

The Christmas Bowl Offers a Chance to Vote for Refugees!



Many Australians have said that a vote for either major party at the recent Federal Election was a vote against refugees. As the people of Burma (Myanmar) go to the polls on November 7, Act for Peace's Christmas Bowl will give church-goers a chance to reach out to Burma's refugees during a time of political repression and unresolved armed conflicts.

Mr Alistair Gee, Executive Director of Act for Peace (the international aid agency of the National Council of Churches in Australia) said, "Imagine voting in Burma's general election. The ruling military dictatorship has detained the winner of the last election, Aung San Suu Kyi, for 15 years and has rewritten the constitution to ensure military leaders retain power."

Aung San Suu Kyi is due to be released a week after the election, although observers are skeptical this will take place.

Burma's military dictatorship has bombed and burnt down over 7,000 villages in eastern Burma (more than in any other current conflict around the world), leading to 500,000 internally displaced people near the eastern Burmese border with Thailand and 140,000 refugees in camps across it. The military continues to lay landmines around thousands of villages.

While the Burmese election will not help Burmese people displaced by war, the people of Australia can help through the Christmas Bowl.

Mr Gee said, "This Christmas, Australians have a chance to show their support for refugees. The Christmas Bowl supports programs helping over a million refugees from Burma and around the world to help rebuild their lives."

The theme of this year's Christmas Bowl is 'Share Christmas' and tells the story of the plight of a Burmese family living in a refugee camp on the Thai-Burma Border. Hsar Htoo (left, five years old) and Si Si Paw (right, 12 years old) have been living in the camps for all of their young lives after their family fled the conflict caused by Burma's military dictatorship.

Hsar Htoo said, "My family has been at the refugee camp for 12 years now. They left their village in Burma when people with guns and bombs came and began fighting. At the camp, my mother and big brother grow vegetables for us to eat. I help my mother by collecting water with my big sister at the water point. She works very hard to look after us."

Mr Gee said, "Supporting the Christmas Bowl is a vote for Burmese refugees in many ways. As it has done for over 20 years, the Christmas Bowl continues to provide food, shelter and support for refugees in the camps. The Christmas Bowl also provides emergency food for the most vulnerable hiding in the mountains of eastern Burma, prosthetic limbs for landmine victims, mapping of mine fields and human rights training for vulnerable communities."

If you would like to support refugees like Hsar Htoo and Si Si, please give to the Christmas Bowl. Gifts can be made through your local church, by phoning 1800 025 101 or by donating securely online at: www.actforpeace.org.au

Supplementary Information

Interviews

- Mr Alistair Gee, Act for Peace Executive Director

For more information or to arrange interviews: Edwyn Shiell, 0458 303 515, eshiell@ncca.org.au

Stories & Photographs

To download the high resolution photo of Hsar Htoo and Si Si (Photo: Janet Cousens/ Act for Peace), please go to: <http://www.actforpeace.org.au/site/DefaultSite/filesystem/documents/CB%202010/Tham-Hin-2-2010-Kids-eating-310.jpg>

For personal stories direct from Burma's camps and high resolution photograph sets go to:

http://www.actforpeace.org.au/Ways_To_Give/The_Christmas_Bowl/Resources_Events/Christmas_Bowl_Media.aspx

Resources

To order Christmas Bowl resources free call Sarah Gregory, Marketing & Communication Coordinator on 1800 025 101 or email christmasbowl@ncca.org.au.