

The **Mandalay** *Projects*



**“Hope is rare now
in Myanmar”**

UNHC for Human Rights

Annual Report
to Members & Supporters

2022-23

SHAME

“Systematic, gross human rights violations, amounting to war crimes and crimes against humanity, are being perpetrated daily on the people of Myanmar.”

Tom Andrews, UN rapporteur on Myanmar

“Satellite images confirm that numerous incidents have involved destruction of entire villages, while other villages have been set on fire on multiple occasions. People who are unable to flee risk being burned to death. Those who can escape – over 1.3 million people displaced since the coup was launched – face destitution.”

Volker Türk, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

“Attacks on schools and hospitals in contravention of international humanitarian law also constitute one of the six grave violations against children in times of armed conflict strongly condemned by the Security Council.”

Antonio Guterres, UN Secretary-General

“Time is running out to save Myanmar’s stricken generation. More than half of the country’s child population, about 7.8 million, remain out of school. Children continue to bear the brunt of the Myanmar military’s ongoing attacks to assert control. They have been dispatched to participate in armed conflicts.”

UN Child Rights Committee

“The junta has consistently shown it holds no respect for international rule of law, human rights or democracy. Across the country, we see arbitrary arrests, targeting of civilians, torture, mass gender and sexual-based violence, and other restrictions and assaults on rights and freedoms. We are appalled by the ongoing and egregious actions of the junta. The people of Myanmar have shown immense courage in the face of this.”

UK Government

“By nearly every feasible measurement, and in every area of human rights – economic, social and cultural, as much as civil and political – Myanmar has profoundly regressed.

Hope is rare now in Myanmar.”

Volker Türk



The **Mandalay** Projects

Our **VISION** is:

*that all children will live **free from fear of exploitation**,
with **access to a proper education**.*

Our **MISSION** is:

*to **prevent the trafficking of children into the worst forms of child labour***

Our **PHILOSOPHY** is:

*that children's vulnerability to trafficking is directly linked
to their **living conditions and life opportunities**.*

Our **OBJECTIVE** is:

*to reduce that vulnerability to trafficking
by **giving children a safer and healthier environment** and
by helping them to become **more independent and self-sufficient**.*

Shelter Health Education Hope

Dear Members & Supporters

It is with a heavy heart that we present our latest Annual Report.

Our report normally goes out in the early months of the year, but on this occasion we have deliberately delayed the process, in the hope that a more positive message for our supporter group might unfold.

Sadly, it has not.

Conditions on the ground in Myanmar are truly dreadful, and much, much worse than one might assume from the scant Western media coverage. Our first page is headed "SHAME" because that is what we think the world should be feeling about the situation. There is overwhelming evidence of human rights contraventions, breaches of international law (and, in particular, crimes against children) and total disregard for anything resembling democracy. Despite this, the military junta continues its barbaric war against its own people with seeming impunity.

In this short Report we include some commentary from our local team in Myanmar, which highlights the personal challenges they are facing. When we are in contact with our team, we can sense their anxiety. All communication with our reps is via secure, end-to-end encrypted platforms, but even then our friends are fearful, and delete all messages as soon as they have been sent or read.

We also include some rather dramatic news about one of our partner orphanages, which is dealing with the reality of military activity in close proximity to their site. The infrastructure which The Mandalay Projects has developed there is at serious risk, but there is little we can do to protect it. Our absolute priority is the safety and wellbeing of the children, and we have made emergency funding available to the orphanage management team, to enable them to flee their home and find alternative accommodation in a safer part of the state.

For obvious reasons, we have not identified any individual or partner orphanage by name, but those of you who know our organisation well will recognise the players and locations.



For now, the strategic development aims of The Mandalay Projects must be put to one side, while we do what we can to provide tactical humanitarian aid where it is most urgently needed.

We are confident that you will fully support us in this mission – we cannot sit back and watch these events, and do nothing.

That said, we must be realistic. We must not do anything which endangers our local team of volunteers or their families. And we must take great care that the support we provide does not inadvertently make matters worse for our partner orphanages. Several of them are located in the main conflict zones, where local resistance forces are taking on the Burmese military, and where basic provisions are in scarce supply, or are only available at hugely inflated prices. A simple donation of, say, a sack of rice can cause trouble, as both sides in the military conflict are desperate for supplies, and both will view even a humble bag of rice as a valuable prize.

All of us at The Mandalay Projects are obviously deeply saddened by what is happening in Myanmar. While we are determined to do what we can to help, and will not turn our backs on our many friends there, we do feel rather powerless.

This situation cannot continue indefinitely, and we truly hope for an end to the hostilities and a return to normality, whatever that might now look like. We will continue to monitor the situation carefully, and adjust our own operating model accordingly.

In the meantime, as always, we send you our heartfelt thanks for all your interest and support.

The Board of Directors of The **Mandalay Projects** Limited

Ian Love	<i>Founder & Chairman</i>
David Gibson	<i>Founder & CEO</i>
Anne Love	<i>Director</i>

July 2023

A local perspective. . .

We asked one of our local volunteers in Myanmar to write an essay, describing his feelings about the situation in his country, and how it is impacting the lives of his family members, friends and others in the community. His essay captures the difficulties they face, but also highlights the indomitable spirit and optimism of the Myanmar people, which we have witnessed time and time again during our 20 years working there. Here is what he wrote.

I operate as a travel agent in Myanmar, but I am also proud to be a volunteer social worker, helping The Mandalay Projects with its philanthropic work in my country. The military coup on February 1, 2021, and the subsequent violence and instability, have had a significant impact on both my personal and professional life.

As a travel agent, I have seen a complete collapse of the tourism industry in Myanmar. Many hotels, restaurants, and travel agencies have been forced to close due to the lack of tourists. The pandemic had already caused a severe decline in tourism, and the political instability has further exacerbated the situation. As a result, many people in the tourism industry have lost their jobs, and businesses are struggling to stay afloat.

In my role as a social helper, the current situation has made it more challenging to reach and provide assistance to the orphanages in remote areas. The travel restrictions, roadblocks, and curfews imposed by the military junta have made it more difficult to deliver aid, and the internet shutdowns have made communication with the orphanages more challenging. Despite the challenges, I remain committed to helping those in need. I am working with local partners and other volunteers to find alternative ways to reach these orphanages and provide the assistance they need.

More generally, the situation has become very dangerous, even in the larger cities. One of my cycling friends was recently badly assaulted in Yangon. He had just popped out to buy some food for his family, as the power cuts meant they couldn't cook. He was beaten up by three men, and had his wallet and phone stolen. People are desperate. I have decided not to go out cycling while things are this dangerous.

My children have been significantly affected by the upheaval. The security situation has become increasingly chaotic, making it difficult for the children to feel safe and secure. The shortage of electricity has made it challenging for them to study and complete their homework. Public education is in turmoil, and private education costs have risen dramatically, and many families are struggling to afford it. The rising cost of healthcare has also made it difficult for families to access medical care when they need it.

My son has been particularly affected. He is at an age where he is thinking seriously about his future and is concerned about how the current situation will impact his prospects. He finds it difficult to focus on his studies and to plan for his future.

My daughter is younger and does not fully understand the severity of the situation, but she has noticed changes in her daily life, especially the difficulty of doing her homework when there is no power for light or air conditioning.

My family understands that, despite all these challenges, many other people face greater difficulties than we do.

We worry about the children at the orphanages. When I speak to the orphanage managers, they tell me that donations from local supporters have fallen significantly. They have had to make difficult decisions about how to care for the children with limited resources. They have had to cut back on some services and programs, which has been hard on the children who rely on them.

They have become more concerned about the security of the children, as the threat of child trafficking has become greater, particularly with the military looking for young recruits. In my opinion, these orphanage managers are true heroes in our society.

My hope for the future is that Myanmar will once again become a stable and democratic country, where all citizens have equal rights and access to basic services.

I hope that the military junta will be held accountable for their actions, and that democracy will be restored through peaceful means.

Moreover, I hope that the tourism industry in Myanmar will recover and that tourists will return to experience the rich culture and natural beauty of my country. I believe that the tourism industry has the potential to create jobs and economic opportunities for many people in Myanmar and to help the country develop.

I hope that my country will emerge from this crisis stronger and more resilient.

A difficult situation has just become a whole lot worse . . .

Earlier this year, we reported on social media that, with the assistance of our brave local support team in Yangon, we had been able to get much-needed funding to one of our most remote sites. Many of you would have recognised the place we were referring to, but we didn't name it, as to do so would potentially have put our partners at risk. We were able to finance three critically important mini-projects. Our Medical Fund enabled orphanage staff to purchase antibiotics and other drugs, the price of which had risen dramatically due to the impact of the military coup on supply chains. Our Education Fund paid local teachers to attend the orphanage, to provide vital education to all age groups at a time when the government education system was badly broken. The teachers are part of the broader resistance movement, so their identity couldn't be revealed as they are working in secret, and at great personal risk. Finally, we topped up one of our Workshop Training Funds, to assist with purchase of raw materials for our weaving looms. We were pleased that we were able to provide some basic support in such challenging circumstances.



Sadly, the recent news from this remote site has not been good.

The orphanage is located in an area where local resistance forces are actively engaged in combat with the Burmese military. The situation has become extremely dangerous, and fragments of shells and other weapons have been landing near the orphanage compound. The safety of the children and staff could not be guaranteed, and so the decision has been taken to evacuate the site. The staff and children (70 in total) have relocated to a safer site, about 20km away. They have found premises to rent for the next few months, and we are told that they are at least safe and comfortable for now. We have provided emergency funding, to assist them with rental costs, and to buy basic provisions. Communication with the staff is difficult, but we are able to contact them and we will actively monitor the situation there in the coming weeks and months. Sadly, at this stage, we have no idea what will happen to all our infrastructure at the orphanage, but that's for another time. For now the safety of the children is all that matters. The photo on the right shows some of the children at their new location. As if their young lives weren't already challenging enough . . .



In other news . . .

In our social media posts, we occasionally mention the ongoing support of our generous donors. We have been very grateful that, despite the fact that our strategic development work has been temporarily suspended, many of you have continued to make donations. Some of you donate by monthly direct debit, and we are very grateful for the regular income. Some, like Kari and Alyssa Willesee, raise funds by doing something fun and a bit different. In this case, the girls have once again raised a sizeable amount by baking and selling cupcakes outside their home. Thanks so much, girls. We really appreciate the effort, and we will put your donation to good use as soon as we can.



We learned recently of the sad passing, at the age of 91, of the Venerable Sayadaw of the Kani orphanage, in the Irrawaddy Delta region of Myanmar, which The Mandalay Projects has been supporting for many years. As the spiritual leader and guardian of the orphanage, Sayadaw was inspirational. He oversaw a strong leadership team, who introduced educational and vocational training initiatives we were proud to support. We had many long and interesting conversations with Sayadaw, and he always made time to meet our visiting group, and to thank us for the support we provided. We have sent our condolences to the Kani leadership group.



We try to keep in touch with former residents of our partner orphanages, particularly those who have taken advantage of vocational training provided by The Mandalay Projects. The original trainee in our looming workshop has set up her own tailoring business in her home, and is employing another local in her business. It's a modest affair, but is generating regular income for our trainee. Her home is in the middle of a military conflict zone, but we have been in touch with her recently and she is safe, and her business is doing quite well in very challenging circumstances.

For further information please visit our website at
themandalayprojects.net
where, among many other things, you will find
back copies of our previous Annual Reports



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