



Dominican Month of Peace, December, 2022

Myanmar

A humble plea for a helping hand to rebuild the devastated lives in Myanmar



Myanmar, also called **Burma**, is a country in Southeast Asia. Myanmar became a British colony in the 19th century. After a brief Japanese occupation, Myanmar was reconquered by the Allies and gained independence in 1948. Following a coup d'état in 1962, it became a military dictatorship under the Burma Socialist Programme Party .

For most of its independent years, Myanmar has been struggling with ethnic conflicts and its myriad ethnic groups have been involved in one of the world's longest-running ongoing civil wars. In 2011, the military junta was officially dissolved following a 2010 general election, and a nominally civilian government was installed. Along with the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and political prisoners, another successful elections was held in 2015 in which the National League for Democracy won the majority of votes. In the 2020 Myanmar general election, Aung San Suu Kyi's party won the majority in both houses for the second consecutive term.

Before the military staged the coup, Myanmar was heading for a better country. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party was about to take power for the second consecutive term and everyone was in a positive mood and hoped for a brighter future. Just when everything was heading for a change for the better, the Burmese military (Tatmadaw) seized power in a coup d'état on the February 1, 2021 and reversed all the positive changes.

Weeks after the coup, people took to the streets to protest against the takeover of power and demanded to return the power to the democratically-elected government. As the protest gained momentum, the military could not control it but still refused to submit to the demand of the people. They, then, started to shoot to kill and tortured some to death in order to terrorize the public and bring the protest to an end.

As the military became more and more brutal in their killings, arresting and as there was no sign of their giving in to the demand of the people, the young people decided to take up arms and fight back. Therefore, a number of them fled to the jungle and took military training under the Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs). From April 2021, young people began to form themselves into People Defense Force to protect and defend the lives, properties, and livelihoods of the people. Eventually, these young people, using their homemade guns and traditional hunting guns, fought back the military and soon the fighting spread to the whole country. As time wore on, these young people were

able to buy assault rifles and other heavy weapons to combat the junta forces.

Many young people and Ethnic Armed Organizations began to join forces to bring down the dictatorship by weapons while democratically-elected Members of Parliament formed a government, namely, National Unity Government and is now seeking diplomatic recognition from international communities.

Humanitarian Situation

As a result of the fast spreading of civil war, the civilians had to flee for safety either to the jungle or to other villages or towns where they considered safer. In the conflict zones, the military forces would shoot anyone found in the streets and arrest anyone caught delivering food supplies to the displaced people. So many innocent civilians have been killed, tortured, and burned to death by the military forces. On many occasions, the soldiers would break into the civilian's houses and loot the valuable properties. After looting the properties, the military would then destroy the things that they could not take with them or torch the houses and in other cases, they would burn the whole village down. According to Data for Myanmar, over 30,000 houses are believed to have been burnt down by the military countrywide .



According to figures of UN, there are now 1.3 million internally displaced people countrywide. Some have been displaced for more than a year now while others have recently fled from their homes due to escalating fighting and armed conflicts. These people are now taking shelter either in the forest or in remote villages where the junta forces cannot reach or in the more peaceful neighboring states and regions.

As the number of internally displaced people continues to rise, and donation is hard to come by, humanitarian aid is becoming more and more dire.



Our Response to the Humanitarian Crisis

With the donation received from the different communities of our Province and from the friends of the Friars both local and foreign, we, Myanmar Dominicans, have been able to respond to the humanitarian crisis under the following categories since 2022.

(1) Humanitarian Response

Since March 2021, Fr. Paul Aung Myint Win, OP, had been delivering food and other relief aid to poor families, to the jobless families, to the families who lost their loved ones due to the cruelty of the military in the region of Yangon.



Since May 2021, the Dominican Friars and sisters in Loikaw led by Fr. Moses Dereh, OP, not only had been providing food and shelter to those who came to take shelter in the convent; they had also been delivering food, and other relief supplies to the refugees who are displaced in various parts of Kayah State and Shan State.



This year, in order to respond to the humanitarian crises effectively, we have formed an **Emergency Response Team** composed of Fr. Paul Aung Myint Win, OP, Fr. Marko Thoe Reh, OP and Sr. Rosa Mu Mu Lin, OP and some volunteers. The friars and sisters of this team buy relief supplies and with the help of volunteers, they deliver them to the neediest people who are taking shelters in different locations of the country.



In some cases, as the friars and sisters cannot go to the displaced camps personally, they cooperate with other social organizations in delivering aid and in other cases, they send financial assistance to the displaced people via mobile digital banking services.



(2) Health Care

In addition to suffering from the consequences of political turmoil, the people of Myanmar also had to weather the viruses of Covid 19. As medical staff walked out of their jobs after the military seized power on 1 February, Myanmar Healthcare system shattered. As COVID-19 infections peaked, hospitals could not accommodate the patients, and as a result, countless individuals died in their homes.

In those difficult times, Fr. Paul, OP, personally went to give medicines and food to the families who contracted the virus and bedridden in their homes. In Loikaw, with the help of a retired nurse, Fr. Moses, OP set up a small clinic for the displaced people in the convent. Besides, he also bought medicines and delivered them to various displaced camps in the state.



To respond to the needs of healthcare, we have formed a **Medical Team** which consists of Fr. Mariano Kai, OP, Sr. Benedetta, OP, Sr. Elizabeth Byama, OP, a doctor and other volunteers. This team is in charge of buying medical supplies and delivering them to the places in need.



This medical team is also providing medical supplies for students who are studying in community based schools in various displaced camps.



Besides, with the help of a volunteer doctor, the members of this team are also touring the camps and tents of displaced people in the forest regularly in order to check the physical conditions of the people and thus give the necessary medical assistance.

If the situation permits, and should more funds are received, this medical team will set up a mini clinic for the displaced people in the forest and provide health care for the people there.



(3) Education

Schools were closed in 2020 due to wide spreading of Covid 19. After seizing the power, the military junta tried to open schools in 2021 but was not successful because most of the teachers refused to collaborate with them and students didn't enroll for classes. This year too, though the military government open the schools, many students refuse to attend and teachers refuse to collaborate. At this moment, home schooling and online classes are available for those who can afford, and have facilities, and for those who are living in safe zones. However, for those who have been displaced, opportunities for education are limited. In most camps, the people set up self-supporting schools for the children with the help of volunteer teachers. However, our parishioners and that of another parish do not have the resources.

The Friars and sisters are not only supervising, they are also teaching some subjects to the high school students. 187 students are attending the school we are running and 50 of them are boarding in the tents set up near the school. We are paying the teachers for helping us teach in our school and two workers.



Besides sponsoring these 187 students, we are also giving minimal assistance to 293 elementary and primary students who are studying in their parents' self-supporting primary and elementary schools in the forest and also supporting the teachers of these students.



Therefore, with the limited funds received from our Province and from the donors of the congregation of Religious Missionaries of St. Dominic, we decided to work together as a Dominican Family, and formed an **Educational Support Team**, composed of Fr. Marko Thoe Reh, OP, Sr. Francesca Polo, OP and Bro. Simon Htoo, OP and put our effort in this educational sector. We set up a temporary high school, **St. Catherine of Siena's School**, in the forest for the students who are taking shelters in that area and with the help of 17 teachers, we are now running this school.



4) Psycho-spiritual Assistance Team

As most of the displaced people are Catholics, pastoral care is also urgently needed. The 2000 Catholics who are directly under our Dominican care are also displaced at this moment. In the past year, Fr. Moses Dereh, OP, Fr. John Sui, OP and Fr. Philip Soreh, OP had all been giving some pastoral cares to our parishioners by visiting them in their camps, hearing their confessions and regularly celebrating Eucharistic mass for them.



To respond to spiritual and psychological needs of the Catholics who are displaced, a **Psycho-spiritual Assistance Team** has been formed. This team is composed with Fr. John Maung Sui, OP, Sr. Judith Mujar, OP and Sr. Lucia Baw Myar, OP and some catechists and leaders of the people are also added to assist.



This team is responsible for providing spiritual needs of the people who are dispersedly taking shelters in the forest. Every now and then, the team tours the camps, celebrate the Eucharistic mass for them, and accompany them in struggles, listen to their stories and offer them words of encouragement.

Cooperating with the catechists, this team also organizes catechism classes for the children in order to give faith formation to them.



Occasionally, the team members also create happy and relaxing moments for the students and children in the camps with the intentions of reducing stress and preventing unforeseen mental disorders .



Months ago, the members of this team were trained for giving the Psychological First Aid to the people who have recently been exposed to a serious crisis event by a staff from the United Nations.



Therefore, the team members are also offering a kind of psychotherapy to those who may have been traumatized because of wars, of losing homes, of losing their loved ones or because of other serious crisis. The displaced people are gathered and grouped according to their age and gender, and after some input, the participants are encouraged to share their stories and worries among their groups.

The purpose of giving Psychological First Aid to the displaced people is to prevent from developing traumatic disorders.

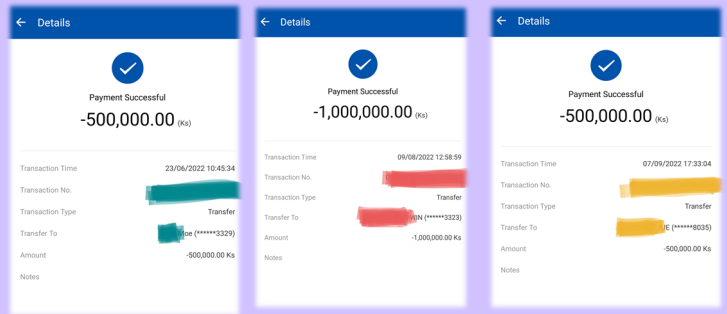
(5) Rebuilding

According to *Data for Myanmar*, the military and its affiliated groups have burned down over 30,000 civilian houses and still many others have been damaged by the shelling of artilleries. As of 20 of September, 2022, *the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma)*, also known as AAPP, confirmed that 2299 civilians have been killed by the military forces and a total of (15,580) people have been arrested and currently, 12,435 are still under detention. So many people are still gone missing. For those who have lost their houses and properties, it will take them long to be able to rebuild their lives and for those who have lost their bread earners, it will be more difficult to earn their living.



To assist the people who need financial help in rebuilding their lives, we formed a team called a **“Rebuilding Team**, composed of Fr. Paul Aung Myint Win, OP, Fr. Moses Dereh, OP and Sr. Rosa Mu Mu Lin, OP. This team is responsible for (1) giving financial assistance to the families who lost their homes, and to the families who lost their bread earners, (2) giving assistance to those who have lost their limbs because of landmines, (3) granting scholarships to the high school graduates in their search for vocational training courses.

Since the funds in hands have been very limited, the members of this team have not been able to carry out much of their mission as planned yet. As all the members of this team are assigned in the city of Yangon, they have not been able to deliver relief aid and financial assistance to the devastated families and wounded individuals personally, but such assistance was transferred to the recipients via mobile digital banking services.



(1) Emergency Response Team

Through this team, the Dominican family in Myanmar is coordinating *relief aid* to address immediate needs in war-torn areas, providing food, shelter and other fundamental needs.

(2) Medical Team

This medical team is responsible for buying and delivering the medical supplies to the places in need and the team members are also providing health care to the people they can reach out to.

(3) Educational Support Team

The Myanmar Dominican Family is putting much effort in giving education to the displaced children because their future is at stake. We are running a high school and sponsoring 187 students in the forest and also giving minimal assistance to more than 290 primary and elementary students.

(4) Psycho-spiritual Assistance Team

Through this team, Dominican Family is providing pastoral care and fulfilling psycho-spiritual needs of the displaced people.

(5) Rebuilding Team

This team aims to give assistance to the people who are most affected by the current political crisis to help rebuild their lives. However, in order to do so, the team needs financial support from the international community.

The Dominican Family in Myanmar is doing its best in providing humanitarian assistance to the neediest people with the limited funds received. Therefore, in order to be able to continue providing assistance in the name of the Order, Myanmar Dominicans urgently need the support of the International Dominican Family.

