

Longing to Go Home



The traditional water container and cup for the sharing of merits

The situation in the country is dire and the villagers from Sayadaw's village are still not able to return to their village. They stay at various monasteries and meditation centres, but are longing to go back to their homes and lives as they have known it. The adults want to work in the fields again growing peanuts, sesame seeds, peas, or water melons and look after their animals. The kids want to roam around the village and go down to the Mu River, play with their friends, and go to school. But that is not possible, not yet. When will it be possible? Nobody knows, but everybody hopes that it will happen soon. Due to the delicate situation, I must be careful what I say. At times, you must read between the lines.

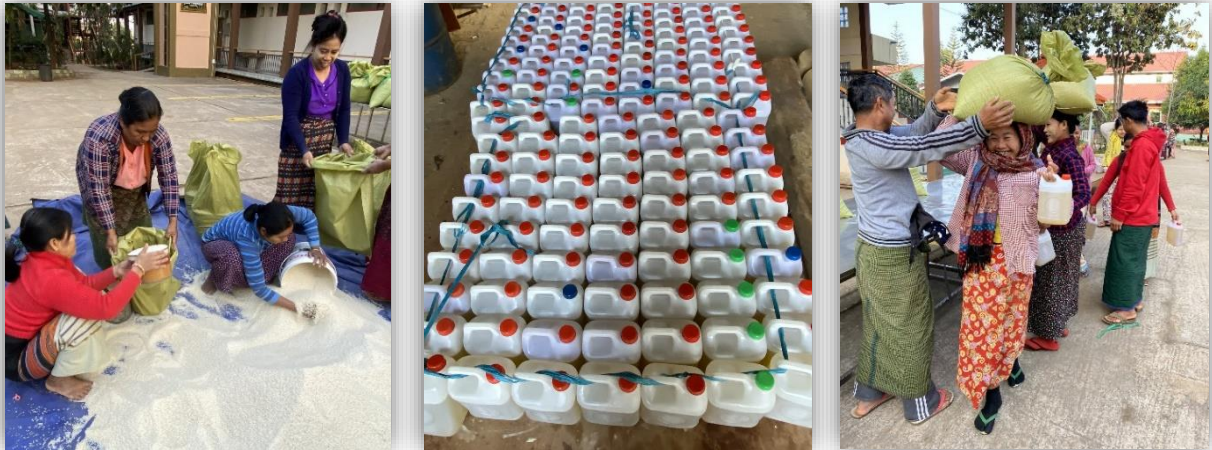
At the CMMC meditation center in Pyinsar (east of Mandalay, in the Shan Hills) there are 78 villagers from Th. – see previous MIA updates about the offering to this village, for example Th. Update 2020. They have been there since more than a year. In the first few months, Sayadaw U Indaka provided not only a place to stay but also all the meals. But feeding an additional 78 people every day is costly and very difficult in the long run. He came up with the following solution: meal donors for the meditators and resident monks, nuns, and helpers can decide whether they want to include the 'refugees' (Internally Displaced People) or not. If this is the case, then the refugees get breakfast and/or lunch in the dining hall. If donors do not include them, refugees will have to cook their own food. Fortunately, most of the meal donors include refugees. However, on days without meal donors, each family cooks their own meals. They need to buy rice, oil, vegetables, meat or fish, and everything needed to prepare a decent meal. In some families, there is a son or husband who works in the area and earns some money. With this, they get by, more or less. Other families have no income and completely rely on the generosity of others.



Distributing oil and rice at the CMMC Pyinsar

MIA offered a bag of rice and a bottle of oil to each Th. refugee at the Chanmyay Myaing Meditation Centre in Pyinsar, the Chanmyay Myaing Meditation Centre in Takone, the Metta Guna Meditation Centre in Pyinsar, and the Aye Mya Myaing Meditation Centre at the bottom of the hill. In total, about 300 Th. refugees got a good stack of rice and oil to sustain them in the coming weeks and months.

Impressions from the distribution of oil and rice:





Sayadaw's uncle is the abbot of the large **Maha Myaing Monastery** in Mandalay, his younger brother lives also there. A total of 360 refugees from various destroyed villages live in this monastery, including some from Th. village. All refugees receive a good meal every day at 4.30 pm, when those who work outside are back in the monastery. There is a kitchen team that cooks for all 360 people. Anyone can donate towards these meals. MIA offered money for 13 meals and a contribution to a health fund for those who need medical treatment. I was told that many local (rich) people from Mandalay are very generous and not only donate money for these meals but also offer clothes or other things.



A meal dāna at the Maha Myaing Monastery in Mandalay



During my two months in Myanmar, I saw and noticed that the spirit of generosity remains unbroken despite the terrible and challenging situation. People show solidarity and stand together, even or especially in these challenging times. They were also incredibly grateful for our support and not only gave us big smiles and lots of words of thanks, but also came back with small bags of traditional fried beans. These beans need to be peeled by hand – which is a very laborious job – and then fried. We left Pyinsar with a huge box full of these delicious beans!

The refugees at the CMMC in Pyinsar have somehow adjusted to their new situation and are trying to achieve some 'normalcy'. Early in the morning, they sweep the paved paths between the buildings and the forest path. Later in the morning, I saw them cooking in front of their kutis, the small buildings designed for meditators, when there was no meal dāna for them. They have also areas where vegetables such as cauliflower, aubergines, tomatoes, green beans, chillies, or broccoli are grown. To preserve the vegies, they dry them in the sun or make tomato paste. Washing clothes is also an almost daily chore, the washing is done by hand.





The little girls do what little girls do: for example, they go shopping with bags full of money (tree leaves) and a cell phone (a flat block of wood). To go 'to town' they apply lipstick and the traditional tanaka, a paste made from tree bark. At another time, they were beaming with a fancy headgear. One day late in the afternoon I saw the three girls standing on the stage (a slab for the donors) and doing a dance & singing performance! They were good performers – who knows, one day they could become famous singers.

The young boy proudly drives around his trucks, or simply carries them!



Five of the boys were ordained as novices. One of their daily tasks is to collect the leaves that have been swept into piles around the center's grounds and take them to the northeast corner of the site to burn them. They have a small three-wheeled electric vehicle to transport the leaves. The oldest of the novices is the driver, he is both skilled and races around at a relatively high speed. Of course, the novices like this job, including burning the leaves. Making a fire and playing with the fire is something attractive and fascinating that I also enjoyed in my younger years.





The three men suffering from trauma

MIA also offered some money for **medical support** for the refugees staying at the Maha Myaing Monastery in Mandalay and at CMMC in Pyinsar. At the Maha Myaing Monastery, we offered it to the Refugee Health Fund. All refugees with health problems can contact the committee to receive financial support for seeing a doctor, examinations, and medication. At the CMMC in Pyinsar we offered the money directly to the 8 sick persons who need to take medication regularly. Three of them are suffering from the trauma when their village was burned down a bit

more than a year ago and they had to flee.

Two of them are young men, one of them is married and has a daughter. With the medication, they are able to work and get through life. The wife of one of these men told me that her husband had stopped taking the medication a little while ago. He had thought that it was no longer necessary. But then he relapsed due to the severe trauma and was unable to work or do anything.



Her mother had a stroke and now is bed-ridden



Last year we donated a wheelchair to the family with a disabled boy, also refugees from Th. village, staying at the CMMC in Yangon. I was so pleased to see how helpful this wheelchair is. What a blessing it is for the boy to be part of the community and to interact with others, instead of being confined in the room most of the time. Adults and children alike take him for a ride around the center. Or he can be in the kitchen with his mom who helps with the cooking. The mother told me that he is making progress, for example: he can now stand on his legs for a few moments.



In case you need inspiration for a new hairstyle: this seems to be the latest hair-do!





With a heartfelt *Thank You* to all of you who make this wonderful support possible. We and the people in Myanmar are ever grateful for the unbroken generosity.

With mettā
Ariya Baumann, April 2024

