

East Timor: a taste of life

An hour's plane ride north of Darwin lies Dili, the capital of the world's newest democracy, East Timor. This little half island experienced centuries of colonial rule and decades of suffering under Indonesian occupation. During this occupation one third of East Timor's population lost their lives due to starvation, epidemics and war. On 20 May 2002, after enormous bloodshed and impoverishment, East Timor was internationally recognised as an independent state. *Forceten's Simply Sharing Week* in 2004 will coincide with their second birthday celebrations.

After years of chronic displacement, people are returning to their land and embarking on the great task of rebuilding their lives. The work of *forceten's* partners in East Timor is largely focused on food security. For those starting up a new community garden our partners provide a variety of seeds, information on composting and hand tools. This allows adequate nutrition for the families involved and often provides a little surplus that they can sell at the market to buy salt or sugar. Our partners run a community buffalo farm. The buffalos are given to a village to plow the fields. However, the village agrees to pass on any offspring of the buffalo to another village so that the benefits are ongoing for the whole community.

Beneath the struggles that exist today in East Timor there is a feeling of tremendous hope. And it is this hope that we wish to celebrate and support during *Simply Sharing Week* 16- 23 May 2004. If you would like to receive a *Simply Sharing Week* kit on East Timor in early 2004 or have any questions on these exciting projects please email kr Robertson@ncca.org.au or phone (02) 9299 2215.



Photo: Kirsty Robertson, *forceten*

Kirsty Robertson

"The faith of Burmese Christians is rooted in their own soil"

The Myanmar Council of Churches is keen to promote spiritual growth to sustain the people and the country and has a commitment of service to all people – to provide spiritual and material needs", said Mr Ja Naw, Executive Secretary of the Service and Development Unit of the MCC.

Ja Naw visited Australia as a guest of the Christmas Bowl. The Christmas Bowl supports the work of the Myanmar Council of Churches and particularly the Service and Development Unit – Ja Naw expressed much gratitude for the concern, prayers and support from Australian people through the Christmas Bowl.

He spoke of the work of the Myanmar Council of Churches – which includes training and people-oriented community organising programs, primary health education, the growth in drug usage, clean water supplies, food security programs in grass-roots communities, and mining and logging issues.

The problems of internally displaced people (including students in the border areas, and the urgent need for education programs for them) are also being addressed. There are several hundred thousand displaced people, of different ethnic groups, in Burma.

Almost all of these people are searching for work, and the spectre of HIV/AIDS confronts them everywhere, in the towns, border areas and villages. Many of the half



Photo: Colleen Hodge, CWS

Mr Ja Naw, Executive Secretary of the Service and Development Unit of the MCC

million HIV+ people are in the church communities. There is also the need to care for HIV+ orphans.

Ja Naw asked that the members of the National Council of Churches in Australia continue to pray for peace and reconciliation in Burma, and for inter-faith dialogue. He said, "The faith of Burmese Christians is rooted in their own soil". There had been a time when it was thought Christianity would die – although there have been no foreign missionaries since 1996 the number of Christians is increasing.

Colleen Hodge