

## Maltese students join Missio Malta in aid of the Myanmar missionary campaign



Every year St. Margaret College Secondary School, Verdala students join Missio Malta in aid of a missionary campaign. This year Missio Malta is inviting Maltese people to contribute to the missionary campaign in aid of Myanmar. St. Margaret College students, together with their teacher Martin Azzopardi sdc, join Missio Malta not only to raise funds in aid of Myanmar, but also to do research about the situation of poverty in Myanmar and offer solutions to the Myanmar government.

The Asian country of Myanmar (previously called Burma) is estimated to have a population of 52 million people, of whom 26% still live in poverty. Despite the 5% annual economic growth of this country, poverty still reigns, especially in

the rural areas. Thus a thorough investigation and understanding of the main causes of poverty in Myanmar is needed.



Myanmar is considered to be the largest country in mainland Southeast Asia with very fertile lands and with a significant amount of potentially productive natural resources. In fact, agriculture is the main economic source of income creating employment for more than half the country's workforce. Paddy rice is the country's primary crop which generates profit in Myanmar but compared to Cambodia and Vietnam it still offers the lowest profit in the region.

Many rural areas in Myanmar are highly vulnerable to extreme weather such as heavy downpour and cyclones. In fact in 2008, Cyclone Nargis hit the country leaving long effect devastation, especially in the rural areas. Following the effect of Cyclone Nargis, people were unable to create economic value for themselves and their communities.

Health issues are also among the causes of poverty in Myanmar. Around 37% of the population is still unable to have access to clean water and sanitation. These health issues rank the country with the lowest life expectancy as well as the second-highest rate of infant and child mortality. According to recent figures it is assumed that 40 out of every 1000 babies born die before they reach their first birthday. Much of this is due to inadequate healthcare facilities which can easily be overcome if the government invests more money to improve the existing healthcare facilities and make plans to contribute more to the country's healthcare.

However, a campaign to increase the disease control in Myanmar has shown a marked reduction in reported HIV/AIDS cases. Also the economic growth of the country and the government's priority to decrease rural poverty is offering a light of hope towards rural areas in Myanmar.

According to the World Bank, poverty in Myanmar has decreased from 44.5% in 2004 to 26.1% in 2015, mostly in urban areas. The government of Myanmar has made plans to invest more on education. In fact, the government's investment on education increased from \$251.8 million in 2013 to \$1.2 billion in 2017.

On contacting the Director of Missio Malta, Mons Valent Borg, students were told that this year's Missio Malta missionary campaign in aid of Myanmar carried the slogan: **'Healing a nation through education'** where all fundraising campaigns held in Maltese schools, parishes and Church institutions aim to support schools in Myanmar, particularly St. John's Catholic School in the Diocese of Hakha, State of Chin in Myanmar, and various college teaching programmes around Myanmar.

While successes are to be recognized, it is important to highlight the fact that without more investment from both government and foreign aid, poverty in Myanmar cannot be eradicated. Thus St. Margaret College students unite with Missio Malta in encouraging other students to contribute in the fundraising campaign in aid of education in Myanmar



This project aims to reach seven of the main goals proposed by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals: No Poverty, Zero Hunger, Good Health and Well-being, Quality Education, Gender Equality, Reduced Inequalities, and Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.