

Burmese School Project

After attending the Rotary International Convention in Bangkok, I visited Mae Sot on the Thai-Burma Border. This is a Thai town that hosts about 200,000 Burmese, mostly Karen ethnic group people who have fled the notorious Burmese Junta to live a precarious life in Mae Sot. Some are in the UN recognised refugee camps and some live as illegal immigrants.



They are tolerated as a source of near slave labour in the local factories and farms. They live very basic lives in thatched roof huts usually with no electricity or run-

ning water.

Many NGOs have been operating in the area for years providing help with education, health-care and welfare programs.

The International press publicity that the situation in Burma is improving has meant that many traditional donors are moving their support inside Burma.

This is premature and is shifting aid away from the border areas. Many Burmese send their children to schools in Mae Sot as there is vir-

tually no schooling available inside Burma. Until such time as the infrastructure in Burma is greatly improved the children will need alternative education. Most of the teachers are also from

Burma and their wages help support their families and their community.

The Elpis School which I visited currently educates about 400 children from Nursery to grade 7. Around 40 of



these children are orphans and are provided with full board. The rest also get daily lunch and essential medical care. It has lost its traditional donor funding this year and is threatened with immediate closure. The cost of keeping the school going for the next year is approximately \$A79, 000 about one Australian teacher's salary.

They keep meticulous accounts and give exceptional value for the money. It would be really sad if just as the future for Burma is looking hopeful, these children are to lose their educational opportunities.

RTN Marie Gerrard PHF

PP Rotary Club of Southern Mitchell

Please send donations to our bank account

Rotary Club of Southern Mitchell

BSB 063-698

Account No 10039919

Mention Elpis school and your Name.

