



VOICES of the DISPLACED

SPRING 2017

FIRST WORD

"They beat and killed my husband with a knife," a 25-year-old woman told investigators, describing how five soldiers then raped her and killed her 8-month-old son, who was crying. "To silence him, they killed him, too, with a knife."

The devastating report this quote was pulled from went public on February 3, 2017. United Nations human rights workers interviewed 204 survivors from recent violence in West Myanmar who fled across the Naf river seeking refuge in Bangladesh.

That 25-year-old woman is real. Our team met many women like her and heard their stories. According to Jesus, she is also our neighbor. And because He told us to love our neighbors as ourselves, what I want for my own daughters I also want for that woman who has suffered beyond imagining.

The people being deliberately and systematically targeted by State authorities in Western Myanmar are the same ones our team works to save. In Rakhine State our team takes tremendous risks to continue delivering food that your donations purchased, for people you will never meet, who would slowly starve to death without us all working together.

Fortify Rights has documented the steady wheels of genocide that are rolling over this entire race of beautiful people.

As the wheels turn, there is a dedicated body of people who keep reaching out, praying, giving money, and doing so many creative interventions for the victims, and that Body is you. Because you understand that to love is to act, you consistently dig deep and reach out and love big, and we couldn't be more grateful.

This magazine is published as an ongoing labor of love to let you in on the back story. We want you to meet the people your compassion touches: from the ethnic states in Myanmar to the border areas of Thailand, to the ongoing violence in Mosul and Aleppo: this is where you are. Where politics and violence attempt to halt the hand of compassion, that's where you show up and embody very, very Good News.

That's what you are. To us, to them, to the world. Thank you.



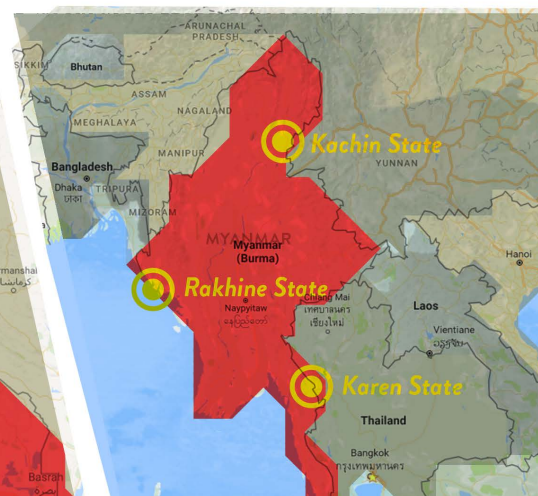
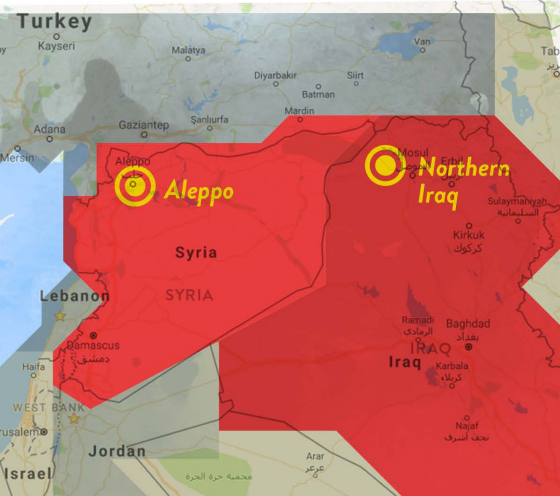
STEVE GUMAER

President, Partners Relief & Development



There are over **65 million** refugee stories happening in the world right now.

Here are five we think you should hear



// Karen State

"The bullet missed my head"

REBECCA JONSSON & CHAUNG KLANE

In 1985 a young pastor was just starting out in ministry in his home village in Karen State. Because he was a Karen Christian pastor, he was considered a target by the military, who regularly raided his village claiming they were looking for rebels and ethnic opposition supporters. This pastor soon found himself homeless inside his own country, always running for safety. He lived like this for a few years until he fled across the border to Thailand and resettled in what he thought was a safe zone – a temporary resettlement camp, Baw Nah.

But the border did nothing to provide refuge or protection. The pastor was targeted for his ethnicity and for his faith. He tells us that the soldiers snuck into the camp and shot at him when he was sleeping, but "by

the grace of God, the bullet missed my head and went straight through my pillow instead." When the army burned down the refugee settlement area, the pastor fled along the Thai-Myanmar border to a new camp area, called Mae La. This is where he lives now, along with his wife and their three teenage children, all born and raised inside the camp's borders.

This is Pastor Arthur's and his wife Thramu Clasper's story. We met them in their humble home next to the church where Arthur is the head pastor and where his wife teaches music. When they first arrived in the camp 23 years ago, there were only a few simple bamboo homes surrounded by corn fields and jungle. Thramu Clasper told us that in the beginning they were afraid to stay in their assigned squatter houses at night. Instead they would run into the nearby forest or hide by the road

construction, seeking safety from the soldiers who would unexpectedly but regularly come and raid the resettlement area.

Still, the camp was safer than their homeland. As the camp grew and more and more ethnic Karen people resettled in the area, a large group of unaccompanied children found their way to the refugee camp. These children were seeking shelter and safety from war, but had no adults to care for them when they arrived. To meet this need, Pastor Arthur and his wife built a school dormitory where these children could live in safety, have a roof over their heads, get food in their bellies and go to school. When they started, they had 45 children in their dormitory; now, more than 90 children live and flourish there.

As the dormitory has grown, so too has the need for assistance to ensure each child receives the care they deserve. Because of your support, Partners has been establishing sustainable agricultural and animal husbandry projects to generate income that will ultimately allow the dormitory to become self-supported. For the children who help take care of these projects, it also means investing in skills that will be beneficial when they one day return to Myanmar.

Even though these children are getting an education, the challenges which remind them they are still refugees are never far away. When I asked Pastor Arthur what the biggest struggle is, he answered right away, "Equality and discrimination. All we want is for our education to be recognized the same way the

Burmese schools are. Even though our children receive diplomas and complete their schooling with great marks, it's not recognized in Myanmar or anywhere else. Our children should have the same opportunity as others, but they don't."

Yet this hasn't stopped many of the students going on to complete further education, studying at Bible School and training to become school teachers themselves. The investment this inspiring couple has made in the hundreds of children they've provided care for has borne much fruit, giving these children hope for a better future filled with more opportunity to follow their dreams.

While the effects of a ceasefire agreement are yet to be seen, which means they are still unable to return home, Arthur speaks about the blessings in the midst of the undeserving pressure. There is resilience in his eyes and there is great hope in his words. As he takes his wife's hand, he tells me, "You know, God always prepares a way for us. We have a community and we have friends that love us. Even though we live in a refugee camp and people call us bad names. They may call us hopeless and see us as a burden, we are still blessed. We know that our future is in God's hands and He will prepare us for whatever lies ahead."

Arthur and Clasper won't give up on the children they believe they are called to care for, just as we won't give up on this vision we share to bring freedom and fullness to children displaced by conflict.

// Aleppo

The Greet

Oddny Gumaer

The woman who was tugging at my sleeve that cold December morning had tears running down her cheek. We were visiting a camp for internally displaced people in Aleppo.

During the previous days I had travelled through the ruins of a once-majestic town. Everywhere was destruction. Not one building was intact. Death was looming in the streets, stories of heinous acts could be heard in the walls of the destroyed buildings. The constant rain, the cold wind, and the leafless trees made the scene even more dismal.

People were returning to this sadness, determined to rebuild their lives. I watched them, bent over, so the wind and the rain would not whisk them away. I watched them wrap whatever clothes they owned around themselves so they could keep the cold out. I watched them walk into their ruined homes, and I wondered: How can they return to this? It is hopeless. Anything would be better than moving back into the ruins and the memories of lives lost.

Now, standing on the grounds of a temporary camp that housed many thousands, I realized: Anything would be better than this miserable place. They were all sitting on the cement floors, staring ahead, as if life had left them. The cold seemed colder here where there were no walls to protect them, and the roof leaked. The smell was nauseating. The 4,000 people had long stopped using the two toilets the UN had installed. They were overflowing, and the people resorted to using the open space of the camp as toilets. Children were crying, but some were too lethargic to even cry. Food was distributed once a day.

"Please help me," the mother begged. "If I don't get help, my children will surely die. We are freezing to death here." Her crying turned to uncontrollable sobs. I took the baby she was holding in my arms so she could tend to the toddler who was whining next to her. The baby had a runny nose and every breath he took sounded like a whistle. "Come, let me show you where my five children



and I live," she said confidently. We walked with her past many families who were too cold and miserable to even care about us walking by their simple shelters made from mattresses leaned towards each other. After some minutes we came to a green mat. It was small, like a rug I would put on my living room floor. "Here," said the woman and pointed. "This mat here is the home of my five children and me." She broke down and cried again. Through her sobs she also told us her husband had disappeared, probably taken captive by the government forces since he had opposed them. There was nothing she could do to find him.

I held the baby tighter and wanted to give him some of my warmth. Somebody came and warned me: make sure his mother doesn't disappear. She may be planning to make you take the baby from her. My honest thought when I heard this was: Let me! But I knew it would be futile. We talked a while to the mother.

We did what we could do for her that day, which, to be honest, wasn't much. We had nowhere to take her. We could not buy her a tent or a shelter that would keep them warm; what then would happen to the thousands of others who were just as cold and desperate as her? We gave her some money and promised we would think of what to do to help her and her kids.

In the end we decided that the best thing we could do right now was to try to buy as many sleeping bags as we could to give to these people living outside in the cold winter. The second thing we could do was to ensure they had something to eat every day.

I left the camp that day with a heavy heart. I felt like I hadn't done enough for the mother with the five kids who was living on a green mat in the middle of an ocean of desperate people. I have been thinking of her every day since. I wonder how she is doing now that the winter has gotten even colder. I pray, and I ask for money for sleeping bags. That is what I can do right now.

// Rakhine State

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RYAN McCABE

The eyes. It's always the eyes. Before I've even hit record or asked a question, the eyes fill with tears, palpable rivers of pain and hurt and confusion, ready to pour forth in defiance of the old adage that grown men don't cry.

I don't speak Rohingya, but I know pain when I see it. I don't need a translator to understand that these men have been torn down to a point I can't even fathom.

"I went to the sea to catch a fish for my family, because we had nothing in the house. When I was at the beach, villagers and police found me and beat me and took my nets."

Muhammed talks a bit more, and I hear some details, but I'm not fully listening. I look into his crying eyes and wonder what it would take for someone to see him as an enemy: a man to be hunted down and beaten if found alone and vulnerable.

I asked the men gathered around me in this small Rohingya village outside Sittwe in Rakhine State, Myanmar, how often these attacks happen. The answer was at least 10-20 times a month, and increasing. Violence against Rohingya is on the rise due to a brutal military crackdown in response to several attacks against a military outpost by a handful of Rohingya a few months ago. It's estimated that more than 73,000 people have been displaced over the last several months due to military action, and there have been reports of sexual assaults, village burning, and violence on a massive scale. As the men in Muhammed's village talk, I see resignation and

hopelessness in their eyes. This is just another in a long history of abuses.

But not all the eyes I looked into that day were crying. Earlier, we had visited a camp Partners has been working with for awhile now, delivering rice and cooking oil and other dry goods, as well as renting a plot of land for the growing of veggies to supplement their diets, and a well for them to draw clean water.

The eyes there were totally changed from the last time I was there a year ago, when the stress of feeding their children was carving deep worry lines into the faces of the mothers and bringing the fathers to tears. But this year, after roughly six months of regular food deliveries and support, laughing children mobbed us as soon as we arrived, and the entire atmosphere of the camp was brighter. Child malnutrition is on the decline, and parental eyes that had previously been full of worry were now more at peace.

Eye contact is hard. It cuts past the safety barriers of articles, photos, even verbal language, and exposes you to the raw feeling of the individual. And in a world with millions of refugees and displaced people, we desperately need to acknowledge that individuality, that these people are just like us in so many ways, not just overwhelming numbers. As uncomfortable as eye contact can be, it's the best way to understand and share in someone's story. I saw pain and tears last week in Sittwe, but I also saw the effects of our work there: peace and hope. And that's definitely a sight for sore eyes.

// Kachin State



DISPLACED. AGAIN.

Doug Gibbons

In December 2016, Ja Mai heard the bombs falling again. For a week, she could hear heavy fighting on a hill not far from the displaced peoples camp that had become her home when she was first displaced five years ago. The Myanmar Army was attacking using planes and large bombs to pave the way to overrun any remaining Kachin resistance with ground troops. This time the Kachin were unable to withstand their superior numbers and firepower.

Ja Mai was attending an evening devotion at church when the first bomb hit. By now they were so used to the sounds of bombs going off that they didn't think too much of it. Then the second bomb hit very close to the camp and everyone ran in panic. The Myanmar Army had taken the nearby Kachin outpost and began firing mortars down towards the camp. Ja Mai ran back to her home with her baby on her back. A mortar had exploded close to her home and she was terrified. She fumbled for the key to the lock but her hand was shaking so much she couldn't get the key inside. Eventually she got the door open and grabbed the bag she had pre-packed in case she ever needed to run again. Inside were some clothes for her baby and a few essential items. She fled with everyone else along the road, carrying her baby and the small bag of belongings. They hardly risked using their flashlights, worried that they would be seen by the Myanmar Army soldiers. They hid along the side of the road. Ja Mai crouched over with the baby on her back but realized if a bomb hit her, her baby would be at risk so instead she held her baby in her arms and sheltered him with her body. Her only thought was to protect her baby.

They stayed the night there beside the road hoping that they would be safe.

Ja Mai realized that she couldn't stay in the jungle with her young baby. It was winter in Kachin State, when temperatures in the area regularly plummet to near freezing. Instead she managed to get across the border to China where she stayed with a friend. The rest of the people in her camp were not so fortunate. They crossed the border into China but were immediately forced back across, back towards the Myanmar Army. They spent weeks in the jungle waiting to be told where they could go to find a safe place to live.

Eventually the high school children from the camp were relocated to a boarding school. As a teacher, Ja Mai was asked to move nearby the school. This is where we met her. As she shared her story with us she seemed so strong but once she finished talking she cried quietly. We prayed for her and her son and gave them some warm hats and socks knitted by supporters from around the world. A couple of days later one of our staff went to the area where many had recently been displaced and gave 4,899 kg of vegetables and meat to 2,500 people.

It breaks my heart to see a baby a few months younger than my own grow up in a place where there is no security, and lacking so many basic necessities. It was a real privilege to be able to meet Ja Mai and her son, to pray with them and help her in a small way.

We go on your behalf, and when we do this together, your love and generosity for the displaced brings hope, and helps them know that people care.

// Northern Iraq

Innocence Lost

JOYCE HAZLETT

This story is very difficult to read and has deeply affected our team members. We are sharing it here because we have had a relationship with this family since 2016 which has mobilized us to pray and help them. May it mobilize you to do the same.

I'm not sure how to tell Gazal's* story because what I write in black and white can never adequately convey what she experienced. She spoke, I listened. Long periods of silence followed by tears. Memories were unpacked and peeled back. An open unhealed wound was exposed. It had been just fifteen days since \$23,500 was exchanged for Gazal and her 4-year-old daughter. After two years and six months, they walked away from their ISIS captors for the last time. She heard we had come to provide food for her Yazidi community. She wanted to meet us. She wanted us to know about her captivity. She said it was important for us to hear. She said the world needed to know. She wanted to tell it for all the Yazidi women and young girls who couldn't. She invited us inside where a kerosene heater warmed us from the bitter wind and snow outside. For the next several hours, over hot tea turned cold, I listened, completely paralyzed for words as she spoke of rape and unspeakable abuse. This brave 32-year-old mother recounted with resolute determination the events which forever tore her life apart in ways none of us could possibly imagine.

August 3, 2014 was a day she will never forget. It was a day marked by terror when ISIS stormed into their peaceful Yazidi village on Sinjar Mountain in northern Iraq and captured her, her husband and their 4 daughters. They weren't alone. There were hundreds, maybe thousands taken on that day. "The first day Daesh (ISIS) took all of our money, gold, phones and identification cards. Then they separated the men and boys from the women and girls." August 3, 2014 would be the last time she would ever see her husband. He would have had only two options:

join ISIS or Islam; his fate was sealed. August 3, 2014 marked the beginning of her two and a half-year sentence of horror when lives and innocence were snatched away by forces only evil knows.

"They put us in a truck and took us to Tel Afar where there were many other Yazidi women and children. We had no food." She told of mothers too hungry to feed their babies. "Many babies and young children died. We were so hungry." After that they took the women and children to Badush Prison. "We suffered here. Daesh beat the children." She told of how ISIS soldiers raged against crying babies by taking them away from their mothers who couldn't stop their crying. "Badush Prison was so cold. We had no blankets; they wouldn't give us blankets. We suffered so, so much." It was there they endured unspeakable atrocities. She spoke of barbaric treatment too graphic to comprehend or put in writing.

ISIS returned the women and girls to Tel Afar school. There, she was separated from her 14-year-old daughter who was sold and taken to Raqa, Syria. "I begged them not to take her because I knew what would happen. They beat me so much. It was the last time I saw her." Then Gazal, her three remaining daughters and others were moved to another village. "We suffered so much there. We had no food or water." From this village they were transported to Mosul. "ISIS took all the beautiful girls over 14." Two of her daughters (aged 10 and 12) were sold to men from Libya; the remaining Yazidi girls were sold to members of Daesh. "The rest of us women were taken as their 'wives' and slaves." ➔

Any woman over 40 was held for ransom. If the ransom wasn't paid, they were beaten and killed.

She described how she was sold to 9 different men. "They would trade wives and sometimes we were given as gifts to others. Each man I was sold to, I lived with as his 'wife'." The first one, an 18-year-old, beat her because she was an 'unbeliever'. The second one, a 21-year-old from Libya, also beat her. She lived with him for 5 months before he sold her to another Libyan man, a 24-year-old. He sold her to a fourth man, an 18-year-old from Algeria. She lived with him for one month before she was sold again - for the fifth time - to another Algerian man, a 24-year-old. "We suffered so much during those days. We were beaten. We were their slaves." Then she was sold to a sixth man, a 33-year-old from Libya. When her four-year-old daughter became very sick, she begged him to take her to the hospital. Instead, he took her daughter away from her. "I told him if she wasn't with me, I would rather die." Gazal then tried to commit suicide but only severely injured herself. After she recovered, she was sold two more times until her last captor, an Algerian man, took pity on her and sold her to another man from Syria, who sold her to her family in Iraq for \$23,500.

She told us she cries every night for her daughters. "My girls are still captured. I don't know what has happened to them...whether they are dead or alive. The men treat all the girls, even the ones as young as 10, the same way they treat us women. We see with our eyes what they do to them. I know because I have been through that myself. I don't only want to tell you about my story... these are things that happened to all

the women and girls. There are so many who are still suffering. I want to think of a way to rescue them. I want foreign countries to know how bad it is for them."

As Gazal's words flowed from her heart into mine, I wondered about her small daughter sitting quietly in her uncle's arms. Her face empty of emotion, staring at what I can't see. What had those eyes seen? From what terror had she survived? Who would rescue her from the trauma she now carries?

When we got up to leave, Gazal hugged me and placed her little girl in my arms. It was as if to say, please don't forget me, my daughters and all of the Yazidi daughters still in captivity.

We cannot undo the past. Gazal knows that. She opened up her heart because holding back would mean the enemy wins. We promised we'd share her story, a reality not easy for any of us to hear. We promised we'd pray because we believe prayer is action that can bring change. It's why we ask for you to pray too for the rescue of Gazal's daughters and all of the women and children who are still in bondage. Until all children can experience freedom, we will not stop praying, advocating and acting on their behalf.

As we walked into the snow outside and were swarmed by children in thin shirts and open-toed sandals, we decided to focus on something else we could do: deliver food and kerosene to ease the hunger and cold for families who had suffered beyond comprehension.

** Name changed to protect her identity.*

Now What?

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PHOTOGRAPHY/DESIGN: Ryan McCabe, Rebecca Jonsson, Jon-Ivar Solberg, David Hoppe, Lars-Andreas Pedersen

EDITORS: Claire Gibbons, Jenn Tendero, Thalia Kehoe Rowden

Partners Relief & Development is a registered charity in the USA, Canada, UK, Australia, Norway, and Thailand

USA:
Partners Relief & Development
PO Box 912418
Denver, Colorado 80291-2418
USA
Phone: +1 909 748 5810
info@partners.ngo
www.partners.ngo

CANADA:
Partners Relief &
Development
33130 Springbank Road
Calgary, Alberta T3Z 2L9
Canada
Phone: +1 403 538 2870
info@ca.partners.ngo
www.partners.ngo/ca

NORWAY:
Partners Norway
Staffeldtsgate 4
0166 Oslo
Norway
Phone: +47 99 301 919
info@norge.partners.ngo
www.partners.ngo/norge

AUSTRALIA:
Partners Relief &
Development
PO Box 552
Mentone, VIC 3194
Australia
Phone: +61 3 9013 7676
info@au.partners.ngo
www.partners.ngo/au

UK:
Partners Relief & Development UK
Box 161
2 London Bridge Walk
London
SE1 2SX
info@uk.partners.ngo
www.partners.ngo/uk

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