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WORKING TOWARDS A TRULY JUST, HEALTHY AND PEACEFUL WORLD

WORKING AMID WAR



Dr. Suhaila Tarazi stands in her office at the Al-Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza following a blast in October 2023. PWRDF has supported the hospital during many crises brought on by violence.

An interview with PWRDF Humanitarian Response Coordinator, Naba Gurung

Naba Gurung is the Humanitarian Response Coordinator at PWRDF. Whenever and wherever disaster strikes or conflict erupts, Gurung is managing the response as PWRDF answers the call to support our partners on the ground. In his 22 years with PWRDF, Naba has experienced countless unique situations. PWRDF Communications and Marketing Officer, Jacqueline Tucci, recently sat down with Gurung for this edition of PWRDF's Under the Sun, to discuss the intricacies of delivering humanitarian aid during times of conflict and war.

JT: Is your work different when partners are responding to war rather than something like a natural disaster, or other emergency?

NG: In some ways it's the same, and in some ways, it's different. It's the same ultimate target. Whatever the cause of the disaster, the response would be to save lives and to reduce suffering of those who are most vulnerable. Ideally, partners will always consult with those who are affected and then respond where they can be most impactful, depending on the greatest need and gaps in the overall humanitarian response.

JT: What are some of the unique challenges of responding in a humanitarian context within conflict?

NG: In natural disasters, the state has the responsibility. Unless they declare an emergency and appeal for a wider response, it is their responsibility first. You may have limited road access, road collapse or bridge collapse, or there may be groups who are angry and they may obstruct the aid going through to certain areas, but usually,

in the larger community and within the government, everybody is on board. In conflict, you have warring factions, so that makes the situation complicated. I need to remain flexible with the partners. You can't expect an ideal scenario. We're working in a very fluid situation. That part, that fluidity, that need to remain flexible and to adapt to the local context is a challenge.

JT: What does it mean to you to stay flexible and adaptable, and what might that look like in these types of conflict situations?

NG: Usually we need a plan, to be in solidarity with the partner; but also to contribute our financial resources. We come together to work with a local partner that's responding to a crisis in a conflict situation, and for us to move money, we need at least some kind of a plan. Today, we and our partners might come up with a plan, and then it may have to change. We adapt as we go along. I don't say, "okay, last week you presented this plan." This week that plan may not fit people's needs, so we need to revise it.



JT: The humanitarian principles are humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. Are these principles particularly challenging to uphold during times of war compared to other emergencies?

NG: The short answer is "yes." The first one is, of course, humanity, and that's what drives all of these responses. All human lives are sacred. It's the main reason humanitarian response exists in the first place. But the principles become challenging when in an active war situation. I think neutrality is the most challenging. There are partner organizations, there are warring factions and then there are people in the community. People have different lenses and views. It's hard because you may be perceived as a sympathizer to one group, even if that's not your intent. Neutrality is a very complicated thing.

Humanitarian response is important but it doesn't give you the ultimate solution. You need to advocate for leadership, for peace processes and negotiation. And then in that case, also, you may be perceived as taking sides, even though the basis of advocacy

would be the protection of civilians. That's what I call the "humanitarian resistance."

Independence is a challenge. In some cases, there's a very strong actor. As in the case of Ethiopia... In Tigray, there was a very active blockade of aid by the government of Ethiopia because they were fighting a rebel group (the Tigray People's Liberation Front) there. Our partners were doing a drinking water project. They had to suspend their work because of security concerns, and because of limited access. You need to be patient; you can't risk the staff, and it simply wasn't possible to do the project in that context. If you are the partner in this case, you are effectively not able to be independent there. Because you're not able to function in that context, the basic functioning is not allowed at all. In a war situation, all these principles become very difficult to uphold.

JT: What do you mean by humanitarian resistance?

NG: I think it's more and more recognition towards demanding peace. Our partners' work in general is holistic. They would demand peacebuilding. They would demand negotiations or get involved with preparedness or other kinds of activities that would attempt to address root causes, and that advocacy sometimes comes from a need to navigate a very complex situation. On one hand, partners want to respond. And on the other hand, they are aware that they can't continue responding, and continuing with the status quo. Something must change. That awareness is often a big challenge, to balance these two things.

JT: PWRDF operates under a unique model. We work with partners who are local who do the direct work, we don't send our people to deliver. How does that model uniquely position us to effectively support the delivery of aid in war and conflict situations?

NG: For us, not being on the ground, we don't have to worry about an office, or putting staff in a conflict situation. We also don't have to maintain a compound, security, all those things. In almost any type of humanitarian response, the first responders are the neighbours, the community members. And usually that also involves the churches or other faith institutions. Over time, PWRDF has built mutual trust and respect with our partners. Our partners understand the local context, they are there because they have committed their lives to that cause. Our work is so dependent on the sacrifice and commitment of our partners. And that's what makes it possible. In these communities, we have built long-term mutual trust and respect with our partners, and they have in turn built those kinds of relationships with the communities where they work.



Scan this QR code to read Jacqueline and Naba's entire interview.



2 WORKING AMID WAR

“We will not build a peaceful world by following a negative path. It is not enough to say ‘We must not wage war.’ It is necessary to love peace and sacrifice for it. We must concentrate not merely on the negative expulsion of war, but on the positive affirmation of peace.”

From “The Quest for Peace and Justice,” Dr. Martin Luther King’s Nobel lecture, delivered December 11, 1964, in response to winning the Nobel Peace Prize that year.

PWRDF staff work with partners around the world amidst conflict, political instability and war. Here are updates from some of the most challenging areas, including reflections from Naba.



01 Haiti

REASON FOR HOPE

The assassination of Haiti’s President Jovenel Moïse in 2021 plunged parts of the country into an ongoing crisis, but local development workers know that there is hope.

“The resource we have during crisis is community, and what we can do together,” said Renaud Thomas, Director of Rayjon Share Care in Haiti. Rayjon Share Care is a Canadian organization working with partners in Haiti towards sustainable development, and a long-standing partner of PWRDF. The partnership was renewed this year in a project to empower the Haitian Women’s Federation and support their diverse initiatives.

Port-au-Prince has been marred by political instability, civil unrest, and limited access to fuel, clean water and food, leading to widespread hunger, for over two years. Despite the challenges, Thomas and Rayjon Share Care continue to push forward in their work, finding creative solutions to continue. “Every day we have to struggle to meet these challenges,” said Thomas.

As acting-President Ariel Henry assumed office, gang activity sky-rocketed in the capital, but according to Thomas, this is not the case across the country; something that is not always made clear in international media.

“We feel that the international community doesn’t really understand what’s going on [in Haiti],” said Thomas. “The international solutions fix problems that are not our problems.”

One such international solution is the deployment of Kenyan troops to Port-au-Prince following a request by acting-President Henry. Thomas and his colleague, Piera Spinelli Barrile, a Communications and Programs Officer with Rayjon Share Care who was born in Haiti, suggest that while Henry calls for troops to stabilize the unrest against his government, the Haitian people seek a more meaningful change in leadership.

“The people want a revolution,” said Spinelli Barrile. Still, Port-au-Prince is one of ten districts in Haiti, and according to Thomas, nine out of ten exist in relative stability. “Unfortunately, nobody reports that,” he said.

For Thomas and Spinelli Barrile, hope for Haiti comes in the form of learning from communities, following their lead on projects and creating conditions which allow people to stay and invest in their home communities.

“[Community organizations] are the ones who are going to be able to have an impact,” said Spinelli Barrile. “[International governments and organizations] don’t want to fund Haiti because of corruption, they think it’s hopeless...you have to see the actual things that are happening outside of Port-au-Prince...Look outside and this is where you are going to find the solutions.”

02 South Sudan

THE TOOLS OF PEACE

Since declaring independence from Sudan in 2011, South Sudan has struggled to find political and economic stability. In 2016, conflict erupted anew causing many South Sudanese to flee to neighbouring countries such as Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

In 2021, many refugees began returning home and PWRDF supported partners working to improve food security for returnees with cash transfers, seeds and farming tools. In 2022, PWRDF began another project aiming to build peace and heal trauma. In Northern Bahr El Ghazal state, violent armed groups were continuing to cause displacement. Intercommunal fighting, cattle raiding and cross-border attacks from Sudan were making the situation increasingly insecure, especially for women and children.

In response to the growing crisis, the Episcopal Church of South Sudan (ECSS) Northern Bahr el Ghazal Internal Province (NBGIP) began reaching out to local communities for peacebuilding and trauma healing. NBGIP’s Justice, Peace and Reconciliation Officer ran a five-day Multi-ethnic Peace Dialogue for 50 men and women from nine different tribes, of Christian and Muslim faith. NBGIP also organized a trauma healing training, a multi-ethnic peace dialogue and a peace update conference which included rebel forces. PWRDF’s annual support of \$16,000 will enable the NBGIP to reach out to even more communities in need of these initiatives.

In May 2023, PWRDF supported the Rev. William Majok – Program Manager for Church Leaders’ Initiative for Peace, and a certified trainer – to conduct a two-day healing and peacebuilding workshop in Wau with 40 local youth participants. The training provided youth with skills in mediation and negotiation which they can use to promote healing and peacebuilding activities in their communities.



“South Sudan became independent in 2011 and I was thinking, ‘this is really good.’ Then conflict broke out in 2013 – another civil war began. Many INGOs and UN staff had to be evacuated. Many people went to the churches for both safety and for food or water or anything that they could get. We were supporting the Episcopal Church there because many of the church compounds were hosting these people who were escaping violence in their communities. There are some small groups that are still fighting, but the major groups now have a peace agreement. Gradually, people are returning. It’s an interesting time again. Many people don’t go directly to their original communities because of security issues, but also because they may have some land, but their houses have been destroyed and the community may have just dispersed. They need help to resettle. Basic support is very important.” - Naba Gurung



03 Democratic Republic of the Congo

RECOVERING FROM SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, ongoing war has created a deeply unstable and unsafe environment for hundreds of thousands of women across the country. Rape and sexual assault are often used by soldiers as a tactic of war against women in their home villages and communities. With nowhere to go, Maison Dorcas – part of the Panzi Foundation – provides services and support to survivors of Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) so they can heal and safely reintegrate into their communities. From 2019 to 2022, PWRDF supported Maison Dorcas and the Panzi Foundation with \$180,000 to provide women with vocational training and microfinance loans so they can earn an income and gain independence.

Through the initial phase of this project 1,021 women received vocational training from Maison Dorcas; and 878 were successfully reintegrated back into their communities and using their newfound skills to earn an income. Most of those women said that their income was sufficient to meet the needs of their households.

Following the success of this project, PWRDF has partnered with the Panzi Foundation and Maison Dorcas in another three-year phase of the project. This time, a heavier emphasis is placed on agricultural skills, as many of the affected women live in rural communities. Fields, agricultural implements, seed, goats, pigs and fishing equipment are being distributed during this phase. Agricultural success has been proven to boost survivors’ self-esteem and facilitate their reintegration back into their families and communities, while the increase in financial autonomy mitigates the risk of becoming a victim to SGBV again.



04 Ukraine

PROCESSING THE TRAUMA OF WAR

Since Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, the ongoing violence and occupation has killed thousands of civilians. Survivors are often displaced and left to live with the insecurity, fear and psychological impacts of ongoing war. PWRDF is supporting the Voices of Children Foundation as it responds to an urgent need for mental health and community support. The Foundation saw the impacts in communities immediately, as people began suffering from high rates of fear, panic, exhaustion, depression, suicidal thoughts, sleep disorders, increased anxiety, aggressiveness, apathy and more. The need for professional psychological help was urgent to stabilize people's psychological state and allow them to regain their desire to work, communicate with others, and begin to free themselves of destructive emotions and trauma.

Though the needs are great, delivering care and services during ongoing war can be extremely difficult. In the Kyiv region – where Voices of Children primarily operates – the cities and towns of Vyshgorod, Bucha, and Makariv districts were occupied at the beginning of the war for more than a month. The Foundation was forced to find solutions to work around these obstacles and began delivering social and psychological services through mobile teams.



Through this initiative, mobile teams of psychologists host five-day training sessions for teachers, staff and social workers in the region, where they learn to recover psychologically and how to assist others with self-regulation, self-help as well as physical techniques.

"I believe that sessions with psychologists will help us to learn how to behave in stressful situations," said Tetiana Prokhorova, a kindergarten instructor and project participant.



To view a video about this program scan your device over this QR code.



05 Gaza

KEEPING HOSPITAL DOORS OPEN

PWRDF has been supporting the Al-Ahli Hospital in Gaza since conflict erupted in the region in October. The hospital – which is owned and operated by the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem – has been providing quality healthcare to people of all backgrounds since 1882 and is a long-standing PWRDF partner.

The escalating conflict has caused loss of life, destruction and displacement in Gaza, as well as trauma and fear across Israel and Palestine, and around the world.

On October 8, PWRDF responded to the hospital's request to support staffing, supplies and fuel for generators with an initial grant of \$30,000. Known as a place of safety, hundreds of people were also sheltering in the hospital courtyards.

The conflict continued at an unrelenting pace and in November Al-Ahli sustained significant damage. A temporary truce allowed for humanitarian access to Gaza. In the meantime, the government of Canada announced a matching fund of \$13.77 million through the Humanitarian Coalition (HC). PWRDF participated in this campaign through the Canadian Foodgrains Bank, a member of the HC.

Due to the uncertainty of the hospital's ability to offer medical services, PWRDF broadened its allocation of funds to include other needs in Gaza and the West Bank, as identified by the Diocese of Jerusalem. The diocese also oversees health facilities in the West Bank and in Israel, where needs have also intensified. At press time in December, the war showed no signs of ending.



"PWRDF works with other like-minded agencies, and with partner staff on the ground, to create a joint response plan. ... In the case of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem, we had several Zoom calls with partner staff, also involving several other agencies from the United States, the UK, New Zealand and Australia. ... In situations where unimaginable suffering is taking place, our partners might also be assisted by larger agencies, like the United Nations, such as when the World Health Organization delivered medical supplies to the Al-Ahli Arab Hospital. Ultimately though, there needs to be political will in the local and global leaders to end the violence and seek a durable solution for peace with justice. This is true in the case of Gaza, but also in many other crises." – Naba Gurung

Lyudmyla Romanenko, a psychologist with the Voices of Children Foundation, saw how the sessions were benefitting participants almost immediately.

"At the beginning, everyone is a little afraid to talk about their emotions [and] feelings. Then they understand that it is necessary," she said. "The difference between the first session and the last was very noticeable."

Prokhorova was impressed to see how others in her group – even the most reserved members – began to come out of their shells as the sessions continued.

"They were able to relax," she said. "I think this gave them a significant inner resource for work."

Romanenko sees these sessions not only as supportive, but also as psycho-educational.

"There were cases when people understood that is it normal to experience such emotions that most people feel now ... These are normal feelings for abnormal events."

"A partner in Afghanistan whom I recently met has multiple visas to come to Canada. But he has chosen to stay, in the adverse context there, where more than 90% of Afghans are now in humanitarian need. One incident he shared with me was the time when he and some colleagues went to help with a cash transfer during one project. The partner didn't have enough money to distribute to everybody because the project was only targeting so many people, but others who were in need came. He and his colleague gave whatever money they had in their pocket. They later realized they didn't have money to pay for a taxi home. They walked seven kilometres back on foot."
– Naba Gurung

06 Afghanistan

ADVOCATING TO PUT FUNDS TO WORK

In 2021, the Taliban took over the government of Afghanistan, and a humanitarian crisis soon unfolded, resulting in a severe lack of food, medicine and essential supplies. These desperate and dire circumstances led to an increase in child marriages and people forced to take extreme actions to survive. Because the criminal code of Canada prohibits the funding of terrorist organizations, any donations made to organizations such as PWRDF could not be forwarded to partners in Afghanistan.

In response, PWRDF joined a coalition of 18 aid agencies who are also members of Cooperation Canada and began advocating the Canadian government to change the law so that urgently needed aid could be delivered.

In March 2023, the Canadian government introduced Bill C-41 which made it possible for Canadian aid organizations to provide humanitarian support in Afghanistan without the fear of criminal prosecution. This was "a critical and important step toward protecting the ability of humanitarian organizations to provide neutral and impartial aid in Afghanistan and other complex crises," said a Cooperation Canada statement.

The #AidForAfghanistan campaign raised awareness of the impacts of regulatory barriers and their chilling effect. "Over the past eight months, we have worked with legal experts, Afghan Canadians, and women's organizations to engage in constructive dialogue with all parties, who have all affirmed their commitment to ensuring that legislation must be amended to allow Canadian organizations to help the people of Afghanistan."

Bill C-41 meant that funds raised for PWRDF's partners working in Afghanistan could at last be forwarded and used. "Canada has a long history of support for Afghanistan and the Afghan people," said Cooperation Canada. Canadians are particularly concerned for women and children, who have been increasingly vulnerable since the time of the takeover.

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BY CHRISTINE HILLS
PWRDF Public Engagement Officer



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MAKING AN IMPACT TOGETHER

As part of their confirmation stewardship project, the confirmation students from the Parish of Grand Bay, Newfoundland sold raffle tickets for gift cards, raising \$700. The students donated these funds to PWRDF's World of Gifts to "buy the whole farm," supporting nine different food security projects in nine different countries! The students' hard work exemplifies the Anglican Church's mission of making a positive impact by helping those in need, reaffirming the power of collective kindness and compassion. Congratulations to the members of the confirmation class: Rylee King, Ava Strickland, Jada Walters, Ella Cutler, Macie Dominie, Jordyn White and Emily Ann Short.



GETTING THE MESSAGE ABOUT COLOMBIA

Vancouver's Christ Church Cathedral held a dinner in support of PWRDF's partnership with Grupo ComunicArte and the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC). The Voices and Whispers of the Páramos project trains people to become citizen reporters so they can spread the word about the urgent need to protect the moorlands – locally called the Páramos – which supply 70% of Colombia's drinking water. Rev. Margaret Marquardt addressed those in attendance, showed videos of the project and, together with members of the working group, prepared dinner for 43 people. By the end of the night, \$1,832 was raised, plus donations sent directly to PWRDF.



PARISH GETS PUMPED!

Thanks to generous donations and proceeds from their annual Christmas Market and Snowflake Tea, Immanuel Anglican Church in Regina, Sask., raised \$3,000 towards PWRDF's World of Gifts campaign. They focused on building a well with a solar pump in Kenya, one of the 'big ticket' items in the catalogue. The organizers noted that having water available is truly life-changing and life-giving, to people and their crops, gardens and livestock.



CYCLING SUCCESS!

Danielle Benoiton assembled a Wild Ride team in North Bay, Ont., to cycle 14 kilometres and set her sights high. She raised \$1,181, donated from family and friends, old and new, and members of her parish – much of it thanks to email requests for support. Many of the responses were unexpected, making them doubly appreciated. Throughout the Wild Ride, Danielle focused on competing with the teams ahead of her, getting into the top 10 and making it to the first page of listed teams. She made it a couple of times, but with so much generosity, the pages changed frequently. "I was very pleased!" said Danielle. "I far surpassed my plans. It was all in just a few weeks!"



HONOURING A LEGACY

This year's PWRDF Wild Ride was dedicated to the late Rev. Canon Greg Smith, longtime PWRDF Representative for the Diocese of Huron. "For many years, Greg organized a walk in London's downtown, to raise awareness and support for the work being done through PWRDF and its partners who serve refugees and displaced people," writes Sarah Chase, a diocesan staffer and PWRDF volunteer. Supporters raised \$5,000. "Greg's leadership is deeply missed by everybody. The example he set for us, and the passion of his work toward a more compassionate and just world, will continue."



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