

One Refugee Can Change the World



Myanmar

Dr. Cynthia Maung has undergone a dramatic transformation. Once a rural Burmese doctor, she became a victim of war, then a refugee and exile, and is now a world-renowned human rights leader helping thousands of desperate people from her country.

Known universally as Dr. Cynthia, she was working as a doctor in a rural clinic in Myanmar in 1988 when political turmoil and conflict forced her to flee to neighbouring Thailand. There she established the Mae Tao Clinic in Mae Sot, Tak Province.

The Clinic has grown from a small, makeshift operation in 1989, with a few volunteer staff assisting approximately 1,700 patients, to become one of the leading organizations on the Thai-Myanmar border. Today, more than 250 staff and volunteers provide critically needed and culturally appropriate health care to thousands of ethnic Burmese and migrant workers living in desperately poor circumstances in Thailand, as well



Dr. Cynthia Maung.

as internally displaced persons in Myanmar who undertake the dangerous, illegal trip across the border to Thailand to obtain health care at the Clinic. The Clinic also provides health services for thousands of internally displaced persons at two satellite clinics in Myanmar. In 2003, the Clinic provided for over 80,000 patient visits to its facilities.

In addition to the Clinic's comprehensive inpatient and outpatient services, Dr. Cynthia and the Clinic's volunteer staff support education and social services, including two schools for orphaned children. The Clinic also hosts regular extensive training programmes for health workers, who then work in migrant communities along the border, among the internally displaced in Myanmar or with international organizations in one of ten refugee camps in Thailand.

Humanitarian Assistance

FACES

Dr. Cynthia has trained some 70 backpack health worker teams, each comprised of two medical assistants and a traditional birth attendant. The teams provide health services to internally displaced people at great peril to their own lives, risking possible landmine injuries and military attacks, in areas of Myanmar where government services are not available and international non-governmental organizations are not allowed to go.

In 2000, Dr. Cynthia helped to found Social Action for Women, which established a ten-bed temporary safe house for abandoned infants and young girls who have suffered gender-based violence or who are seeking to escape commercial sex work or forced prostitution. The organization provides information on HIV/AIDS and other reproductive health issues, helps young girls attend school and offers job skills training. The increasing numbers of abandoned infants at the Mae Tao Clinic and the district hospital reflect the critical problem of unwanted pregnancy and the need for family planning among internally displaced women in Myanmar and others living in refugee-like circumstances.

Dr. Cynthia has lived in exile for 15 years and is effectively stateless, at constant risk of being deported along with the 150 volunteer staff who work with her. She lives in a house at the Clinic's gates, along with her husband and three children, including a baby girl adopted after she was abandoned by her mother.



A senior medic at the Mae Tao Clinic tends to a newborn.

Dr. Cynthia's humane and fearless work truly embodies the spirit of Security Council resolution 1325. Under her direction, the Clinic has received numerous international accolades – including the Jonathan Mann Health and Human Rights Award, the John Humphries Award and the prestigious Magsaysay Award – for its compassionate and courageous work in addressing the health and human rights of ethnic Burmese people in Thailand and the internally displaced in Myanmar.

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Women as Partners in Peace and Security