in and around Tahan, but eventually the students were able to successfully complete their training and they graduated in August. PCM womens secretary Hming Sangi sent a report which is included here for your information as it helps to give some insight into their context:

*“Hello Phil,*

*I can finally give you a short report on nurse aid training. Wesley Hospital arranged a closing service on August 1, 2024. Our two students, Hlue Mana and Sen Nawng Mana had completed their courses and received their diploma. These students cannot go home as you know, there is heavy war on the side of Paletwa route. So, both are staying with me and we still do not know how to arrange things. Hlue Mana's father is very sick and lives with an oxygen cylinder between their village and Paletwa for check up. Please remember him in your prayer too. I attached some photos from closing service.*

*Thank you for your support. May God Bless PCANZ for her ministry.”*



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, our advocacy for their freedom, and our financial support. 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 citizens of Myanmar who long for a restoration of their democratic freedoms and rights.

**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](mailto:katrina@presbyterian.org.nz)**

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