

STORIES OF SHAN WOMEN LEADERS

**A Leading Force in Advancing
Women and Their Communities**



SHAN WOMEN'S ACTION
NETWORK (SWAN)

| JANUARY 2026



SHAN WOMEN'S ACTION NETWORK (SWAN)

Shan Women's Action Network (SWAN) is a network of women from Burma's Shan ethnic group active in Burma/Myanmar and Thailand. SWAN was founded on 28 March 1998 and has received international recognition for our work promoting the rights of Burma's women.

SWAN is a founding member of the Women's League of Burma (WLB), an umbrella women's organization comprising 13 women's groups from Burma/Myanmar involved in peace processes and political change.

Our mission

We commit ourselves to work for gender equality and justice for women in the struggle for social and political change in Burma/Myanmar through community-based actions, research and advocacy.

Our Goals

Promoting women's rights and the rights of their children

Opposing the exploitation of women and children

Working together for peace and freedom

Empowering women for a better life

Raising awareness to preserve natural resources and the environment

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**VIOLENCE AGAINST
WOMEN ISSUE
IGNORED DURING
THE POLITICAL
TURMOIL**

March 2022

“AFTER THE MILITARY COUP, SEXUAL VIOLENCE, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, AND CHILD RAPE CASES ARE RISING ALL OVER THE COUNTRY. IN OUR KACHIN STATE, THE NUMBER OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS HAS DECREASED, AND THERE HAS BEEN ALMOST NO SUPPORT FOR WOMEN FACING VIOLENCE.”

| YING A HOM, AN ETHNIC TAI-LENG,

WORKS TO PROMOTE WOMEN’S RIGHTS AND HELP WOMEN IN BHAMO, KACHIN STATE.

Before the military coup, on behalf of her organization, Ying A Hom provided counseling services and travel expenses and helped contact lawyers who could provide legal assistance to the survivors of violence.

After the coup, human rights activists had to risk their lives of being arrested or even killed. All of them have stay alert and keep a low profile at all time as the authority continuesly cracks down and arrests people whose names are on their list. There are times when people have to travel in disguise.

The military coup has effected the lives of women even more. Since the coup, Ying A Hom has seen an increase of domestic violence and sexual violence including child rape cases are at an alarming rate.

"Most of the sexual violence cases were rape cases of underage girls. Most were settled quickly because of the bribery by perpetrators and corrupted authorities."

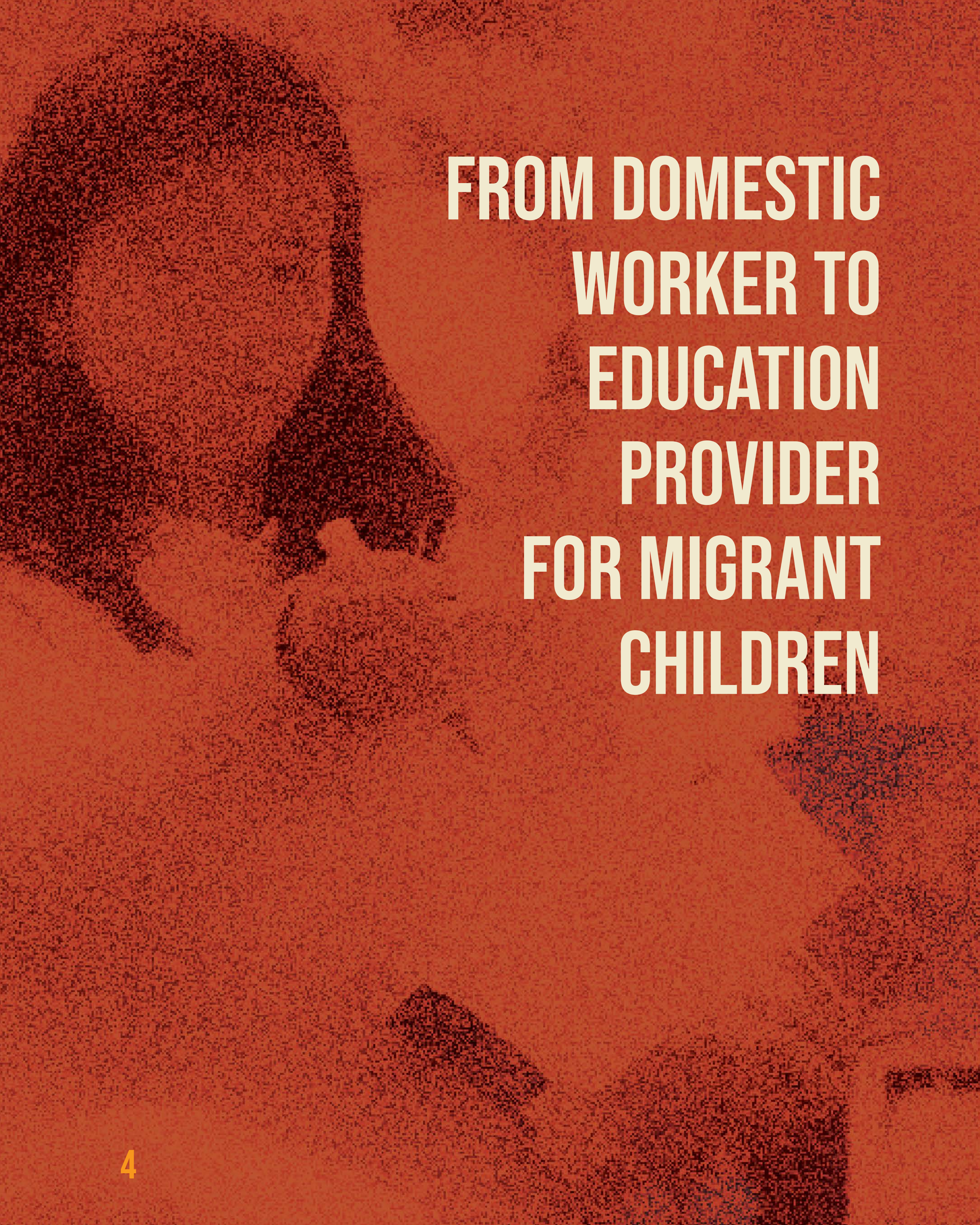
"Nowadays, I can only provide counseling services and some advice. Corruption in the justice system allows the perpetrators to remain free from punishment and enjoy impunity. In our area, there is no justice at all." According to Ying A Hom, working around justice system or dealing with government offices under the previous government was management with the strong presence of civil society organizations.

Now, the whole justice system has been destroyed. Bribery and corruption have escalated, and it becomes a system of impunity and amnesty for perpetrators.

"Some women members of Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) who joined the resistance against the military dictatorship were also subjected to sexual violence. We have heard cases of women in the CDM and women in the People's Defence Forces living in the jungle. Some of them asked for help. But we cannot provide our assistance because they are in remote areas. And we have to be careful with CDM, and it is hard for us to know who is involved. It is more dangerous for us."

THERE IS NO LAW TO PROTECT WOMEN. WHEN WE FACE VIOLATION, THERE IS NO LEGAL PROTECTION. IT IS DANGEROUS FOR WOMEN WHEN PERPETRATORS ARE FREE AT LARGE DUE TO CORRUPTION IN THE LEGAL SYSTEM.

“I THINK WE CAN ACHIEVE JUSTICE FOR WOMEN IF THERE IS NO CORRUPTION IN THE LEGAL SYSTEM AND IF IT TREATS EVERYONE FAIR. WOMEN SURVIVORS ALSO NEED THE COURAGEMENT TO FACE COURT CASES.”



**FROM DOMESTIC
WORKER TO
EDUCATION
PROVIDER
FOR MIGRANT
CHILDREN**

April 2022

“MIGRANT CHILDREN AND I SHARE A SIMILAR LIFE JOURNEY. I THOUGHT THE CHILDREN MIGHT BE HUNGRY TO LEARN AND STUDY, JUST LIKE ME. THIS WAS WHY I WANTED TO FULFILL THEIR WISHES. I DID NOT HAVE PERFECT SKILLS, YET I STILL BELIEVED THAT IT WAS MY RESPONSIBILITY TO HELP.”

| YING KAWN TAI

AN EDUCATOR AND ADVOCATE

My name is Ying Kawn Tai. When I first arrived in Thailand, my life began as a housekeeper. After I worked as a housekeeper for almost six years, I started to teach the children of migrant workers in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

Upon arriving in Chiang Mai, I continue to work as a domestic worker while teaching. As I was interested in learning English, I searched for opportunities to learn the language. I finally was accepted to study English at a Chiang Mai-based not-for-profit education center known as the School for Shan State Nationalities Youth (SSSNY).

“WHY WAS I MOTIVATED TO TEACH THE MIGRANT CHILDREN? BEING A MIGRANT MYSELF, I SHARED THE SAME STATUS WITH MY STUDENTS. SO, I WANTED TO HELP AND SHARE MY KNOWLEDGE WITH THOSE WHO WERE SIDELINED AND COULD NOT RECEIVE FORMAL EDUCATION AND WHO WERE LIVING IN MIGRANT-WORKERS’ MAKESHIFT RESIDENT SITE. I TAUGHT THEM WHAT I HAD LEARNED.”

After graduation, I worked with Shan Youth Power (SYP), another not-for-profit organization. That is when I got back to teaching migrant workers, whom I shared similar life experiences.

In 2007, I was heavily involved with migrant-workers' education affairs in Chiang Mai. In the evening, I regularly taught Shan language, Shan culture, English, Math, and Social Studies, etc. to the children, at the migrant-workers' makeshift resident site in and around Chiang Mai.

In those days, children who were born and raised in Thailand by both Shan parents did not even speak Shan. They had no idea about Shan culture. After we started teaching and discussing for some time, gradually, they picked up not just the language but also Shan culture. Little by little, they could also improve their English. In short, everything was improving.

Both parents of the migrant children had to work from early in the morning until late at night. As their wages were minimal, they could not afford the expenses associated with their children's education. Their parents could not afford for them to attend extra classes, as their Thai counterparts often did. They felt rather unhappy about the extra expenses. So I try to help them out to fulfill their needs.

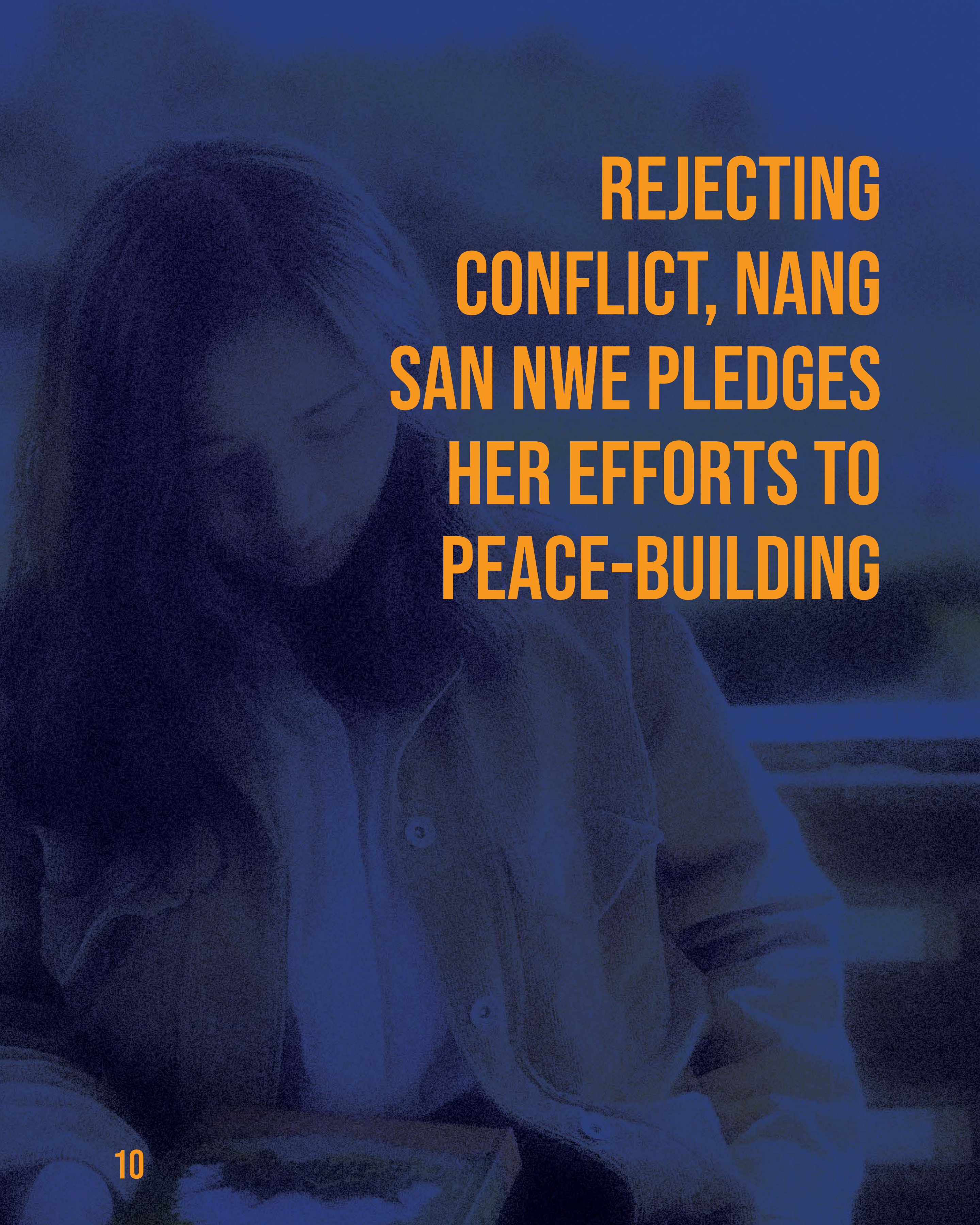
“Most parents of these migrant workers were undocumented, and so were their children. Sometimes, Thai authorities would come to do a surprise check, and then they had to go into hiding for their own safety. In such cases, the children were unable to go to the school. That was why we were trying to help them, even with limited capacity and resources ourselves.”

There were many challenges to be an education provider for the children of migrant workers. It was a long distance to travel from one place to another. We needed fuel for our motorbikes and did not have enough teaching staff. On the other hand, as Thailand is also a foreign land for us, we had to be extra cautious with the country's rules and regulations. Sometimes, we had to withhold from gathering in case there were political tensions in Thailand. Then we had to stop classes, which resulted in delaying lessons for children.

Another issue is that, migrant workers are always on the move for work. They did not have a permanent place to live. When parents move, the children have to follow, and their school terms had to be transferred too. As a lot of them also lack legal documents and/or birth certificates, continuing their schooling without interruption has always been problematic. More often than not, we encountered such challenges.

Regarding children with no birth certificate, we tried to obtain information, and shared it when available. Sometimes, it was necessary to make a good connection with Thai authorities for a certificate to be issued. We also did scholarship fundraising campaigns for children in need so they could continue their education.

I BELIEVE EDUCATION IS THE MOST IMPORTANT MATTER IN MY LIFE. I UNDERSTAND THAT PARENTS ARE WORKING HARD TO EARN A LIVING IN A FOREIGN COUNTRY. NEVERTHELESS, I DO NOT WANT THIS ISSUE TO SET BACK CHILDREN'S EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES. WHILE I WILL CONTINUE TO ENCOURAGE THEM TO SUPPORT THEIR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION, I AM DEDICATING MYSELF TO HELPING THEIR IN EVERY WAY POSSIBLE BY SHARING MY KNOWLEDGE.



**REJECTING
CONFLICT, NANG
SAN NWE PLEDGES
HER EFFORTS TO
PEACE-BUILDING**

“I WANT TO ELIMINATE HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AND THE SUFFERING OF THE PEOPLE DUE TO ARMED CONFLICTS. I AM DEDICATED TO ADVOCATING FOR THE RIGHTS OF THE PEOPLE. I WOULD LIKE TO UNDERSTAND THE ROOT CAUSE OF CONFLICT AND FIND THE SOLUTIONS TO END IT. THAT IS WHY I HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN THE HUMAN RIGHTS MOVEMENT.”

| NANG SAN NWE

POLITICAL ANALYST AND
HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCATE

My name is Nang San Nwe. I have been involved in Burma/Myanmar’s Human Rights Movement since 2014.

For three years, I worked in the protection and human security sectors, specifically in conflict-affected areas in Northern Shan State, helping Internally Displaced People (IDPs). As I became more passionate about Peace and Conflict Studies, I decided to pursue a master’s degree to understand more about conflicts and find suitable solutions. In 2019, I graduated with a master’s program in Peace and Conflict Studies from the University of Sydney, Australia.

I now work as an analyst in the humanitarian and protection sectors, monitoring and evaluating the impact of conflicts, human rights violations, and the 'peace process' in conflict-affected areas. I also analyze and research the political situation and conflicts throughout Burma/Myanmar.

Observing political conflicts in Burma is very personal for me because my family in Shan State has suffered from the impact of war for many decades. Since I am involved in Burma's political movement and peace process, I constantly get to monitor the situation.

"The impact of politics has affected civilians, especially women, specifically regarding education, health, and job opportunities. Therefore, we cannot ignore politics."

To my point about women, I can speak from my professional experience that it is more challenging for a woman in the political movement. Women don't get recognized like men do in our society. Older men are taking on many roles in many sectors.

"I REMEMBER WHEN I WAS WORKING AS A TEAM LEADER AT AN IDP CAMP IN NORTHERN SHAN STATE, I WAS TREATED DISRESPECTFULLY BY THE GOVERNMENT OFFICERS BECAUSE I WAS A YOUNG LADY. I UNDERSTAND THAT IT IS QUITE CHALLENGING AND RISKY FOR A WOMAN TO

CONDUCT RESEARCH IN AREAS CONTROLLED BY ETHNIC ARMED GROUPS DURING THE CONFLICT. BUT I DID SEE SOME PRIVILEGES OF BEING A WOMAN. COMPARED TO MEN, WOMEN ARE MORE SKILLED IN NEGOTIATING WITH ARMED GROUPS AT CHECKPOINTS IN CONFLICT AREAS.”

Therefore, I want our society to know that women are also interested in politics and conflicts and are capable of finding solutions. These core beliefs encourage me to get involved in the peace process.

The military coup has made it worse. After the coup in 2021, people lost their freedom, and young people experienced restrictions for the first time. Both youth and women are physically unsafe to live in cities. We have seen youth being watched with suspicious looks, inspected, and arrested under various law articles at inopportune times. This demonstrates that women and youth are in an unsecured situation, and most of all, they are losing their futures.

“Lastly, I want to point out that there should not be conflicts between any ethnic armed group in Shan State. I want ethnic armed groups to be united and dedicated to the interests of people while simultaneously working towards the main goal of the revolution. We should all be reminded that the revolution cannot succeed without people’s support.”

**NANG HLA YEE,
A LEADING FORCE
IN ADVANCING
WOMEN'S
RIGHTS IN
KYAUKME**

April 2022

“WOMEN HAVE BEEN DISCRIMINATED AGAINST FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION. WHEN SOMETHING HAPPENS, PEOPLE WILL ALWAYS BLAME THE WOMEN RATHER THAN THE MEN. THAT’S NOT FAIR AT ALL. WE WANT JUSTICE. THAT IS WHY WE ARE WORKING HARD TO ENSURE THAT THE PERPETRATORS ARE PROSECUTED AND THE SURVIVOR RECEIVES JUSTICE.”

| NANG HLA YEE

WOMEN’S HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCATE

My name is Nang Hla Yee. I am the chairperson of the “Nan Htike San” women’s organization. I train women to become self-employed and run their businesses. I empower them to take leadership roles in their villages in Kyaukme Township.

In 2013, the “Nan Htike San” women’s organization was founded with a mission to promote women’s rights and empower them to build the lives they desire and aspire to.

“I BELIEVE THAT WOMEN HAVE THE RIGHT TO FIGHT FOR THEIR DESIRES AND ASPIRATIONS. WHEN WE ARE ABLE TO STAND UP FOR OURSELVES, WOMEN HAVE SO MUCH POTENTIAL AND ABILITIES. CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN TO BE SELF-EMPLOYED AND ABLE TO RUN THEIR OWN BUSINESS ARE KEYS TO EMPOWERING THEM.”

“A SELF-EMPLOYED BUSINESS INCLUDES PIG FARMING, MAIZE CULTIVATION, SEWING, SHOEMAKING, AND ACCOUNTING. WE SUPPORT THOSE WOMEN WHO ARE INTERESTED IN HAVING THEIR OWN BUSINESS BY PROVIDING THEM TRAINING AND SOME CAPITAL.”

When the Nan Htike San women's organization was first founded, we faced many challenges. It was not recognized or accepted because it was a women's organization. Some people in our community insulted us. They remarked that women like to work with imagination, but they are not practical, so we won't be successful.

There is a Shan proverb that says, "If a hen crows, the sun will not rise." This means that no matter what women do, they will not succeed. Some in the community have criticized women, claiming that we live in our dreams.

Women in our community do not have their own income. Women have to follow men's decisions.

"Recently, my organization has created opportunities for many women to earn more income. We were able to generate income for the women from handicraft work."

Shan society has traditionally discriminated against women. It is perceived that women do not need to get an education or earn money. They just need to stay at home and do all the housework. Such ideas and beliefs are key barriers to women's prosperity, including women in our organization.

Kyaukme Township is a 'black area' where all ethnic armed groups operate, and it is also a region prone to armed conflict. There is no peace in our area or safety in our daily lives.

Due to the frequent fighting occurring in Kyaukme Township, training is held based on security. Training is often delayed or canceled.

As the region has experienced instability for many years, women have been subjected to violence in conflict areas. The perpetrators include soldiers from the armed groups. Armed groups mean all the groups.

We usually visit the survivors of the violence and provide them with counseling and necessary help. We cooperate with other organizations that assist women. With collaboration among all the organizations, we are able to help women access justice within the legal framework."

**DESPITE MANY CHALLENGES
AND OBSTACLES, I WILL
CONTINUE TO WORK HARD TO
SEEK JUSTICE FOR WOMEN.**

**A CARING
HUMANITARIAN
DEDICATED TO
ASSISTING THE
DISPLACED**

“I HAVE SUFFERED FROM THE IMPACT OF ARMED CONFLICT SINCE I WAS FIVE. I REMEMBER I HAD TO SLEEP IN A HTAMEIN (SARONG) UNDER A TREE WITH MY AUNTS. THIS EXPERIENCE MOTIVATES ME TO BE INVOLVED IN SOCIAL WORK, HELPING INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE (IDPS) WITH A SENSE OF PURPOSE, EMPATHY, COMPASSION, AND LOVING-KINDNESS.”

I NANG MOAN MOAN PAO

A SOCIAL WORKER IN HSIPAW

Nang Moan Moan Pao, from Hsipaw, northern Shan State, helps IDPs and is involved in social and charity work. In 2020, she was elected to represent Hsipaw constituency (1) at the State Parliament. She has shared her personal story and the challenges she faces supporting IDPs in her hometown.

Hsipaw is home to many Ethnic Armed Organizations and is one of the key bases of the Burmese military. Fighting happens constantly and forcibly displaced people in the areas. Due to the political unrest and instability in 2015 - 2016, many families, particularly in northern Shan State, where Hsipaw is located, lost their homes and even their loved ones.

Seeing the need to help those families, Nang Moan Moan Pao connected and collaborated with the Shan Literature and Cultural Association (SLCA) to collect donations for IDPs. She has continued to work with the association since.

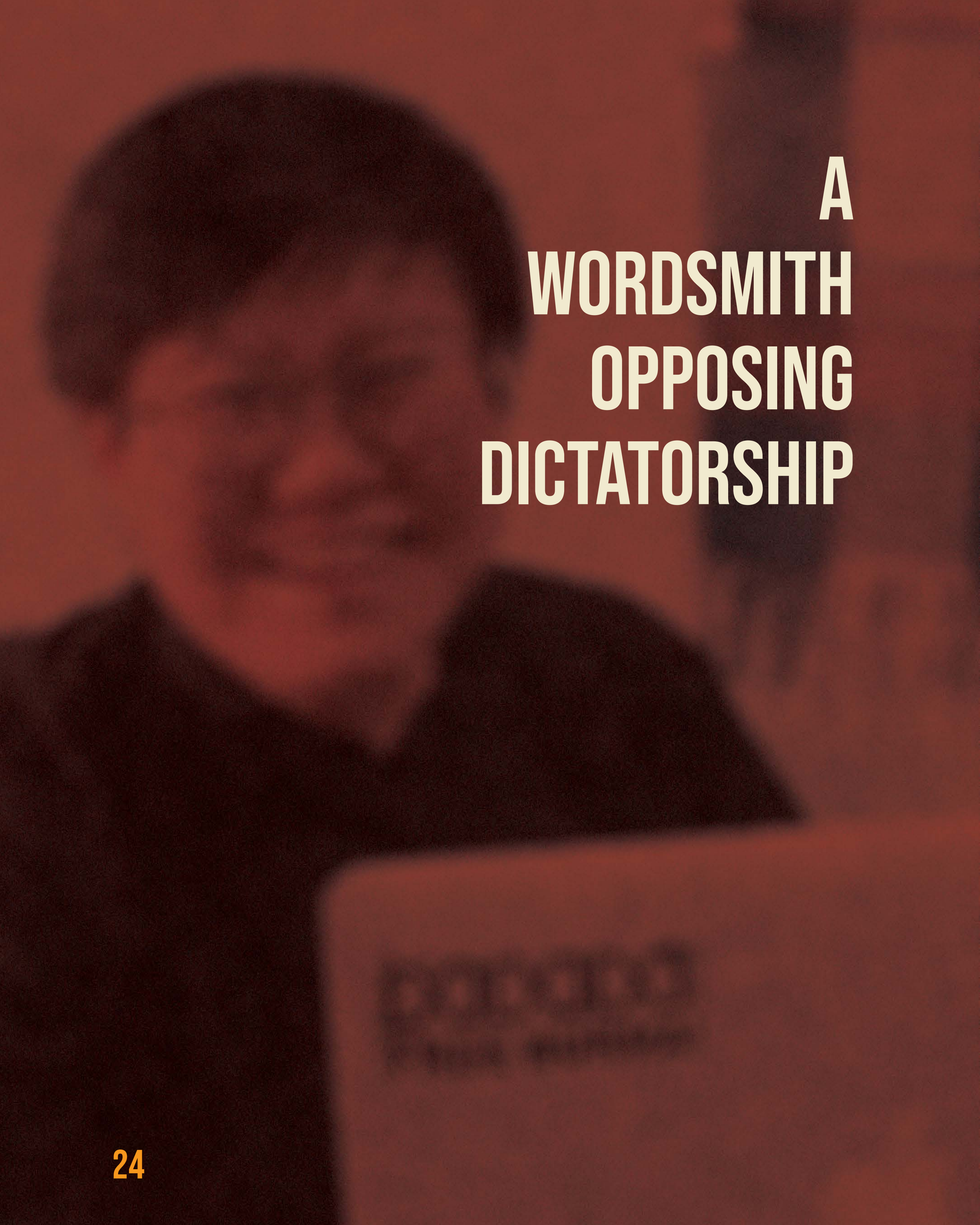
"I feel sad to see the houses and belongings of families in my hometown destroyed, and to witness all kinds of human rights violations against them. I try to help as much as I can because I have had similar experiences."

Her social and charity work presents many challenges. She explained that some donors do not provide transportation funds even though they have core funds allocated for that purpose. Often, she has to use my own money and rely on my friends to send donations to IDPs.

Men in her community also usually oppose her involvement in charity work. Because she is a woman, they believe she should only focus on household chores or caring for babies. They consider charity and social work irrelevant because they deem them costly, time-consuming, and exhausting.

Her family members initially tried to prevent me from pursuing this work, but eventually, they accepted it. Currently, they neither support nor encourage her in her charity work. They are unhelpful but do not actively try to stop her anymore.

“I WANT TO HELP PEOPLE AND CONNECT IDPS IN DANGEROUS ZONES WITH MY NETWORKS TO FULFILL THEIR NEEDS AND EMPOWER THEM. ADDITIONALLY, I WANT TO SEND A MESSAGE TO EVERYONE SUPPORTING IDPS. I SINCERELY HOPE THAT THOSE INVOLVED IN THIS WORK ACT WITH GENUINE INTENTIONS AND A SENSE OF SERVICE, DEMONSTRATING EMPATHY, KINDNESS, COMPASSION, AND SYMPATHY. PEOPLE ASSISTING IDPS SHOULD NOT ACT OUT OF SELF-INTEREST.”



**A
WORDSMITH
OPPOSING
DICTATORSHIP**

“I FEEL IMMENSE HAPPINESS WHEN A NEWS STORY I WRITE BRINGS ABOUT CHANGE, OR WHEN IT ENLIGHTENS READERS AND EMPOWERS THEM WITH KNOWLEDGE.”

| NANG SENG NOM

A JOURNALIST

Nang Seng Nom was born in Muse, a town in Northern Shan State near the border with China.

In early 2010, she engaged in small-scale trading operations. She decided to cease her business due to discrimination and injustice in the field. She decided to take a risk and traveled to Rangoon/Yangon, the former capital of Burma/Myanmar, where she embarked on her career as a journalist in 2010.

In Rangoon/Yangon, she found many news journals rarely seen in my hometown. “Everything seemed new, igniting my interest and fueling my desire to learn more.”

During that period, the country was under the rule of a military government, and freedom of the press was severely restricted. Journalism training could not be openly conducted, forcing me to pursue my studies in journalism as a clandestine mission. Due to the oppressive censorship practices, only news stories about events and celebrations could be published.

“MY PASSION FOR JOURNALISM GREW EXPONENTIALLY AFTER I BEGAN WORKING WITH THE IRRAWADDY IN 2012. MY OVERWHELMING PASSION FOR JOURNALISM TOOK EVERYONE, INCLUDING MYSELF, BY SURPRISE. THAT MEDIA OUTLET PROVIDED ME WITH INVALUABLE KNOWLEDGE, MOLDING ME INTO A SKILLED AND COMPETENT JOURNALIST.”

Throughout her career as a journalist, she have encountered numerous unforgettable moments such as having to flee for her life in armed conflict areas at midnight, facing threats from the military in Mong Ko area, and witnessing the arrest of the two locals who were guiding her to cover the story in that area. Covering news on the Naga Hills in

2014 is one of the most unforgettable memories, as it was a challenging and solitary endeavor.

Nang Seng Nom currently serves as the Burmese-language editor of the Shan Herald Agency for News (SHAN), a reputable media outlet based in Shan State.

Despite having a renowned media outlet within our ethnic group, very few individuals from the Shan community pursue journalism as their profession.

“I ENCOURAGE SHAN YOUTH TO GAIN A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF JOURNALISM AND RECOGNIZE THE SIGNIFICANT ROLE THAT THE MEDIA PLAYS IN EFFECTING CHANGE. MY HOPE IS THAT THEY WILL EMBRACE IT AS A PROFESSION.”

Nang Seng Nom understands well that patriarchy poses a significant challenge within the community, permeating various aspects of society. Hence, she believes the media is crucial in combating and diminishing its influence in the communities.

“GENDER EQUALITY SHOULD BE PROMOTED ACROSS VARIOUS DIMENSIONS OF SOCIETY. I AM AN INDIVIDUAL STUDYING GENDER AND WRITING ARTICLES ON THE SUBJECT.”

“WITH TWELVE YEARS OF EXPERIENCE AS A JOURNALIST, AND HAVING LIVED THROUGH TWO PERIODS OF MILITARY DICTATORSHIP, I CAN ASSERT THAT ONE COMMON ASPECT IS THE SUPPRESSION OF THE PRESS THROUGH BLACKOUTS, AND THE DELIBERATE TARGETING, ARREST, AND ASSAULT OF JOURNALISTS.”

When Nang Seng Nom conducts journalism training for young individuals, she emphasizes the significance of addressing gender issues, especially for male participants. Recognizing the importance of gender perspectives in journalism, she guides them to understand how to incorporate such perspectives when crafting their stories.

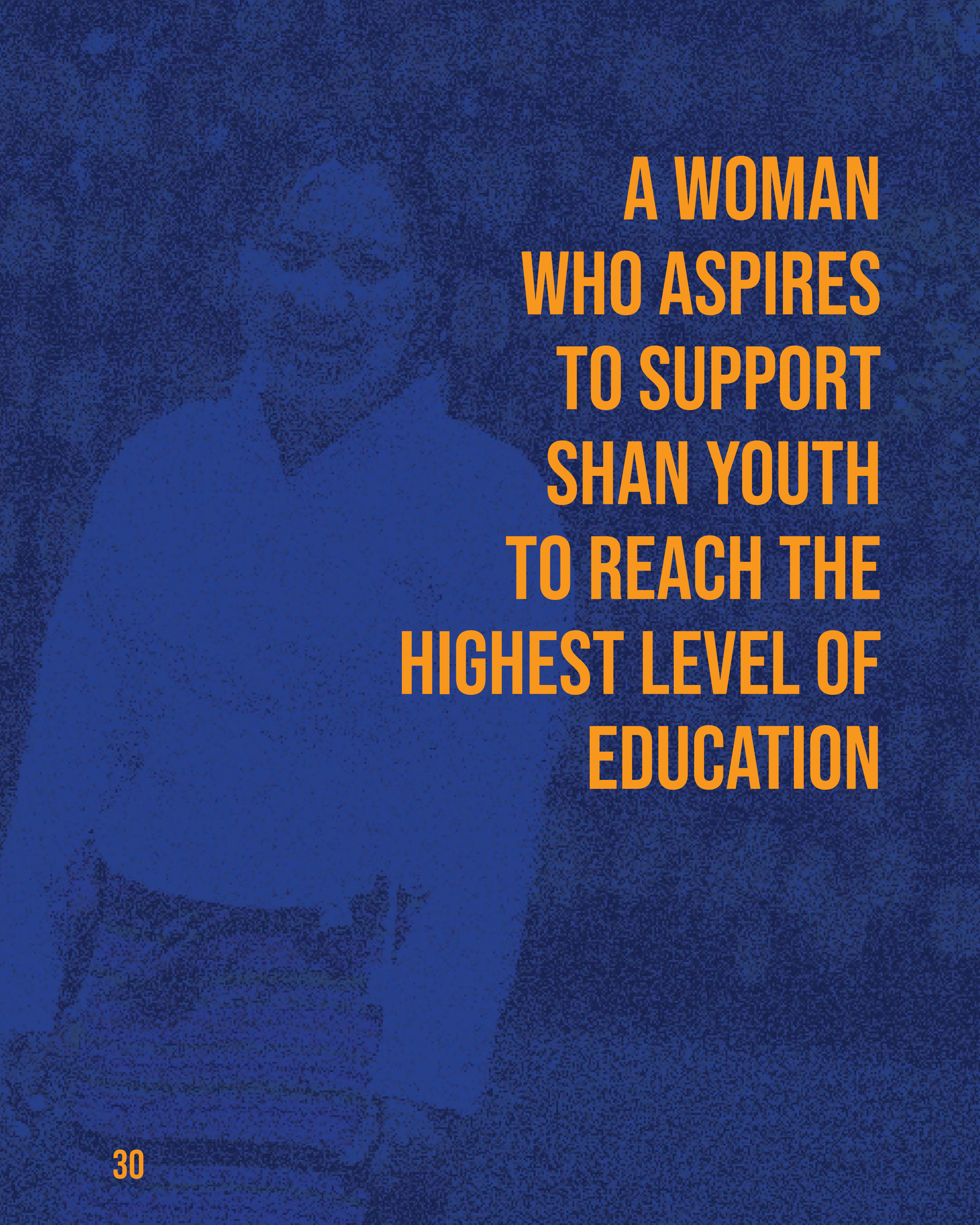
Under the rule of military dictators, journalists face the grim reality of not being able to openly disclose information about their own families, as doing so would expose them to the risk of imprisonment.

In addition to opposing military dictatorship, Shan media also faces threats when covering negative aspects related to ethnic armed organizations and other militias.

Regardless, she often encourages Shan youth to highlight both the positive and negative aspects. "Only through this balanced approach can we work towards improving and strengthening our people and ethnic armed organizations within our state."

"IF WE LACK YOUNG SHAN JOURNALISTS WHO ARE WILLING TO POINT OUT BOTH THE POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF OUR PEOPLE AND OUR STATE, THEN DICTATORSHIP WILL PERSIST; NOT ONLY WITHIN THE BURMESE MILITARY BUT ALSO WITHIN ETHNIC ARMED ORGANIZATIONS."

Therefore, Nang Seng Nom is dedicated to nurturing a new generation of young individuals who wield pens as instruments of revolution against all forms of dictatorship.



**A WOMAN
WHO ASPIRES
TO SUPPORT
SHAN YOUTH
TO REACH THE
HIGHEST LEVEL OF
EDUCATION**

“I WANT ALL SHAN YOUTH TO BE EDUCATED, SO I AM TEACHING FOR THE NEXT GENERATION OF SHAN PEOPLE.”

| NANG SAN PHONG

AN EDUCATOR

Nang San Phong is from Keng Tung, Eastern Shan State. Currently, she serves as the principal of the Kaw Dai National Primary School and has been with the school for over 13 years.

Before joining the Kaw Dai National School, she was a summer school teacher and taught children at village monastery schools. She began working as a summer school teacher when she was an eighth-grade student, and that's when she discovered her love for teaching.

Kaw Dai School teaches youth Shan, English, Math, Science, and the Burmese language. The difference between the state school and Kali National School is that the language of instruction is Shan. The school is open to students of any ethnicity who can understand it.

The school accepts students transferring from state schools. For non-Burmese ethnic groups, studying at state schools is challenging. Children can understand and learn more effectively because the school is based on mother-tongue language learning.

“I, myself, did not learn much from state schools when I attended. That’s why I became a teacher. I dreamed of becoming a teacher to teach children to learn more effectively.”

Oftentimes, children across all communities do not want to go to school as they found that the subjects taught are not useful.

“I BELIEVE THAT EDUCATION IS ESSENTIAL. AS A TEACHER, YOU HAVE TO UNDERSTAND YOUR SUBJECT WELL. YOU CAN TEACH STUDENTS TO UNDERSTAND THE MATERIAL YOU ARE TEACHING. I WORK HARD TO DEVELOP TEACHING METHODS THAT ENSURE STUDENTS’ UNDERSTANDING. IDENTIFYING AND DEVELOPING THE MOST EFFECTIVE TEACHING METHODS IS A BIG CHALLENGE.”

“IT IS QUITE CHALLENGING FOR US TO DEEPLY UNDERSTAND WORD CHOICE AND RELEVANT EXPRESSIONS THAT CHILDREN CAN EASILY UNDERSTAND. IF WE DO NOT FULLY UNDERSTAND THE SUBJECT WE TEACH, WE ARE IN TROUBLE. WHEN CHILDREN ASK QUESTIONS AND TEACHERS CANNOT ANSWER THEM, THEY WILL THINK THAT TEACHERS ARE INCAPABLE. THEREFORE, THE CHALLENGE FOR US TEACHERS IS TO THOROUGHLY UNDERSTAND THE SUBJECT WE TEACH. AND ANOTHER THING IS KNOWING THE SPECIFIC VOCABULARY AND APPROPRIATE TERMS USED IN THE SUBJECT.”

Ethnic children's interest in learning depends on teachers. If students do not understand what teachers say and write, they will regress and be left behind in their education.

Understanding how important it is to keep keep children motivated to learn, Nang San Phong always makes sure that they are recognized for the skills in which they excel. She also prioritize at building their confidence to speak in front of people. It is the way she encourages her students to move forward with their education.

The fact that children from remote areas often drop out of school also depends on their parents. Many parents, including Nang San Phong's parents, do not encourage education.

“AT PRESENT, CHILDREN DO NOT WANT TO STUDY AND GO TO SCHOOL. SINCE THEY LIVE IN AREAS WHERE AGRICULTURE IS THE MAIN LIVELIHOOD, THEIR COMMUNITIES DO NOT ENCOURAGE EDUCATION. THEY DO NOT KNOW THE BENEFITS OF EDUCATION. FOR SHAN CHILDREN TO LEARN SHAN, AND OTHER LANGUAGES, AND TO STUDY ABROAD, PARENTS MUST ACTIVELY TAKE PART IN THE EDUCATION PROCESS.”

Nang San Phong is set on a mission to encourage Shan youth to complete their secondary education and further their studies abroad. She hopes the Shan youth expand their education, return to Burma, and give back to the Shan people.

**THE NURSE
WHO ASPIRES
TO PROVIDE
MEDICAL
SERVICES FOR
PEOPLE IN
NEED**

“I ASPIRE TO MAINTAIN THIS FREE CLINIC, PROVIDING MEDICAL CARE TO PEOPLE WHO CANNOT AFFORD IT. DESPITE FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS, I FIND MERIT AND FULFILLMENT THROUGH THIS WORK. I MAY NOT BE WEALTHY, BUT THE SATISFACTION I DERIVE FROM MAKING A DIFFERENCE IS PRICELESS.”

| NANG SI NOON

A HEALTH CARE PROVIDER

Nang Si Noon is a senior nurse at the People’s Hospital in Mong Pan, Southern Shan State, which is characterized by its mountainous terrain.

At age 38, I find myself working not only as a nurse but also as a full-time single mother, raising a 13-year-old son.

“Despite the numerous challenges of being a single parent, I draw strength from my duty to provide for my son. I must stay strong for my son, no matter how tough things get. I cannot afford to be disheartened and weak because my

son relies on me. I think about everything for my son, and together, we overcome difficulties with happiness.”

In addition to her role at the hospital, Nang Si Noon actively engages in volunteer work as a healthcare provider, particularly for elderly individuals who struggle to afford healthcare. Every Sunday, she opens a clinic at the Num Khone Shan Association for Welfare, offering free medical treatment to the elderly.

The number of elderly people visiting the clinic continues to grow. Common issues include high blood pressure and diabetes. Nang Si Noon also often spreads the word about the clinic and its patients’ needs to inspire donations from generous community members. Even elderly people who visit weekly contribute one or two thousand kyats, which helps to cover medical expenses.

“RUNNING A WEEKLY CHARITY CLINIC COMES WITH CHALLENGES, ESPECIALLY SECURING DOCTORS. IN OUR TOWNSHIP, THERE IS ONLY ONE DOCTOR, WHO IS OFTEN OCCUPIED WITH HOSPITAL DUTIES. SINCE NURSES LACK THE AUTHORITY TO ADMINISTER MEDICAL TREATMENT, THE PRESENCE OF A DOCTOR IS CRUCIAL.”

Her journey to getting involved in charity work began when she started to share information on social media about the difficulties and needs of people living in poverty in remote villages. People who saw her social media post reached out to her and showed interest in donating and collaborating with her to extend their help.

“I aspire to maintain this free clinic, providing medical care to people who cannot afford it. Despite financial constraints, I find merit and fulfillment through this work. I may not be wealthy, but the satisfaction I derive from making a difference is priceless.”

Nang Si Noon also spends considerable time collecting donations to ensure that patients can access health care services.

“EVERY DAY AT THE HOSPITAL, I AM DISHEARTENED TO HEAR THAT PEOPLE CANNOT CONTINUE THEIR MEDICAL TREATMENTS DUE TO FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS. THIS PUSHES ME TO COLLECT DONATIONS IN ANY WAY POSSIBLE BECAUSE I CANNOT STAND BY WITHOUT HELPING.”

Nang Si Noon has supported four children in getting surgical operations for Chagas disease in Taunggyi. She also donated to people needing food, sought donations from others, and ensured that donations reached people who needed help.

In addition to addressing Shan communities' lack of knowledge regarding health in mountainous regions, Nang Si Noon also raises health awareness among the community by giving presentations and distributing pamphlets in the Shan language.

“LIVING IN AN AREA WHERE TRANSPORTATION IS CHALLENGING AND ACCESS TO EDUCATION IS QUITE LIMITED, MY ROLE IN PROVIDING HEALTH EDUCATION IS CRUCIAL. THEREFORE, I AM DELIGHTED TO FIND WAYS TO COVER MEDICAL EXPENSES FOR PATIENTS FACING DIFFICULTIES.”

**ALTHOUGH IT IS
CHALLENGING FOR NANG
SI NOON TO BALANCE HER
TIME BETWEEN RAISING
HER SON AND WORKING AS
A HEALTHCARE PROVIDER,
SHE IS DETERMINED TO
PERSIST.**

**EMPOWERING
WOMEN,
PROTECTING
WOMEN'S
RIGHTS**

“THE WORD EMPOWERMENT IS VERY MEANINGFUL TO ME. TO BE EMPOWERED MEANS TO BE ABLE TO MAKE MY OWN DECISIONS, TO BE ABLE TO STAND ON MY OWN, TO HAVE CONFIDENCE, TO BUILD A SAFE SPACE FOR WOMEN, TO GET TOGETHER, TO SHARE OUR EXPERIENCES WITH EACH OTHER, TO LEARN FROM EACH OTHER, AND EMPOWER EACH OTHER ALONG THE WAY.”

| NANG HSENG ZIN

WOMEN RIGHTS ADVOCATE

Nang Hseng Zin is a Shan women's rights activist passionate about bringing women to the decision-making tables. At the time of this interview, Nang Hseng Zin served as the Director of the Women's Empowerment Program at Shan Women's Action Network (SWAN). This interview was conducted right before the general elections in 2020, and subsequently before the 2021 coup.

As someone from a remote area of her home state, Shan State, Nang Hseng Zin is particularly interested in working with women from remote areas who are eager to learn, build their capacity, and exercise their birth rights and freedom. Having been given the opportunities herself, she has been working to pass on those opportunities to many more women.

“FIRSTLY, WOMEN NEED TO KNOW THEIR RIGHTS TO PROTECT THEMSELVES. AFTER THAT, WE MUST BUILD SELF-CONFIDENCE TO RAISE OUR VOICES AND SPEAK UP ABOUT OUR PROBLEMS. MORE IMPORTANTLY, WE MUST LEARN LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION TO HAVE REAL PEACE IN OUR COMMUNITY AND OUR COUNTRY.”

Looking at the current situation in Burma/ Myanmar, there are armed conflicts and fighting between armed groups, especially in the ethnic areas, even during the signing of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement. Consequently, vulnerable groups, especially women and children, are affected by the conflicts. Nang Hseng Zin believes that women must be in leading roles and decision-making levels, as they know what has impacted their lives and needs.

The most enormous challenge is overcoming social norms in the community about women's roles and empowering them by raising awareness and building their self-confidence. Building self-confidence takes time because women have lived in an environment that does not promote and accept women as leaders.

Even after women gain self-confidence after finishing training and returning to the community, they still face challenges of not being recognized by the community. It takes a long time to change people's attitudes and behaviors and recognize women's capacity and leading role.

“I WOULD SAY WE HAVE TO BE STRONG AND PERSISTENT TO CHANGE THE DEEP-ROOTED SOCIAL NORMS.”

Women are half the population, and their representation must be reflected in the parliament and beyond. Since women are directly affected by conflicts and instability, they have the most relevant knowledge to address the difficulties that people in their communities are facing every day.

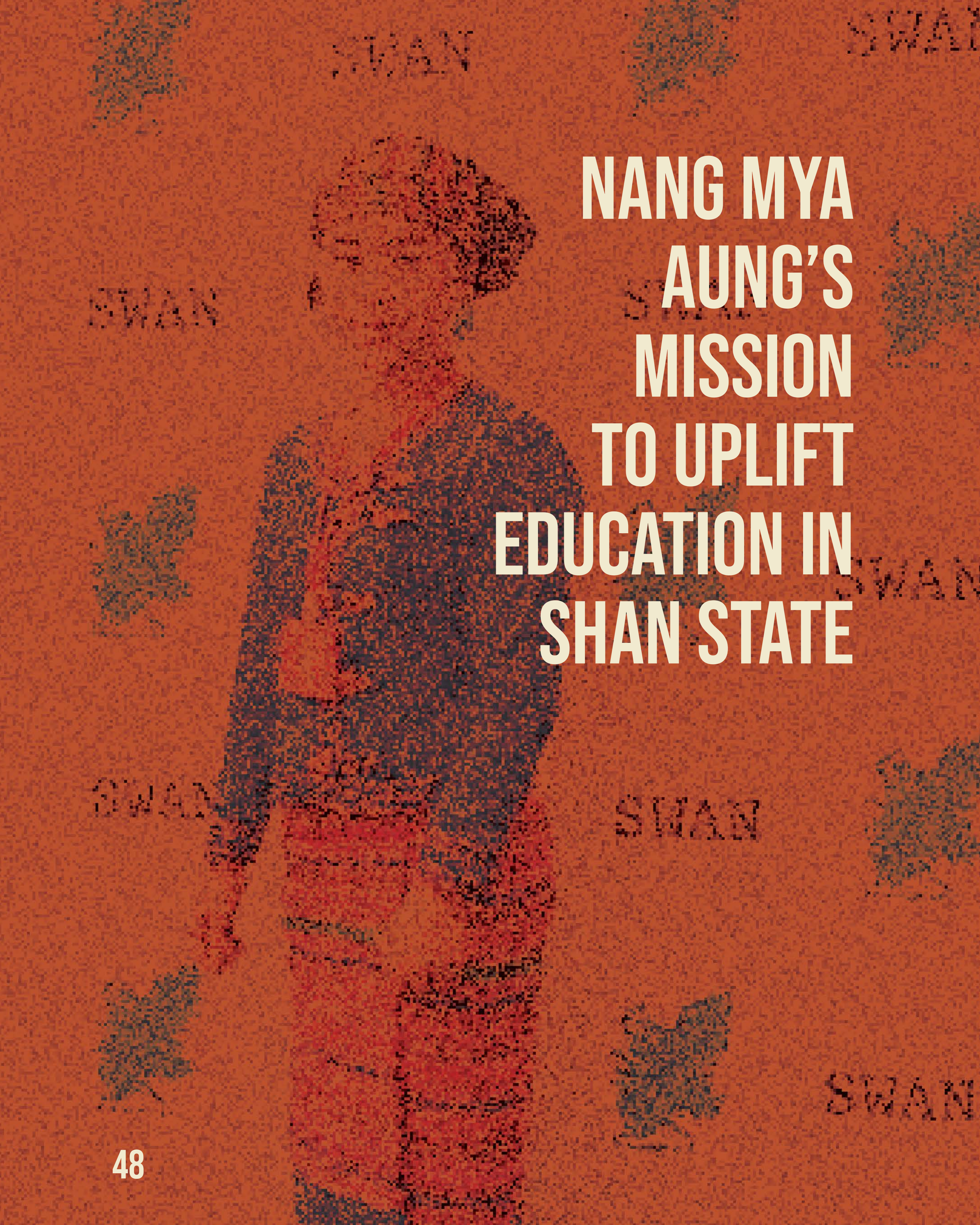
To increase women's participation in leading roles and decision-making, the government should adopt a minimum requirement for women's participation at all levels of

government institutions. For example, the government can adopt a gender quota for every level of all branches of government, i.e., legislative, executive, and judiciary. At the same time, the government should require all government officials and decision-makers to attend gender awareness training to make them understand gender-based discrimination and violence. In addition, the government should adopt gender-sensitive policies to make sure that all the government's policies include gender perspectives.

"I want to see communities and a country that has no fighting, no discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity, religion, or age, and no exploitation. I want to see communities where women and men are working alongside each other to build peace and stability for our communities and country."

GREEN HILL HOTEL
September 20 – 21, 2019

“TO REACH THIS GOAL, MORE WOMEN MUST TAKE THE LEADING ROLE AND BE PRESENT AT ALL LEVELS OF DECISION-MAKING. PARTICULARLY, I HOPE TO SEE MORE WOMEN CANDIDATES IN THE 2020 ELECTION AND MORE WOMEN MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT TO REPRESENT WOMEN’S VOICE AND NEEDS AND BUILD PEACE AND SECURITY IN OUR SOCIETY AND COUNTRY. I, ALONG WITH ALL OUR SWAN SISTERS, AM COMMITTED TO CONTRIBUTING TO ANY EFFORTS THAT WOULD HELP MAKE THIS HOPE AND DREAM POSSIBLE TO THE BEST OF OUR ABILITIES.”



**NANG MYA
AUNG'S
MISSION
TO UPLIFT
EDUCATION IN
SHAN STATE**

“I NOTICED THAT THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SHAN STATE IS MUCH LOWER THAN IN OTHER PARTS OF BURMA. I WANT TO INCREASE CAPACITY FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS BY SETTING A HIGHER STANDARD OF EDUCATION QUALITY.”

| NANG MYA AUNG

A MONASTIC SCHOOL TEACHER

Nang Mya Aung is a monastic school teacher in Mongnai, Southern Shan State.

Nang Mya Aung believes education is a tool for peace-building because it can be used to communicate between people, groups of people, or countries. For this reason, she has dedicated herself to educating the new generations.

“WHEN EDUCATED, THEY CAN DECIDE WHAT IS RIGHT OR WRONG AND WILL KNOW HOW TO BRING PEACE TO OUR PEOPLE.”

Nang Mya Aung's students attend the monastic school because their village has no school or place to study.

“SOME DO NOT HAVE A CHANCE TO STUDY BECAUSE THEY ARE VERY POOR AND CANNOT AFFORD THE COSTS. OTHERS ARE ORPHANS WHO ALSO HAVE LIMITED OPPORTUNITIES.”

Women face more challenges in accessing education because they are not seen as equal to men. Due to this, women have to try harder. Young girls continued to be discriminated against by the social norms, believing that they don't need education, as they are supposed to and expected to help their parents earn money and care for their younger siblings.



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By Ying Tzar

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SHAN WOMEN'S ACTION
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