

## **Mennonites in Myanmar face desperate situation**

Posted: June 21, 2021

Amid mass protests, lethal military response and UN warnings of Myanmar becoming a “new Syria,” one Mennonite

source in the country said. “We are in darkness, full of fear and with no hope for the future.”

This story does not use the source’s name due to the threat to those who speak critically of the military.

A military coup on 1 February 2021 sparked largely peaceful protests and general strikes. According to our source and news reports, the military showed restraint at first but then began using live ammunition on peaceful protesters.

More than 800 protesters have been killed by the military, including dozens of children. More than 5,800 more have been detained, with reports of torture being used on some.

The violence and fear come on top of the pandemic, which already had devastating financial impacts on many people’s livelihoods, with many work places shut down.

“We are struggling for our daily food to survive,” wrote our source, referring to the food crisis among hundreds of church families. “Our income generation is zero because of the impact of the pandemic and the political crisis.”

There are about 2,000 Mennonites in 50 congregations in the largely Buddhist country, formerly known as Burma.

On 15 April 2021, MWC issued a pastoral letter to the church in Myanmar, acknowledging the suffering, and calling on God for mercy. Months later, the military continue to harass civilians, resulting in displacement and suffering.



“The situation in our country is getting worse,” says our source, who reports many church members are displaced. “The junta is armed and killing every day.

“On the other hand, COVID-19 is spreading in the country for the third time... [This] is very worrying because there is no care.

“People have abandoned their villages. They live in the jungle with no food and in the rain. Pray especially for our church people, struggling to make ends meet and fleeing war.”

*An MWC article adapted from Will Braun. His original article appeared in the May 10, 2021 print issue of Canadian Mennonite.*

*Photo: empty oxygen tanks in Kalemmyo, Myanmar*

## **Prayer for Myanmar**

*MWC Prayer Network*

“Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice!” (Psalm 130).

We hear accounts of military forces torturing and killing peaceful protesters, raiding houses and destroying property in Myanmar. A democratically elected government has been displaced. COVID-19 has caused suffering and death, and the people of Myanmar now face increased food and fuel costs at a time of high unemployment.

God grant our sisters and brothers strength to follow the way of Jesus, “wise as serpents and gentle as doves” (Matthew 10:16).

*Kyrie eleison, Lord have mercy!*

*from A pastoral letter to the church in Myanmar*

*J. Nelson Kraybill, President Mennonite World Conference*

## Excerpt from **Rely on God for everything**

Posted: March 4, 2021

The story of Brethren in Christ Church Nepal

In the present context of Nepal, we have both challenges and opportunities.

### **Challenges**

Persecution from the government and religious fundamentalists is one of the major challenges. Although Nepal is declared a secular country under the constitution of Nepal, which was promulgated 20 September 2015, and the constitution provides for freedom to practice one's religion, it still denies the right to convert another person. Christianity is a minor religion; therefore, followers of Jesus are often in the target of religious fundamentalists, who falsely accuse Christians of bribing others to Christianity. Several Christian leaders from other churches are in prison or facing court cases against them. BIC leaders are aware of the risk of accusations against them.

Other major challenge is natural disasters as Nepal is vulnerable to earthquakes, landslides, floods, thunderstorms, avalanche, fire, droughts and epidemics. Almost every year, hundreds of people die and thousands people are badly affected by these disasters.

In 2015, an earthquake took more than 10 000 lives and damaged 500 000 houses were damaged. People who were badly affected by such devastating disasters were slowly trying to recover. Now, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected normal human life. At press time, 51 919 people are infected of which 322 have died and 36 672 have recovered. Comparatively more than the direct hit by the illness has



been the lockdown, which badly affected people especially the daily wageworkers.

Poverty and increasing rate of unemployment of youth is another major problem because of which youth participants in the church decrease day by day. The young people are attracted to worldly pleasures and they try to compete with others to earn more instead of desiring to grow spiritually and be obedient to God.

After Nepal became a secular country it was a joy for Christians to worship and practice the faith in Christ more openly. Christian leaders are learning about the fundamental human rights and are raising their voice for religious freedom. But with this religious freedom, several cults came to Nepal who visit mostly Christian homes and try to impose the believers to accept their teaching that is contradicting our biblical and evangelical faith.

## **Opportunities**

In the midst of difficulties and challenges, many good things are also happening.

Persecution brings unity among the Christians and binds them in one cord despite doctrinal and denominational differences. It opens the ways to connect with each other and share our common concerns and also support each other in whatever ways possible. Those who are strong in faith try to help other believers to be strong and encourage them to trust God, spend time in continuous prayer and live in closer fellowship with other believers in Christ. They are motivated to organize chain prayer with fasting and praying and also depend on God rather than any resources or human being. It gives them sense of togetherness and unity as it is seen in the book of Acts. During difficulties, the believers experience the grace of God and also learn to support each other in every way as possible. They learn only to depend on God and God's power rather than human

power. As they live in unity, they learn to co-operate each other and try to resolve problems together.

In times of difficulty, like the pandemic, people are more open to the gospel. Especially when they are sick, lack supplies and also face political pressure, they are open to accept Jesus as Saviour.

*—Submitted by Hanna Soren on behalf of BIC Church Nepal.*

*Photo: Brethren in Community Welfare Services helps farmers like these in Jahada Rural Municipality in eastern Nepal through food security projects, vocational training programs and rural education programs. Henk Stenvers*

## **Prayer for Nepal**

*MWC Prayer Network*

May our hearts and souls hold all of our global brothers and sisters in prayerful attendance while each of us struggles with the realities and consequences not only of the pandemic but of severe and violent oppression, economic disruption etc.

May our hearts and souls be opened to the small everyday miracles and huge kindnesses in the world directly surrounding us.

May our hearts and souls be filled with patience and gentleness towards all the people working so hard to help ease our way out of this pandemic.

May our churches find new and hopeful ways of being church in a world that changes rapidly.

May our focus be not on quantity but on quality, on gentle kindness instead of targets, on prayerful silence instead of barricades.

## **‘Thank you for not leaving us alone’ Canned meat, relief kits reach Haiti earthquake survivors**

Posted: September 2, 2021

MCC.org By Linda Espenshade

Boxes of canned meat and relief kits from Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) brought joy and relief to recipients who are struggling to recover from the Aug. 14 earthquake that devastated the southern peninsula of Haiti.

The supplies were the first of any to reach Saint-Jean-du-Sud, a southwestern municipality, made up of several towns, on Aug. 31, more than two weeks after the 7.2 magnitude earthquake occurred. Two thousand people died. It destroyed homes and buildings, leaving 650,000 people in need of emergency management assistance.



“Thank you for not leaving us alone,” one woman told Paul Shetler Fast, MCC’s health coordinator and former representative in Haiti who was present for the Aug. 31 distribution. “We’ve felt very alone these last days waiting after the earthquake, hoping someone would come, hoping someone would not forget us.”

Relief organizations, including MCC, struggled to get supplies to people because the main road to the south was unsafe. Gang activity and robbery of supply trucks as well as tropical storm Grace, which came three days after the earthquake, kept trucks grounded.

Gradually police have been able to establish more security on the road, so two members of MCC's assessment team drove to Saint-Jean-du-Sud on Aug. 29 to help set up for the distribution.

And two days later MCC sent its first shipment and two more assessment team members by a Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF) airplane. MAF provided its services free of charge.

The distribution unfolded smoothly, Fast said, because MCC's partner AVOREDES was organized and prepared. Fifty families received a relief kit and 12 cans of meat, which represents the maximum the aircraft could hold.

AVOREDES chose the recipients whose homes were damaged or destroyed and were especially vulnerable in other ways. They included pregnant women, people with disabilities, and families headed by elderly persons or single women. About half were members of Mennonite churches in the area.

"All of them that we talked to mentioned, you know, a neighbor, who they knew was facing hard times — family member, cousin, someone who they knew needed help, who they would be sharing some of their cans with," Shetler Fast said. "We weren't telling them to do that. We weren't encouraging them to do that. But they said, 'You know, when God gives you a gift, then you give gifts to others.'"

Their generosity and compassion also sustained them before help arrived.

"Everywhere you look, people are doing what they can to rebuild, patching houses that can be patched," Shetler Fast said. "Neighbors have been letting neighbors stay in their house, especially when it rains." Otherwise, those without safe housing sleep outside.

About half of the vulnerable recipients were members of Mennonite congregations in the area, which are part of Assemblée de la Grâce Mennonite Church, a member of

Mennonite World Conference. AVOREDES, the Creole acronym for Association for the Reform and Development of St. Jean-du-Sud, is associated with Assemblée de la Grâce.

MCC intends to send two more shipments to this area in the next couple of weeks with MAF. The assessment team will evaluate long-term needs this week. The results will inform MCC's long-term response.

This same area is still recovering from Hurricane Matthew which caused a lot of devastation in 2016, said Shetler Fast. People remember how MCC helped them rebuild their livelihoods then and are asking for similar support this time.

The earthquake caused market women to lose their goods that were stored at market and in their homes. This year's crops, which would be used to pay school fees, are gone. Farmland is destroyed, churches, houses, roadways, bridges and schools are damaged.

"And so people looking ahead, not just to ... the need for the next plate of food. But beyond that," said Shetler Fast. "How do they rebuild? How do they send their kids to school this fall? How do they rebuild a livelihood that's sustainable?"

MCC expects that its long-term response is likely to include trauma healing and long-term livelihood recovery, said Raquel Conde Guevara, interim MCC representative in Haiti from Oakville, Ontario. The work may be carried out in cooperation with other non-governmental organizations.

Conde Guevara said MCC also will work with another southern MCC partner, SOFA, the Creole acronym for Solidarity of Haitian Women. Its work is focused on preventing gender-based violence.

In the midst of a disaster, women are more vulnerable to abuse, said Conde Guevara. She expects MCC's support of SOFA's abuse prevention and psychological and social support to increase as part of the earthquake response.



SOFA staff in the town of Beaumont report that more than 300 houses were damaged and destroyed in addition to livelihoods, gardens and livestock. MCC is sending meat and relief kits there too.

*Photo: Angie Mosie Bernard holds 12 cans of MCC canned meat that MCC's partner AVOREDES distributed to her and 49 other earthquake survivors on Aug. 31. The earthquake badly damaged her family home.  
MCC photo/Paul Shetler Fast*

## **Prayer for Haiti**

*MWC Prayer Network*

Lord, you have formed your people with diversity within the body of Christ. Yet this gift sometimes seems unwelcome. Our brothers and sisters hold different opinions and practices that make us feel uncomfortable. Continue to teach us through your Spirit to learn unity without uniformity.

Lord, you call us to speak to each other honestly and directly when there is offense. Give us courage to do so with grace and compassion. Guide us also to search our own hearts for ways we have failed and lead us in repentance.

Lord, you have placed us as your caretakers upon the earth. Show us your glory in the world around us, in its abundance and its fragility. Forgive us for our selfish consumption. Teach us humility in our dominion and remind us how our actions affect those around us.

## Hope fades for resuming MCC Afghanistan programs

'Our hearts break' for the people of Afghanistan, co-director says

Posted: August 25, 2021

John Longhurst for Anabaptist World

Almost two weeks after the Taliban took over Afghanistan, hope is fading that Mennonite Central Committee's partners can resume programs in that country.



“There is a lot of fear, a greatly increased sense of desperation,” said Rebecca Burkholder who, with her husband, Blaine Derstine, directs MCC’s programs in Afghanistan from their home base in Thailand.

The situation is different from last week when the couple, from Lancaster, Pa., reported their partners had a sense of optimism for their future work.

At that time, all of MCC’s literacy, health, education and peace programs were put on pause in the hope of resuming in a couple of weeks.

But now that hope is diminished.

“People are feeling afraid and powerless,” Burkholder said. Banks are closed, so nobody can get any money. At the same time, prices are rising dramatically for flour, cooking oil, fuel and other things.

“We sincerely hope we can once again serve with the people of Afghanistan, but there are no guarantees at this point,” she said.

Derstine added: “Last week things seemed more positive than what we are seeing now. Back then partners were really hopeful things would come around.”

Now, he said, “there’s panic in the air,” along with a decreased sense of security.

Partner staff are still safe and staying home, they said.

“Our hearts break for them,” said Burkholder. “What we can do for them is so limited.”

Programs continue to be on pause, they said. MCC is monitoring and assessing the situation.

Meantime, they invite people in North America to pray for the people of Afghanistan.

“Remember them in your hearts,” Burkholder said.

MCC has provided \$22 million U.S. in aid to Afghanistan since 2001. That includes a large grant from the Canadian government for maternal, newborn and child health.

*Photo: Taliban fighters patrol in Kandahar, Afghanistan, on Aug. 15. Sidiqullah Khan/AP*

## **Prayer for Afghanistan**

*MWC Prayer Network*

Blessed are the meek, Jesus said, for they will inherit the earth. Lord, may we live out your kingdom in humility and patience.

Blessed are the merciful, Jesus said, for they will receive mercy. Lord, may we have compassion on each other, especially on those with whom we don’t agree.

Blessed are the peacemakers, Jesus said, for they will be called children of God. Lord, we desire to be known as your people by our love for all and our ability to walk calmly into conflict seeking to understand and transform.

Lord, teach us to be your salt amid divisions, especially those within churches and families, and to be your illuminating justice, especially where there is systemic discrimination against those who are poor or people of color.