

2024 Thailand Trip Report
by Tansy Kadoe, Executive Committee Member of Friends of Burma
(September 24 – October 13, 2024)

Our recent trip to Thailand was a transformative experience, filled with opportunities for fellowship, learning, and direct service to communities profoundly affected by conflict in Burma. With heartfelt gratitude, we acknowledge the prayers and contributions that made this journey possible, particularly those from the supporters of Friends of Burma. Your enduring commitment continues to bring hope and healing to the people of Burma, year after year. The trip underscored the resilience of individuals in the face of adversity and highlighted the pressing needs of those we encountered.

We successfully distributed 450 rice bags and 800 gift bags, a big blessing to many families and children. Financial contributions were made to support various ministries, enabling ongoing mission efforts. The trip fostered deeper relationships with local leaders and provided insights into the resilience and faith of those we met.

1. International Myanmar Baptist Fellowship Conference (Sept 26-29, Chonburi):

Janet Zan and I arrived in Bangkok and immediately traveled to Chonburi for the International Myanmar Baptist Fellowship - Youth and Young Adult Conference. This gathering brought together over 200 young people from the US, Singapore, Japan, Australia, Burma, and Thailand. The atmosphere was a mix of vibrant energy and deep concern, reflecting the participants' awareness of the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Burma.



I led a workshop titled “Hope Farm,” where I provided tools to cultivate hope rooted in faith. Janet helped with music and handouts. We focused on actionable steps to maintain hope amidst despair, encouraging participants to draw strength from God’s promises.



2. Mae Sot Visits (Sept 29 - Sept 30):

After the conference, we traveled to Mae Sot, a region close to the Thai-Burma border.

We visited a safe house that provides refuge for over 30 individuals, many of whom shared harrowing stories of trauma and loss. This experience reinforced the necessity of emotional and spiritual support for those continuing to suffer from severe trauma.

Afterward, we visited Pastor Kyaw's family. He shared his journey as a pastor's child who rebelled in his youth but ultimately found his calling to help those struggling with alcohol and drug abuse. He invited us to his church service, where he planned to baptize a Muslim couple, but we couldn't attend due to a tight schedule. Pastor Kyaw hopes to acquire land to build a church, focusing on reaching those who do not know Jesus, particularly those facing addiction.

Throughout our time in Mae Sot, we connected with local leaders who are tirelessly working to provide aid. We distributed essential supplies in IDP and refugee camps, directly impacting those affected by displacement.



Pastor. Kyaw (next to Tansy) and his wife is next to Janet.

3. Kaneh Lay Hta IDP Camp (Oct 1):

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reports that there are approximately three million Internally Displaced People (IDPs) in Burma, with the total population of concern exceeding four million. Along the Thai-Burma border, several IDP camps were established, and we visited three of them during our journey.

On the morning of October 1, 2024, we loaded two trucks with essential supplies—rice bags and gift bags containing school supplies, shoes, soap, snacks, drinks, clothes, sardines, and noodles. We headed to the Kaneh Lay Hta IDP Camp in the Brigade 6 Area, right by the Thai border, with Rev. Dr. Wado, president of Kawthoolei Hope Theological Seminary, as our driver. Crossing the Gaw Lay Kee River was unexpected; Dr. Wado drove right into the water, navigating through at least two feet of it, and I felt immense relief when we emerged on the other side.

At Kaneh Lay, about 500 residents, including 70 children, live in challenging conditions. While we distributed the gift bags at the school, more camp occupants came to receive assistance upon hearing we were there. Some villagers shared their attempts to return to their homes, only to retreat to the camp due to ongoing airstrikes.



Time Table	Grade . 3, 5	Grade . 4	Grade . 6
Monday	Karen Myanmar	English Geography	Mathematics Hygiene
Tuesday	Mathematics Hygiene	Karen Myanmar	English Geography
Wednesday	English Geography	Mathematics Hygiene	Karen Myanmar
Thursday	Karen Myanmar	English Geography	Mathematics Hygiene
Friday	Mathematics Hygiene	Karen Myanmar	English Geography
မျှတိန်ခိုင်း	8:30 Am	မျှတိန်ခိုင်း	12:30 Pm
နေ့	11:30 Am	နိုင်ငံခိုင်းပျော်	3:00 Pm



One of the camp's biggest struggles is access to clean water. Thanks to your generous donations, we were able to provide tanks and pipes to collect water from a nearby mountain spring.





4. Mae La Refugee Camp (Oct 2 - 4)

The Mae La Refugee Camp is the largest camp, housing over 50,000 people. Here, we organized a fun event for 247 children, including games, gift bags, refreshments, and a talent show that showcased the Karen cultural traditions.

We also met with caretakers who provide critical support to the children, working without any financial compensation. Sharing a meal with them allowed us to celebrate their dedication and commitment to the well-being of the youth in their care.

We had a great visit with the leaders of Kawthoolei Karen Baptist Bible School and College (KKBBC), which trains more than 600 students for ministry. It was heartwarming to reconnect with friends after five years. These dedicated individuals truly inspire me, and I'm grateful for their work.





In Mae La Camp, I spent time with my brother and his wife, as well as my sister's family, who are new refugees—her son, daughter-in-law, their eight-year-old son, and one-year-old twin girls. I never imagined my sister would become a refugee, but I'm proud of her for standing up for what is right, despite the high cost. I'm grateful to friends who helped her find shelter in the camp. I also visited the prayer house on the mountaintop and explored the morning market there.

I was also thrilled to see that the shop we established a few years ago is thriving and positively contributing to the Bible School.



On the afternoon of October 4th, we returned to Mae Sot. The most challenging and perhaps traumatic experience of the trip was getting stuck in a malfunctioning elevator for half an hour. Despite our attempts to use the elevator phone, no one answered, and my phone had no signal. It was hot and uncomfortable, and my anxiety escalated as I felt claustrophobic. For the remainder of my stay, I opted to use the stairs to reach my hotel room on the seventh floor.



5. Baw Ner Hta IDP Camp (Oct 5)

We loaded up two trucks and traveled to Baw Ner Hta IDP camp, located near Nu Poe Refugee Camp in the Brigade 6 Area near the Thai border. The scenic, mountainous terrain featured long stretches of cornfields, but the winding path was challenging, with some sections damaged by heavy rain. After five hours, we reached the border, where polite Thai soldiers questioned our drivers and took photos.

Entering Baw Ner Hta IDP camp, we found a small river where villagers sought refuge from battles. Although the Burmese soldiers had retreated, the community lived in constant fear of

airstrikes and artillery. We met two organized leaders and learned that about 432 families, totaling 2,334 people, resided in the camp. Many had lost their villages and expressed despair: "We can't enter Thailand. We can't go back to our village. We can't work. We have no healthcare, and schooling for our children is a challenge." As we walked through the hot and humid camp, we observed children playing with marbles and a school serving K-7th grade with over 400 students and ten teachers. The pregnant principal looked exhausted and mentioned the school couldn't afford textbooks. Once again, thanks to your generous support, we were able to provide a curriculum and notebooks. After more than 10 hours on the road, we returned to our hotel, feeling exhausted yet fulfilled.



Church and homes in Baw Ner Hta IDP Camp





6. Pulu Plaw IDP Camp (Oct 6):

Our next destination was Pulu Plaw IDP Camp in the Brigade 7 Area near the Thai border. After loading two trucks, we encountered a snake that our driver found along the way—though not particularly meaty, it added an unexpected twist to our journey. We arrived at the Moei River, where we took two motorized wooden canoes across its strong current. Despite some unease, I was excited about the crossing, which felt lengthy as we battled the current.

On the other side, we hopped onto a trailer pulled by a hand-walking farm tractor. Unlike previous camps, Pulu Plaw featured brick buildings, constructed by the Japanese Nippon Foundation during a temporary truce. The camp housed 101 families, totaling 419 occupants, eagerly awaiting our arrival to receive rice bags and gift bags. I was delighted to reunite with a long-lost old friend, who whispered, “How did you know we were running out of rice?” God was doing His thing.

A young leader, who also served as the school principal, efficiently distributed the rice bags by calling heads of households based on the census. The return canoe ride was quicker, as we floated with the current.







Afterward, we visited the children of my childhood friends, who had sought shelter from the Burmese army. It was heartbreaking to see young talents—one nearly finishing medical school and another with a computer science degree—facing such cruelty and adversity. We capped off the day with a visit to another friend's house, enjoying the warmth of connection amidst challenging circumstances.

7. Kawthoolei Hope Theological Seminary and Learning Centers (Oct 7):

Janet and I led worship at Kawthoolei Hope Theological Seminary (KHTS) and I spoke to the students about the critical importance of understanding mental health. I emphasized the need to create safe and healing spaces within our churches for those who are suffering and in emotional distress. During our visit, we met Thramu Esther from Nagaland, India, who is actively teaching and serving at the seminary. We also toured their faculty housing, which is currently under construction.



Thoo Mwe Kee Migrant School Learning Center serves around 3,000 disadvantaged Karen children, youth, refugees, and IDPs, providing education from primary to post-high school levels, supported by 106 dedicated teachers. Nearby, Bethel Church has established a care and counseling center to support the students, culminating in a celebration for World Mental Health Day attended by over 300 students. I enjoyed speaking to the students about the importance of mental health and self-care, as they were engaged and interactive. I am proud of the Bethel Church Care and Counseling Team for their selfless commitment. The principal's forward-thinking, understanding of mental wellbeing and strong support greatly enhance the efforts in this vital area.



Eric and Yuri Lembke, missionaries with International Ministries, joined us along with their daughter, Harper, which was a wonderful blessing. Upon returning to Dr. Wado's house, we enjoyed grilled catfish together. However, our meal was interrupted by the loud sound of two explosions, a harsh reminder of the vulnerability faced by the displaced people of Burma.

8. Chiang Mai (Oct 8-10):

We left the Mae Sot area for a few days in Chiang Mai, where we observed the impact of flooding and the Thai government's response in providing assistance. In contrast, the Burmese military blocked flood aid and humanitarian efforts.

I spent time with my childhood friend and my niece's family, and on October 9th, we visited the Hmong Village Market to buy items for our church fundraising effort.



On October 10th, I met with Chris and Rebecca Reed and their four children, who are dedicated missionaries evangelizing and equipping locals to establish churches. My admiration for them is immense; despite hardship, they bring light into the darkness with unwavering faith and courage.

9. Return to Bangkok (Oct 11-13):

Our final days were spent in Bangkok, where we marveled at the city's modernity and the luxury surrounding us. This juxtaposition vividly highlighted the striking disparities in living conditions we witnessed throughout our travels.

We enjoyed exploring the city's vibrant markets and restaurants, reflecting on the experiences that had shaped our journey. We departed for the US with a sense of gratitude for the connections made and lessons learned throughout the trip.

Prayer and Needs Requests:

- For the safety, sustenance, and educational needs of children in IDP camps, who face uncertain futures.
- For the young people of Burma, whose lives have been severely impacted by ongoing conflict and violation of human rights.
- For justice and support for those sheltering in Thailand, as they navigate the complexities of their situations.
- For spiritual encounters for those who do not yet know God's love and hope, that they may find solace in faith.
- For the end of the dictatorship in Burma, and for efforts to rebuild communities affected by violence.
- For the Lembkes and the Reeds as they serve as missionaries among the Thai and Karen people.
- It's easy to feel overwhelmed by the constant demand for basic needs, but these efforts are crucial for a brighter future. Pray for compassion and mercy to address fundamental needs while providing sustainable solutions.
- **Church Planting:** We seek funding of **\$25,000** to help plant a church with Rev. Kyaw.
- **KKBSC Rebuilding:** We need **\$40,000** to rebuild the dilapidated dorm and chapel for KKBSC students and orphans.
- **Faculty Housing at KHTS:** Assistance of **\$10,000** is required to complete the faculty housing.
- **Thoo Mwe Kee School:** The school is facing a funding crisis, with monthly expenses of around **\$25,000**. We encourage sustainable support and visits to the school.

This trip served as a profound reminder of God's provision and the resilience of individuals facing immense hardship. It underscored the urgent need for ongoing support and advocacy. We are deeply grateful for your prayers and assistance that made this impactful journey possible. Together, we can bring hope and healing to those in need.

With profound gratitude,

Tansy Kadoe