



# child action international news: BURMA SPECIAL

December 2005

Through the Epiphany Trust's Child Action International (CAI) programme approximately 550 children are being educated through the generous funding of our supporters. Through its merger with the Metta Trust for Children's Education (MTCE), CAI is currently funding six schools on the Thai/Burma border.

For years the Burmese Junta have attempted to destroy the social infrastructure of the country's ethnic groups and exploit them for their own ends. Our funding of schools and teaching projects allows the next generation, from all ethnic groups, to learn about their country's history in a way which is not spun by the



Junta to their own advantage, to learn about their human rights and the basic skills to survive in a modern world without which their future would be bleak.



Two of these schools are in Thailand and the others are in Burma. Each school faces its own challenges as it tries to cope with the political and social situation it finds itself in. We understand the importance of supporting the schools over the long term and have recently strengthened our relationship with the Karen Education Department, an official local group that administers many of the schools on the border. This is an important way of ensuring funding goes to the places where it can have most effect. It also gives us confidence that the money you send is used most effectively both in schools we have contact with and those where direct contact is impossible.

## Our Work

The Trust, through the CAI programme, has recently embarked on an ambitious task of trying to develop its understanding of how education and health projects are organised along the border. It has talked to many Karen, Burman and international organisations about current needs and what an effective response to these might be. Some of the challenges faced include teacher training, health care for students and providing each class with more resources.

Responding to this challenge is not easy. In January 2005, one of the schools was attacked by the Junta. Villagers were forced to flee into the jungle and live there for two weeks until it was safe to return to their homes. The Junta often destroys all buildings, food and resources in an





attempt to cause maximum disruption and suffering. Education and health are often the first to suffer, but even here the Karen and other ethnic groups are very resourceful, teaching the children in jungle hideouts and developing mobile health care.



The teachers themselves often work for little or no money, with the annual teacher salary in Burma being little more than £30 a year, if they get a salary at all. Providing education is difficult enough in illegal migrant worker villages in Thailand, it is even more difficult within Burma. The provision is so bad that in one CAI supported school a teacher, who was educated only to fourth standard, is currently teaching third standard students. We are now working with the school to find suitably qualified teachers and with the Karen Education Department to organise a training programme for them. Ensuring that schools can pay salaries and buy resources is vital if the standard of education is going to be improved on the border.

Until recently, many of the schools that CAI funds have been for the Karen ethnic group. However, we are now exploring how we can work with other groups which live in more isolated parts of Burma. Our close partnership with a range of local groups means that we are starting to fund schools in Karenni and Shan areas. We will continue to fund schools in Karen areas, but also support schools which tend to be neglected by many donors.

There are so many possibilities for work in the future, and we will remain focused on serving the people of Burma in a way that is most appropriate to their needs.

CAI's Programme Manager has spent a total of three months on the Thai/Burma border this year, as part of our plan to develop our work. One highlight of his recent visit was seeing how the new villages which are growing on the Thai/Burma border are developing community spirit and how the schools in the village are acting as a focal point for that. Many people from deep inside Burma have fled their home village and are moving to safer villages on the border. These villagers are having to form new social connections, in a society which has historically been stable and where the community hierarchy has been developed over years. One example is that the school in each village in the area has formed a Karen Dancing Team, which are currently practicing for a competition at the New Year Celebrations.

## FUNDRAISING

A new and exciting opportunity which has developed on the border is that CAI will soon be starting to ask people to sponsor individual children and teachers, as well as give regular donations to support the schools. Sponsors will be sent information on the person they are sponsoring with, for teacher, details on what subject or year group they teach and possibly even some information on their history. If you are interested in taking part in this then please do contact the office.

There will also be sponsored events that you can take part in to raise money for the cause.





## BACKGROUND TO OUR WORK

Child Action International is part of the Epiphany Trust, a registered charity (number: 1006653) set up as a response to the crisis in the orphanages in Romania following the overthrow of Nicolae Ceauşescu. Since then its work has expanded with projects in Sri Lanka, Pakistan, DR Congo, Kosovo and of course the refugee camps on the Thai/Burma border.

### Romania

Over the last 15 years, with the help of local labour and volunteer workers from the UK, a Romanian orphanage, which used to resemble 19<sup>th</sup> century workhouse rather than a home for children, has been transformed into a first class environment for the care and education of disabled children. Now 450 children and 200 staff enjoy a vastly improved lifestyle.



But the children are growing up. They need a place where they can take the next step, and learn to live independently beyond institutional care. This led to the building of the 'ARC' - a halfway house for young people about to leave care, in the town of Sinaia in the beautiful Carpathian Mountains. Four young people currently live in the "ARC" and are learning how to live outside a formal institution. Working together with Romanian charity Emanuel Foundation, and expert staff from Timisoara social services, CAI provides one of just a handful of homes for disabled young people throughout Romania.

Child Action International has two people working in the ARC, teaching basic life skills and supporting the young adults as they make this first step in the outside world.

### Democratic Republic of Congo

After a request by Lord Alton following his visit to the Congo in 2004, we are working with the *Jeddiah Foundation* to restore education and health infrastructure of DRC, in tatters after nearly half a century of war, famine and corruption. St Martha's school for girls in Hadley Wood, London are filling a container with desks, chairs, tables and stationary for the school in this picture, which is in Kinshasa. The container will leave the UK in early December and will be sent on its way by Lomana Lua Lua, a footballer from Portsmouth Football Club and a member of the DR Congo International team. This is a new piece of work for us and it will be exciting to see how it develops over the coming year.



### Sri Lanka



It is now nearly five years since Pastor Sylvester Joseph, from Bogolantawa in the central hill country of Sri Lanka, first approached the Trust for help. He was struggling to fund the continuing costs of running a school for disabled and disadvantaged children. Smyrna School (which includes both primary and secondary education) is now thriving. Free transport and meals, without which most children would be unable to attend, sets the school apart from others in the region.



Within hours of the Indian Ocean tsunami, Pastor Sylvester was co-ordinating aid trips to the devastated areas of Batticaloa and Trimcomalee on the east coast of the country. People in desperate need were given food, water, clothing and shelter.

Other partners are using funds from our Child Action International programme to help people on the west coast rebuild their houses and their lives. The project is quite unique in that bricks are made on site by previously unemployed people, and then bought cheaply by the locals. This money is then ploughed back into the system by funding further brick production and paying people a small wage to re-construct their own houses.

In association with the City of Liverpool's "Hands across the Sea" appeal and our local partners in Galle, we are working to redevelop a community centre. The centre hosts community support groups and will also have dentist and doctor facilities and an advice centre for people who are trying to redevelop their businesses in the aftermath of the tsunami. A micro-credit programme to provide business loans is soon to be launched.

In addition, two Child Action volunteers are working in an orphanage run by one our partners. They are teaching English and helping children to come to terms with the loss so many have suffered.



## Pakistan



A major victory has been won in the quest to free children from the bonded slave labour of the Pakistan brickyards. In June 2005, the Lahore law firm - CLAAS, which receives regular support from the Epiphany Trust, succeeded in releasing children from eleven brickyards where children were ruthlessly exploited. Thousands of children in Pakistan are forced to work as bonded labourers in order to pay family debts that have been passed down through the generations. Many youngsters are forced to sacrifice their education, social life and paid employment to work in horrific and un-legislated conditions.

## CONTACT DETAILS

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If you are interested in someone from our team coming to speak at your church, youth group or school about our Child Action International programme please contact Micah Hampson to arrange when and where!