

## Hope for Lives Marked By Violence

*I have only known life in a country of conflict.*

Since 1987, the year I was born, Myanmar has been one of the least developed countries in the world, according to the United Nations. It is impoverished, underdeveloped, and, because it lacks impartial sources of information, misinformation is rampant. Because Myanmar has more than 100 ethnic groups, with many of them having their own armed groups or militia, it's politically and culturally at odds. The conflict in Myanmar stems from five decades of military rule, an isolated economy, and ongoing war in ethnic minority areas.

My name is Mang Pi, and I am a National Project Officer with Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP). I was born in Chin state, the poorest of the seven states in Myanmar. There are no universities or state-level hospitals. In Shan and Kachin states, they have jade and ruby as natural resources. There are no natural resources in Chin state, so there is little incentive for the government to start development projects in the state.

In 1988, most schools closed because of the 8888 revolution. No state schools were reopened until around 1999 or 2000. Even universities in downtown Yangon were closed until 2000. Growing up, I was scared. What I knew even then was that if I didn't have an education, life would be difficult.

During the Saffron Revolution in 2007, I was 20 years old and a student at a music school. One day, I was in downtown

Yangon when the police started shooting at protesters, everyone who was protesting, even the monks. I ducked behind a building when the shooting started and wasn't hurt, but the person next to me wasn't so lucky. He was shot, and his blood splattered on me.

A couple of years ago, I was in a town in northern Shan state to attend some NP meetings when a bomb went off in a nearby bank. Two bank employees died, and no one knew who was responsible for the attack. The NP staff was safe, but we skipped most of the meetings that week. That hadn't happened to NP staff before in Myanmar. International non-governmental organizations like NP aren't allowed in areas of armed conflict in the country.



Mang Pi guiding a group of visiting Nonviolent Peaceforce supporters.



Meeting with local partners in Myanmar.

## A Different Approach

While I was working as an interpreter in Yangon in 2012, I heard about NP. There were very few peace organizations then, so I was intrigued. I heard that NP worked very closely with local organizations and civilians by supporting them to protect themselves.

Most armed groups in Myanmar think that using weapons are the only way they can protect their families and their people. None of the ethnic groups in the country believe civilians can protect themselves; they think armed groups should handle all security responsibilities. **When I joined NP, I learned for the first time about the concept of civilians protecting civilians nonviolently.**

## Building Peace

NP helps civilians build peace in regions where there's conflict. Between 2012 and 2017, NP trained Myanmar civilians and ethnic armed groups in monitoring the ceasefire agreement. Since 2018, NP has supported women and youth to become leaders in their communities. With your support, NP is creating opportunities to participate in the early stages of the country's peace and local decision-making processes.

## Sharing Tools

It is difficult to build peace in Myanmar. I know personally from the training I do. Many civilians at the grassroots level are determined to make a contribution to peace in their communities but lack the confidence or the ability to influence the country's decision-makers. Others have the confidence and the networks but lack a basic understanding of issues concerning peace and security. This makes it hard for them to work effectively. NP helps train emerging community leaders to contribute to the peace process.

NP trains local peace observers and partners in Early Warning and Early Response: essentially, this allows civilians to plan their response to violent conflict when they see early warning signs of violence. Part of the training includes civilians mapping out the local civil society groups who can offer help before fighting breaks out.

In 2016, there was a lot of fighting in northern Shan. Six months after we trained 30 people in the area, one of the participants, Hlaing\*, called me. He told me that **because they attended NP's training, they were prepared to evacuate more than 5,000 villagers who were going to be affected**

by the fighting. The tools we gave them allowed the peace observers to rescue the villagers and keep them safe.

## Two Women Work for Peace

Since 2012, more than 800 peace observers have been trained, 35% of whom are women. Two of the peace observers you've helped train really stand out to me.

The first is Chomden\*. Before NP trained her, she was a humanitarian aid worker, but she didn't know how to protect others or how to engage with communities. Now, Chomden is a resource coordinator and a consultant for non-governmental organizations. She shares about NP and its work whenever she facilitates trainings about protection or gives speeches. Her main topics include how people can protect one another and advocate on their own behalf for peace.

The second woman I want to acknowledge is Nu\*. After she attended one of our trainings on how civilians could protect one another, she became a peace observer, making sure that all parties are taking the ceasefire agreements seriously. She also started a local organization that provides services to communities affected by violence. It works to empower women and to keep communities from fighting. Nu is the director of the organization. She is well connected, and now everyone contacts her if there's fighting or if there are refugees or other victims. She said she is only able to do all this because of NP.

## How Your Support Changed Me

To be honest, I'm a very emotional guy. But after working for a year with NP, I learned how to control my emotions. This allows me to better observe how some of my colleagues communicated and handled situations. Now, when I get into an uncomfortable situation, I can manage my strong emotions and still communicate well with those who

may not believe the same things I do. Even if I don't get along in meeting with certain groups, I can smile and leave the meeting feeling I've accomplished something.

This change has been invaluable because in Myanmar, relationships are the key to everything. They affect what you are able to get done, especially when working with local groups. Most of them contact me rather than the head of the NP office in Myanmar because they trust me.



Mang Pi with some of the Myanmar women leaders at a Nonviolent Peaceforce training.

What inspires me about NP is the willingness to work with people living in the most conflict-affected areas. The autonomy of local groups and civilians is also highly valued. NP gives ownership to the communities; it is only there to support them temporarily.

I can see that NP understands the people involved in or caught in conflict. I know this because NP understands me. ➡

\*Not their real name.



# PEARLS OF MYANMAR: A ONCE IN A LIFETIME JOURNEY



## JOURNEY FOR PEACE

I will be always be grateful that NP put together this generous, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for us to observe this vital work and to meet with so many amazing people. This was not just a tour; this was an incredible, in-depth experience.

– Jacquelyn, Former Trip Participant

*“This is Burma and it is unlike any land you know about.”*

Rudyard Kipling, Letters from the East (1898)

**Witness the impact your support to Nonviolent Peaceforce has on-the-ground in Myanmar**

- Experience one of the most interesting and beautiful countries in the world.
- Learn about Myanmar’s culture and the difference your support makes.
- Interact with locals who are working to create lasting peace in their country.

**You don’t want to miss this one-of-a-kind opportunity. The trip is scheduled from October 9 to 16, 2019.  
More information available at [www.nonviolentpeaceforce.org/myanmartrip2019](http://www.nonviolentpeaceforce.org/myanmartrip2019)**