



MYANMAR EMERGENCY

UPDATE FROM THE MISSION



HELP US TO SUPPORT THESE GOOD AND HARDWORKING PEOPLE WHO SUFFER VIOLENCE AND REPRESSION.

Dear sister, dear brother,

My name is Brother Joe, and I am writing to you from Myanmar, a faraway country that you may know as Burma, to tell you about the tragedy that its people are enduring.



The people of Myanmar protested peacefully against the army coup.

We are located in South-East Asia, between India, China, Laos, Thailand, and the sea. Myanmar is a large country inhabited by good and hardworking people, motivated by a deep spirituality and a desire for peace.

On February 1st this year, Myanmar came to international attention because its army seized power in a coup d'état. A state of emergency was declared and Aung San Suu Ky, Nobel laureate and head of government, was arrested. She had been democratically elected by the people of Myanmar in free elections that took place in November 2020.



My Franciscan brothers and I witnessed the shocking violence, the death of hundreds of civilians, and the arbitrary detention of thousands of people, who were guilty of nothing except peaceful protest.

The night-time attacks by soldiers in Yangon, the country's largest city, still resonate in my eyes and in my heart. The soldiers, fully armed, entered houses, broke windows, and smashed doors. They stole any money and the few valuables to be found, and also arrested people on the spot. It doesn't take much to end up in jail - it's enough for one of them to take a dislike to you!



Hundreds of civilians were killed, and thousands of people were arbitrarily arrested.

We Franciscans have not remained confined to our friary. On the contrary, we have chosen to join with the people of Myanmar in their peaceful protests and marches, even though our lives may be at risk.

The escalation of army repression made the

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Even though our lives may be at risk, we Franciscan friars stand by the people in protest.

rule of law meaningless. Martial law, imposed on March 15th, provides for detention in prison (and even the death sentence) for crimes against the military junta and the established order. In addition, the army has closed borders, blocked communications, silenced foreign news agencies, and is now trying to shut down social media and the internet.

I plead with you to support the people of Myanmar with your prayers and your support so that democracy may return, and the current crisis find a peaceful and lasting solution.

Pope Francis and Br Michael Perry (our Franciscan Minister General) have already appealed to the international community to prevent further loss of life and to ensure the restoration of the democratically elected government of Myanmar.

But it's not just freedom that's absent in Myanmar. The military dictatorship that has ruled the country since 1962 has concentrated wealth in the hands of the very few. As a result, huge numbers live in abject poverty.

Let me tell you some of the stories that I have come across during my time on the mission.



In Myanmar, wealth is in the hands of very few, while many families live in misery.

CHILDREN ARE HUNGRY AND COLD

In Tonzang, the Franciscan sisters who run the orphanage look after thirty-five children. The climate in this part of the country is cold, and the resources available to the sisters are pitiable: the children don't even have blankets! The sisters themselves can't afford a visit to a doctor or medication.

THE ORPHANAGE IN MYAUNGTAGAR LACKS EVEN THE BARE ESSENTIALS

Four Franciscan sisters take care of forty children in Myaungtagar. They are in great difficulty and have only a budget of 43 cents a



MYANMAR AT A GLANCE

Population: 54 million

Main city: Yangon (Rangoon)

Official language: Burmese

Religion: 88% Buddhist, 6% Christian, 4% Islamic, 2% other

Income gap between rich and poor: among the largest in the world

Government: nominally a Republic. In fact, after running the country as a dictatorship from 1962 to 2010, the military once again took control in a coup d'état on February 1st, 2021.

Internal struggles: since 1948, following independence from the U.K., there have been a succession of civil wars between the 135 ethnic groups that make up the country.



day per child! The little ones do not eat fruit or meat, which means that they frequently fall ill and die of diseases that are easily curable. Apart from lacking food, they also don't have enough books, pens, and pencils for school.

FAMILIES ARE INCREASINGLY IN DIFFICULTY

Marley is 25 years old and lives with her 6-year-old daughter and her mother, who has lung disease. Marley has tried to support her family by selling postcards. However, she had to borrow money to pay for medical treatment for both her daughter and mother, and when she could not repay the money, she was savagely beaten. Now, with our help, she has a job that helps her to pay off her debts and regain some hope.

Throughout 2020 up to now, the Franciscans have been distributing food parcels in response to the pandemic, which has made a bad situation even worse.

As you see, the needs are enormous, and we cannot do it alone. So, I ask you to be there for lonely children, to support families in difficulty, and to be generous to the poor who are our brothers and sisters.

I would also ask you to support us in the construction of a friary in the northern region of the country, which is an area where new vocations to the Order are more likely to come from. In that friary we also plan to assist the wider population as well as giving formation and training to the local clergy, which was one of reasons that Franciscans came to Myanmar. Our witness to St. Francis' way of dialogue and love for the poor is vital if we are to help build a peaceful future in this country.



Children in orphanages need food, clothing, medical care, and school supplies.



We provide work so people can pay for the care of their sick family members.



Every day, we distribute food parcels to help families in need.

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THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN MYANMAR AND THE FRANCISCANS

The first Catholic missionaries arrived in Burma around 1511. In 1867 there was a missionary drive towards the East of the country, led by Bishop Paul Ambrose Bigandet.

These missionaries left the cities for far distant villages and lived closely with the people, an approach that would please Pope Francis, who continually asks Christians to "go out" to what he calls the "existential and geographical peripheries".

At present the Catholic Church has three Ecclesiastical Provinces in Myanmar, but Catholics are still a tiny minority. The Franciscan

Order came with the 16th century missionaries and now comprises two missionary friars, four Solemnly Professed friars, two men in temporary vows, and eight young men who aspire to join the Order.

The friars work with young people and, in keeping with the Franciscan spirit, are engaged in helping the needy, whether they are Catholics or not.



By continuing to work among the poor, by helping victims of military repression, and by helping those most in need, our lives can be signs of hope and comfort. We pledge ourselves to promoting inter-religious dialogue and tolerance through brotherhood and sisterhood.



To bring help and comfort to those in need, the Franciscan friars need your support!

Thank you for your help. Let me conclude with Pope Francis' prayer: "Lord, Father of our human family, move us to create healthier societies and a more dignified world, a world without hunger, poverty, violence and war." (Cfr. Fratelli tutti, 287).

Peace and all good, Br Joe

P.S. The suffering people of Myanmar really need help, so I ask you to also support us through praying the Holy Rosary for peace. Thank you very much!

PLEASE SUPPORT THE FRANCISCAN FRIARS' AID PROGRAMS FOR OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN MYANMAR
they are a real witness to freedom, love, and hope.



A donation of **35 €uro** means:

Food parcels with day-to-day necessities for needy families.

A donation of **50 €uro** means:

Food, clothes, warm blankets, and school supplies for children in orphanages.

A donation of **75 €uro** means:

Paying some medical expenses faced by the most impoverished families.

A donation of **100 €uro** means:

Helping to construct a Friary and House of Formation for young friars so that the Franciscan Mission will have a great future.

HERE'S HOW TO SUPPORT THE FRANCISCAN FRIARS

If you donate by bank transfer, remember to indicate the purpose as well as your name, surname, and address so that you can be thanked and informed about the project.

by **BANK TRANSFER** to a bank account in the name of **FONDAZIONE OFM FRATERNITAS ONLUS**
BANK: Banca Intesa Sanpaolo
IBAN: **IT15T030690960610000168958**
BIC-SWIFT: **BCITITMM**
REASON: Myanmar 2021

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For more information on the activity of the OFM Fraternitas Onlus Foundation as well as on the processing of personal data by the latter, visit the website www.ofmfraternitas.org

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