March 7, 2021

Pastoral Letter on the Crisis in Myanmar

To: The Members of the World Methodist Council,
The Methodist Church of Lower Myanmar and
The Methodist Church of Upper Myanmar

Dear People Called Methodists,

“Set up road signs; put up guideposts. Take note of the highway, the road that you take. Return, O Virgin Israel, return to your towns. How long will you wander, O protesting feisty daughter? The Lord will create a new thing on earth – a woman will surround a man.” (Jeremiah 31:21-22)

Greetings on the third Sunday of Lent! Justice and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be upon you! Let’s affirm in our Christian faith the strong bond of Christian love as well as the evergreen solidarity of Christian hope! Yes, indeed, in the time like this! As we reflect on the prophetic word of God, I would like to share on the struggle and suffering of our sisters and brothers in Myanmar.

The Spirit of God must have been outpouring into the people of Myanmar, especially the young women among them. In Myanmar’s protests, young women are on the front lines, rebuking the generals of Tadmadaw, the Myanmar military, who reimposed a patriarchal dictatorship that has suppressed women for half a century and ousted a female civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

Ma Kyal Sin, 19, was shot in the head by the security forces who killed 38 people on the single bloodiest day of March 3, 2021 since the Feb. 1 coup. Ms. Kyal Sin loved taekwondo and dance. She was one of Gen Z, a fearless generation in Myanmar. When she rallied her fellow protesters, she dressed in sneakers and torn jeans which General Min Aung Hlang, the junta chief, called “indecent clothes contrary to Myanmar culture.” The black T-shirt that Ms. Kyal Sin wore to the protest and carried a simple message: “Everything will be OK” has become a slogan of people’s movement in Myanmar. I strongly condemn the junta’s crime against humanity as they exhumated and further insulted, even murdered twice the body of Ma Kyal Sin in order to conceal the fact she was killed by their forces. And I insist the junta should be brought to the International Criminal Court. Otherwise, I imperatively warn them they will have to stand before the judgement seat of the Almighty God.

What’s going on in Myanmar today? I cannot but believe that a prophesy of Jeremiah 31:22 has come true: “A woman will surround a man.” The numberless protesting feisty women like Ms. Kyal Sin keep on marching today and tomorrow till the restoration of democracy and human rights.
in their conflict-ridden country. Contrary to the worldview of the Tatmadaw considering women weak and impure, they are no less brave than men and as pure as Ms. Kyal Sin which means “pure star” in Burmese. Truly the stars on the shoulders of the generals have already fallen down while the 54 lost souls who led many to righteousness will shine like the bright stars of the heavens for ever and ever.

I would like to urge you to discern that the time is coming, the time when the Lord will create a new thing in Myanmar. The misogynistic Tatmadaw males are loath to walk under the clotheslines of women’s sarongs, called htamein, because they are afraid of losing their masculinity. Flouting gender stereotypes with defiant creativity, people not only protect protest zones but also liberate the silly men from the bondage of “the basic principles of the world” (Galatians 4:3). Not the sarongs but the guns are replacing and removing their masculine symbols as long as they shoot their women down. The sarongs are rather for embracing in love and for fertility the cowering men in the colonized world dominated by the empire.

Let us boldly and joyfully affirm that a woman will surround a man. Yet let’s do not omit our lamentations for the lost ones of the beloved communities in Myanmar. “This might be the last time I say this. Love you so much. Don’t forget.” This is Ms. Kyal Sin’s last message to a friend on social media. We will never forget you, Angel, which is her English name, and also your good people. Since our God of the Lenten season is like “Rachel weeping for her children” (Jeremiah 31:15), she has great compassion, i.e., rahamim in Hebrew for the oppressed from the depth/womb (rehem, the root word for rahamim) of God (Jeremiah 31:20). It is no wonder that Jesus’ women followers, despite their traumatic memory of the materiality of the death of their beloved Lord, became the first witnesses of the empty tomb of the risen Christ which was transformed into the womb of new creation.

Therefore, we hold the Methodist churches of Myanmar in prayer as you do prophetic witnesses and provide comfort to your people in this anxious and uncertain time. And we want to assure you that we stand in solidarity with the patriotic and courageous people of Myanmar struggling and suffering for the cause of justice, truth, freedom, and peace. May God create a new thing in Myanmar! Praise the Lord who declares that a woman will surround a man!

Reverently looking forward to the day of resurrection of free and flourishing Myanmar,

Your humble servant in Christ,

Rev. Dr. J. C. Park
President of the World Methodist Council