



# Justice and Advocacy Week: Stand with Myanmar Devotion

**Rev Moo Hei and Kathy Thompson**

You don't need to look far in the Old Testament to find references to justice and, specifically, how God brings justice to the oppressed and how God calls his people to do likewise. This justice is often summarized as caring for the "widows, orphans and foreigners" (Psalm 146:9, Isaiah 1:17). Then in the New Testament Jesus continues this call and it is probably best summed up in Matthew 25: 31-40 where Jesus characterizes the "righteousness" as those who care for people without food, who are a stranger or in prison and so on. In fact, the Hebrew concept of righteousness involved not just being a moral person but also someone who was hospitable, generous and compassionate.

Many of us may not realize that we have "orphans, widows and foreigners" in our BUV family in the form of the large number of refugees from Myanmar who attend Baptist churches in Victoria. In fact, there are 56 churches in Victoria with congregations consisting of refugees from Myanmar. So often when we think of "the poor" or "the persecuted" it is an abstract concept of people far away and far removed from us. But Baptist refugees from Myanmar live in our suburbs, their children go to our local schools, and they attend our churches. They are our brothers and sisters in Christ. Their family and friends in Myanmar are, by extension, our family and friends.

Myanmar is a country that has been racked by civil war in many of its territories for over 70 years. Successive governments have sought to rule along ethnic lines resulting in ethnic minorities facing attacks by the Myanmar military and often outright ethnic cleansing. These minorities include the Chin, Karen and Kachin communities who make up a majority of the refugees from Myanmar in Australia. The 2021 military coup in Myanmar brought about an escalation in aggression by the military. Villages throughout Myanmar are regularly attacked by air and on the ground as the military seeks to assert control. The UN now estimates there are 1,704,000 internally displaced people in Myanmar along with another 1,086,000 refugees and asylum-seekers in neighbouring countries.<sup>1</sup>

Ecclesiastes 5: 8-9 (NLT) reads:

*“Don’t be surprised if you see a poor person being oppressed by the powerful and if justice is being miscarried throughout the land. For every official is under orders from higher up, and matters of justice get lost in red tape and bureaucracy. Even the king milks the land for his own profit!”*

This could be written today about Myanmar. It is exactly the type of government from which our refugee brothers and sisters have had to flee. It is heartbreaking to think that millenia after this passage was written, people are still suffering at the hands of oppressive regimes.

But what can we do in the face of such insurmountable problems? As an individual, or as a church community, you can:

- Pray: for the people of Myanmar - in their country, the surrounding refugee camps and also for the refugee communities here in Australia to be welcomed
- Be an advocate: tell others about the situation in Myanmar and of the refugees from Myanmar in Australia
- Write to your local Member of Parliament. Click the link to the BUV’s Stand with Myanmar appeal that includes a template:  
<https://www.buv.com.au/standwithmyanmar>
- Give to Stand with Myanmar here: <https://www.buv.com.au/standwithmyanmar>

As we do this:

*“We’ll be closer to a world where every refugee has a safe place to live and is able to start anew, free from the threat of violence”*

(Jordan Pe, Karen refugee from Myanmar and Sharing Hope Director)

Wouldn’t it be amazing to see Jordan’s vision come to fruition? We can be a part of the solution as, in many small but significant ways, each one of us prays, shares with a friend about the situation in Myanmar or provides financial support. These are our brothers and sisters. What is your response?

Reflection Questions:

1. Read *Isaiah 1: 17* *“Learn to do good. Seek justice. Help the oppressed. Defend the cause of orphans. Fight for the rights of widows.”* How does this apply to refugees from Myanmar? How are you, personally, going to help the oppressed from Myanmar?
2. What can we do as a church community to fight for the rights of refugees from Myanmar?

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<sup>1</sup> Myanmar Emergency Update as of 6 March 2023, UNHCR Bureau for Asia and Pacific (RBAP)