

Burma's Internally Displaced Peoples

In the refugee camps on the Thai – Burmese border approximately 140,000 people live in very cramped and deprived conditions. However, inside Burma there are a further two million people who have been internally displaced because of the work of the Burmese army. Many of these people live from hand to mouth in the forests living off wild food and bamboo shoots. They have no access to health-care and education. They are desperately poor, but will not cross the border into Thailand. If even only 10% of these people did cross into Thailand imagine the pressure that would be put upon the already stretched resources within the refugee camps! Earlier this year several thousand of these people crossed the border at Noboh when they found themselves surrounded by hostile elements of the Burmese army. ARMS and other organizations funded a feeding program that provided food and some medical care for them for a six week period until it was safe for them to return.

The plight of these people is of great concern to the Karen church within the camps. Sometimes, orphaned children are found in the forests and are brought to the camps to be cared for. Many stories of atrocities filter back and the Karen in the camps are very mindful that something needs to be done for these people.

Recently whilst in Thailand I was conversing with a Pastor who has the needs of these people very much at the forefront of his mind – together with a few other people this Pastor is setting up a training school to train “mobile teachers” who can go out into the forests and offer some form of education and Bible teaching to the forest children. These teachers will attach themselves to a community group and run with that group in the forest and provide a minimal form of education to the children. The church also plans to build two dormitories in the camp to house 80 IDP children who want to attend the camps schools.

So far 21 people have volunteered to train as mobile teachers – however there is no funding available for this project to provide the books and resources necessary to train the teachers and equip them to teach in the forests.

This solution in itself will not come anywhere near meeting the needs of all the thousands of Burma's displaced children, but it is a start. The Pastor estimates that close to the camp where he lives there are over 20,000 displaced people in areas close to the border inside Burma, his training school will try to initially meet the needs of this small group alone. The cost of training each mobile teacher is about \$200. The cost of building each dormitory will cost \$2,750.

ARMS has agreed to assist with funding this project and is seeking donations to train the mobile teachers and build both dormitories. The total cost of this will be just under \$10,000. Already through the generosity of a local church here in Melbourne we have received a donation of \$1,000. Please pray for this project and consider sponsoring a teacher, or contributing towards the cost of building a dormitory.

Perhaps the most profound thing I heard this Pastor say came in reply to my question about the church members he has living on the Burmese side of the border in the forests with the Internally Displaced People. He said, “*when our people have to run away from the Burmese Army, they always choose to run with a non Christian family – so they can give them the support they need during the crisis – and so that they can tell them about Jesus!*”



Photo courtesy of Steve Cummaer

Burma's Internally Displaced Peoples Lack Basic Healthcare and Education



Karen Preschool Update

On a recent trip to Thailand David, and Belinda Coombe, (our sponsorship manager) visited the Mae-la refugee camp and spent time with Rose and Pelu, and the children. It was a wonderful visit! The children are all healthy and doing very well. Although the preschool's are short on supplies – what they lack materially they make up for in heart. We were treated to a very joyous concert put on by the children in our honour. There were dances, and recitals, and very enthusiastic singing followed by food!

The children were more relaxed than on other occasions – this could be because the wet season had started and there is no military threat from the Burmese at this time of year.

Rose introduced us to two new children who greatly impacted me. The first was a little girl named No Mu Ka Por whose parents were killed in Burma and she was found sleeping in the family pig pen trying to keep warm. No one knows how long she had been living there. But a kind man found her and brought her to Rose saying – *"please look after this child Rose – she has had a rough life"*.



Rose & No Mu Ka Por

When No Mu Ka Por entered Rose's orphanage, she had just turned 5 years old, was malnourished, covered in lice and was very small in stature. Rose opened her home and heart to this little girl and now she is much happier, better nourished and sleeps on her own bed. The money donors send us each month to support the work amongst the Karen refugees is helping kids like No Mu Ka Por. No Mu Ka Por cannot speak English, but I know that she would like to express to you her thanks for caring about her and the other refugee children who benefit from the gifts sent by ARMS donors to support these works in the refugee camps.

The second child that Rose introduced me to was a young boy aged somewhere between 9 and 11 years old. I do not remember his name but he had a big grin on his face and his eyes twinkled; he is one of those boys that seems to be slightly mischievous in a positive kind of way. But this was not always the case. For three years this boy served as a child soldier with the Burmese army who taught him to use a gun and sent him into combat situations.



Pelu with one of her children

In many places in Africa and also in Burma it is not uncommon for children to be used as soldiers. These children are forced to carry arms and fight. One can only imagine the confusion and the terror that these kids experience – however, this kid is lucky, he managed to run away and make his way to the border camps – and someone bought him to Rose. Now he acts like other boys, playing games and climbing trees and through the love of Rose and her staff is also learning about God's love for all of us.



Not all boy soldiers are this tall!

These children are directly benefiting from the donations sent to ARMS that sponsor Rose and Pelu's ministries. Rose and Pelu both asked me to thank our donors on their behalf, both of them are very mindful of your kindness to them.

Both preschools have some very practical needs at this time – Pelu needs funding, extra bedding for the extra children she has coming in; as well as that she needs more money for pigs as a disease has killed her current batch.

Rose needs to make extensions to her buildings to accommodate a further 12 kids who have recently arrived from Burma. In total we aim to raise \$1000 to help cover these needs.



News & Updates

East Timor Update

Great news!! The building project in East Timor has received a boost with a \$5,000 grant from Mission Enterprises with which to develop a prototype of the houses we want to build there.

Our friends at Mobile Mission Maintenance are partnering with us and assisting us with design and technical advice. The prototype should be built within the next few months. Please continue to pray for this project as we seek to do our best to help the needy people of East Timor.

Churches in NSW and Queensland are sending teams to build, as are YWAM bases from all around Australia.

In the immediate we need to raise many more thousands of dollars to pay for the costs of materials in the houses we are building.

We also need a full time project manager to be on site in Dili to help prepare for building teams.

RescueNet

Eight Australian delegates together with representatives from four other nations attended the RescueNet training conference in Thailand earlier this month - each attendee is now qualified to be deployed in a Rescue situation.

RescueNet International will mentor these people in the field and once they have reached a high level of competency they will be released to start to expand the RescueNet vision in other parts of Australia.

Our first Australian training school will run later this year and we are earnestly seeking donations and sponsorship to help us buy the many thousands of dollars worth of equipment that will be needed in order to safely deploy these teams in disaster situations.

Please continue to pray. We hope to have four teams operational by early next year.

The Fruit Trees Are Growing!

Some of you will remember that this time last year we planted a couple of hundred fruit trees on the property that surrounds Em's Clinic. Well earlier this month I was there and the tiny little saplings that we planted 12 months ago are thriving - some over 1 meter tall.

Napoleon (Em's husband) says that they have had some fruit in the first 12 months but next year the trees will really start to bear. Em and Napoleon asked me to thank everyone for their prayers. These trees will be a major asset to their ministry and to the diet of the children in the village who have already sampled the fruit from these trees.

Em and Napoleon are presently buying a small herd of goats to help support their ministry. Sale of these goats will raise funds to help feed the *collection* of children who are currently living at the clinic. Some families in distant villages have heard of Em and Napoleon, and have asked them to look after their children as they are too poor to provide for them. So far Em and Napoleon have 8 such children living in her family home. It seems they have become parents of a larger than expected family.

Napoleon is philosophical about the situation - "*if these children can't stay with their families, then God must want them to stay with us, he says*".



A village boy stands next to one of the many fruit trees near to Em's clinic. This tree is over a meter in height.



The Back Page

Oop's Grandmother

In last quarter's Focus On Mercy I wrote of how Oop's mother had unexpectedly died, whilst Oop himself had left the child sponsorship program to go to trade school and seek a job. (Oop's younger brother has taken his place on the sponsorship list.)

Last month I visited Oop to wish him the best and to express our condolences over the death of his mother. Upon entering the house Oop's grandmother was very excited - she is now caring for the boys and although very elderly is still somewhat spritely and talkative. She told me through an interpreter that when her daughter died - she cried for weeks - "I could not stop being sad", she said, - "I am old and I don't know what to do one night I had a dream about Jesus - after that dream my sadness stopped and I felt that I could live again".

The YWAM slum worker in that slum upon hearing this story gave the grandmother a New Testament to read - the problem is that the grandmother is going blind and can't read the Bible she has been given - *I would like to know what it says*, she said - Oop sometimes reads it to her but that is not very often. I have asked the slum worker to take Oop's grandmother to a doctor and to have her checked out to see if the problem is

cataracts. If it is, then for a couple of hundred dollars this dear lady will be able to read her Bible - that I think will be money well spent!



Oop and his grandmother in Bangkok last month. She wants to read the Bible ... her eye problems may be cataracts.

Focus On Mercy

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A Ministry Of Youth With A Mission Australia

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Karen Preschool Needs

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