



Photo credit: Relief SG

We are pleased to bring you the twelfth issue of Beyond Relief!

In our **Feature Article**, Mr Jonathan How brings the voices of the Karenni State to us, enabling us to hear from the people on the ground.

This issue's **On the Ground** features some of the initiatives and projects that members of the Singapore Humanitarian Network (SHN) have been participating in. Dr Caroline Brassard contributes an article on the need to assess the socioeconomic benefits of climate, meteorological and hydrological Services, while Ms Claire Leow shares her experience with disaster preparedness in the Pacific. Our members from the Singapore Red Cross and CHARIS also share their recent exhibition and activities. We also feature a snapshot of the monthly gatherings of the SHN.

Our members from the academic community are keeping themselves busy, covering a diverse range of topics from the use of AI in crises to the rise of transnationalism in aid and the need for mutual aid networks.

In the Spotlight features the upcoming Humanitarian Futures Forum (HFF) on 27 October 2026. The HFF is a high-level platform that brings together regional stakeholders to deliberate on the humanitarian dynamics of the crises we face in the Indo-Pacific.

Finally, we welcome your ideas, feedback and input and look forward to supporting joint efforts in research, networking and knowledge sharing. Do get in touch with either Nanthini (isnanthini@ntu.edu.sg) or Al (iscook@ntu.edu.sg).

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Voices from The Karenni: Fears, Hopes, and Humanitarian Assistance in Myanmar's Smallest State

By Jonathan How, Relief SG



Photo credit: Relief SG

Kayah (also known as Karenni) State may be the smallest state in Myanmar, but it has achieved significant milestones since the military coup on 1st February 2021. While many other states in Myanmar struggle with fragmented leadership, rivalry between ethnic armed groups, and civil-military mistrust, Kayah State exhibits unusual internal unity among its various ethnic groups, including the Kayah, Kayan, Kayaw, Bre, Manu Manaw, and Yin-Baw. These ethnic groups cooperate rather than compete, and most eschew the use of the official name “Kayah” in favour of the traditional “Karenni” to refer to themselves.

On 6th June 2023, the Interim Executive Council of Karenni State was formed, making it the first ethnic state in Myanmar to create an interim governing body - following the 2021 coup - with the key mission of preparing the state to join a future federal

democratic union. The humanitarian situation in Kayah State deteriorated after the 2021 coup. Attacks by the central government forcibly displaced many civilians, affected their livelihoods, and disrupted education. In 2025, Relief Singapore (RSG) responded to the Myanmar crisis with food and shelter interventions. It provided fortified rice and tarpaulins, which CSOs (civil society organisations) delivered to Karenni refugees and IDPs living in Thailand and across the border.

To highlight the plight of the Karenni, RSG has requested various individuals to express their fears, hopes, and aspirations. Here are their voices:

“As a young member of the Karenni community, I carry both hope and concern for the future of my people and my homeland. The Karenni people and many others in Myanmar have endured

decades of corruption, conflict, and injustice, yet our spirit and identity remain strong. Karenni State is more than just a place; it is our history, culture, and home. Despite the suffering our country has faced, we continue to believe in a future where Burma can become a nation of peace, freedom, and dignity for all its people. Currently, I am working towards studying at a university. But not all Karenni youths have access to education. I hope the international community can support and help build the pathways for higher education, so that we and all other Myanmar youths can develop our potential as much as possible.”

Karenni youth living along the Thai-Myanmar border

“Our greatest hope as parents is for our children to grow up in a peaceful and just society. The people of Karenni State have endured many years of conflict and hardship, yet we continue to hold

onto our culture, identity, and dignity. We hope that one day Myanmar will become a country where all ethnic peoples can live in freedom, equality, and lasting peace.”

Karenni couple living along the Thai-Myanmar border

“I currently support young Karenni refugees along the Thai-Myanmar border by providing them with access to education. The conflict and airstrikes in Karenni State forced many families to flee. In response, I opened my home to displaced children, some of whom have lost their fathers. There are now 19 children with me. All have lost their educational opportunities. As a Karenni myself, my goal is to prevent a future loss of human resources in Karenni State by preparing for the next generation now. Hence, the boarding house I have started for these 19 children is named Goal Boarding House, or simply The Goal. This name reflects our shared vision that we all have a destination to reach, and we are committed to moving forward step by step until we achieve it.”

Eh Day, Founder & Principal, Goal Boarding House

“The Karenni State IEC (Interim Executive Council) is calling for cross-border aid and cash assistance from donors and humanitarian actors. Many of my people are affected by the civil war, and require urgent humanitarian assistance. Since the military coup in February 2021, clashes between the junta and the People's Defence Force have led to widespread displacement in Karenni State. As of December 2025, the needs of IDPs living in close to 500 temporary shelters have grown, with about 150,000 displaced persons requiring humanitarian aid. Women, young girls, children, the elderly, and people with disabilities are among the most vulnerable. The IEC's Humanitarian and Rehabilitation Department is urging civil society organisations (CSOs) and the international community to engage in comprehensive, long-term strategies that safeguard the rights of these vulnerable groups while also ensuring their essential needs are addressed. It meets regularly with the CSO Coordination Group, which convenes monthly to discuss the humanitarian situation in Karenni State. The IEC's role is to coordinate relief efforts, secure support, raise and distribute funds, and communicate regularly with local partners. But we need more help. If only the international community could do more to provide cross-border aid, more lives would be saved.”

Banya Khung Aung, Secretary 2, Interim Executive Council of Karenni State



Photo credit: Relief SG

ON THE GROUND

Why Assessing Socioeconomic Benefits of Climate, Meteorological and Hydrological Services Matters



Photo credit: Gannu03 via [Wikicommons](#)

In 2024 alone, according to the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), global losses due to weather-related events amounted to [318 billion dollars, half of it uninsured](#). The WMO, founded in 1950 as a UN specialized agency (and built on the legacy of the International Meteorological Organization since 1873) promotes international cooperation in meteorology, hydrology, and related sciences to foster safety and well-being. The challenges are increasingly pressing.

A 2021 WMO survey found that 60% of members faced a decline in their capacity for hydrological and meteorological monitoring. Yet this is a particularly important service to ensure global safety. For example, in the South-West Pacific alone, between 1970-2021, storms and floods have accounted for [88% of all reported deaths from natural disasters](#) (71% from storms and 17% from floods).

Less than 20% of WMO members have conducted socioeconomic benefit assessments in the last 10 years. Assessing the return to investment to such services can be a powerful tool to incentivize decision makers to devote funds and create financial partnerships to support key services such as hydrological monitoring. It is also crucial for Early Warning Systems, and essential to reach the goals of the EW4All global initiative (launched in 2022) to ensure universal protection from hazardous hydrometeorological and climatological and related environmental events by the end 2027. Earlier studies suggested that for lower income countries, such returns ranged from 4:1 to 36:1, as highlighted in [Valuing Weather and Climate](#).

This groundbreaking 2015 publication focused primarily on quantitative assessments such as economic modelling and avoided cost assessment, in addition to non-market valuation and benefit transfer. Such benefits translate in economic efficiency by reducing operational costs and contributing to increased resilience, raising productivity gains especially for agricultural planning, reducing risks to public health and safety, as well as improving livelihoods, better targeted humanitarian interventions and better use of natural resources.

Ten years on, the WMO formed an advisory group to promote the assessment of socioeconomic benefit of climate, meteorological and hydrological services. The advisory group also highlights the importance of mixed approaches combining quantitative approaches with qualitative studies to capture the socio-economic benefits, such as poverty reduction and improved public health and safety, and community resilience. For example, these assessments take into consideration behavioural patterns, institutional capacity, as well as social and ethical aspects.

National Meteorological and Hydrological Services (NMHSs) have an increasing role to play in this ever-changing world. Integrating knowledge and experience from a much broader scientific and development community is essential to tackling such complex and growing risks affecting all sectors. This is an urgent call to action and necessitates not just improving technical capabilities, but also a change in mindsets. A much wider effort towards a greater integration and cooperation between geophysical sciences and social sciences as part of a better understanding of climate and earth systems.

Contributed by Dr Caroline Brassard, Adjunct Assistant Professor (Executive Education), Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy. Member of the Research Board of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), Member of the WMO Advisory Group on Socioeconomic Benefits

Disaster Preparedness in the Pacific



Photo credit: Claire Leow

Airlink and its nonprofit partners with active programmes - more than 30 people from more than 20 organisations - in the Pacific head to Fiji in April for the year's regional training workshop for disaster preparedness.

The South Pacific islands grapple with seasonal cyclones each year, and also face unpredictable earthquakes and volcanic eruptions, sitting as they are on the western rim of the Ring of Fire where tectonic plates collide. While earthquakes and eruptions are less predictable, the cyclical danger posed by cyclones is where disaster preparedness is most useful.

Airlink is an aviation-centred nonprofit organisation that supports more than 250 nonprofit partners worldwide through humanitarian aid logistics solutions, providing no-cost or low-cost airlift for first responders and to quickly transport aid cargo to communities in need. Airlink has been responding to the South Pacific cyclones since the devastating Tropical Cyclone Pam in 2016.

Two archipelagic countries stand out in this region - the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. Geographically, they are in the path of high-torque winds and consistently feature in the top 8 worst cyclones of this region, including the devastation of 2023 with Cyclone Gabrielle, the costliest storm in the southern hemisphere in February that year, followed months later by Cyclone Lola, the worst off-season cyclone on record. Airlink responded to both disasters, sending in 56 responders from six nonprofit partners to help with tasks from clean-up to structural and road assessments.

The Solomon Islands has a diverse demographic with almost 1,000 islands spread out over 1,450 kilometres from east to west, making rapid response a logistical challenge. While Airlink is able to deploy experts from its vast network, it is important to be working closely with locally-led civil society organisations for a more accurate mapping of needs and challenges when disasters strike.

Vanuatu has also experienced the wrath of nature too often. Airlink responded to the [March disasters of 2023](#), when Vanuatu was pummelled back-to-back by two cyclones, Kevin and Judy, over 48 hours. The scale was such that the entire archipelago and population was affected. Incredibly, between the two cyclones, on March 3, a magnitude 6.5 earthquake also struck, followed by a powerful 5.5 aftershock. Importantly, despite the scale of the triple disasters, Airlink refrained from rushing in with unsolicited aid, instead, reaching out to seek local answers.

Collaborating with local partners, we learnt that there was enough aid in-country from cyclone preparedness efforts, and what was needed were translators to help [manage the distribution of aid](#) and provide clear instructions and psychosocial support to displaced communities as they evacuated to the bigger islands. In October that same year, the strongest-ever off-season cyclone, Category 5 Lola, also made landfall to cap a devastating 2023 for Vanuatu. [Airlink partners deployed](#) initially to assist in the clean-up and recovery were approached by local officials to assess school structures in remote locations. These schools were key not only to ensuring limited disruption to school children but also acted as aid distribution centres for community support.

Airlink's response demonstrates a localisation approach, focusing on the needs assessments of locally based organisations. Often these needs are modest but on a regular drumbeat - which is well-served by Airlink's model of using excess airfreight capacity on commercially available routes. When it comes to health systems strengthening, for instance, Airlink has been sending medical aid to remote communities in Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Tonga, and Solomon Islands in small batches of medications and essential supplies on a regular basis. This places less strain on supply chains year-round, and bolsters the capacity of health clinics to address spikes in need in disasters.

Disaster responses are only as good as disaster preparedness, and these efforts are most effective when there is collaboration across networks and trust with local organisations. Airlink and partners work in "blue sky" mode to model the best approaches and build bonds to ensure better outcomes.

To support our work, learn more, or donate, go to <https://airlinkflight.org/asia-and-the-pacific/>.

Contributed by Claire Leow, Airlink

Two Years On, We Are Still Here: A Public Exhibition by Singapore Red Cross



Photo credit: IFRC

Since October 7, 2023, the Gaza conflict has escalated into a catastrophic humanitarian crisis marked by extensive Israeli military operations. Two years into the crisis in Gaza, humanitarian needs remain acute. Prolonged displacement, disrupted access to food and clean water, damage to health facilities and uncertainty around shelter continue to shape the daily realities of affected communities. While global attention may shift, the humanitarian impact on affected populations persists.

Singapore Red Cross (SRC) is presenting a public photo exhibition titled “Two Years On, We Are Still Here”, aimed at fostering greater public understanding of the sustained humanitarian impact of conflict. Running from March to June 2026, the roving exhibition will travel across selected locations in Singapore. The exhibition features photographs that reflect everyday life in a protracted crisis, focusing on essential needs such as food security, access to water, shelter, healthcare and dignity.

Beyond visual documentation, the exhibition provides contextual information on how humanitarian assistance continues through the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and the role of Singapore Red Cross in supporting ongoing relief and recovery efforts. By creating a space for reflection, the exhibition seeks to bridge the gap between headlines and lived realities, encouraging audiences to consider the longer-term dimensions of humanitarian crises and the importance of sustained international support. Details on exhibition locations and dates will be shared on the Singapore Red Cross website and social media platforms.

Members of the public who wish to support ongoing humanitarian efforts in Gaza may contribute to the Singapore Red Cross Gaza Humanitarian Crisis Appeal at redcross.sg/donate-gazacrisis.

Contributed by Red Cross Singapore



Photo credit: ICRC

Love In Action: A Year of Humanitarian Impact

Caritas Humanitarian Aid & Relief Initiatives, Singapore (CHARIS) worked with its partners to provide assistance to vulnerable communities affected by disasters in 2025.



Photo credit: Salesians of Don Bosco

Gebirah's Mission to Chiang Mai

Gebirah, a member organisation of CHARIS, delivered critical assistance to a remote village in Chiang Mai, Thailand, where severe weather had devastated the harvest. Facing significant hardship, some villagers lost their livelihoods and income. The mission team provided sacks of rice and essential supplies, offering immediate relief and much-needed support to affected families.



Photo credit: Gebirah



Photo credit: CHARIS

Humanitarian Forum & Fair 2025

The Humanitarian Forum & Fair 2025, held on 14 June 2025 at St. Joseph's Institution Junior, brought together over 500 participants, 150 volunteers, member organisations, and partners to strengthen humanitarian collaboration and action.

Guided by the themes of "Heart, Head, and Hands," the event combined learning, dialogue, and practical engagement through talks, exhibitions, and networking. The forum fostered stronger partnerships, encouraged knowledge-sharing, and reinforced a collective commitment to sustainable humanitarian efforts.

In 2026, CHARIS will continue to advance initiatives that transcend borders, uphold human dignity, and bring hope to vulnerable communities. CHARIS seeks to multiply its impact and strengthen solidarity with those most in need. Learn more or get involved at www.charis-singapore.org.

For more information on our activities over the last year, please read our Annual Report here: <https://charis-singapore.org/annual-report/>.

Contributed by CHARIS

Relief Singapore Response to Myanmar Crisis



Photo credit: Relief SG

Relief Singapore (RSG) first began long-term work in support of the humanitarian needs of Myanmar civilians when it implemented medical, clean water, and psychosocial support programmes in the Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh in 2018. In response to the humanitarian situation of Myanmar civilians affected by the ongoing civil war, RSG went on a field visit in June 2025 to Mae Hong Son province, Thailand, where the largest concentration of Karenni refugees and migrants could be found. There are about 10,000 refugees spread out in two camps, and another 1,000 or more living outside the camps.

Over the ensuing months, RSG engaged several stakeholders - including The Border Consortium, Karenni Refugee Committee, Goal Boarding House, and Ban Nai Soi Community Learning Centre - to assess needs and scope projects. There are a total of 9 camps in Thailand along the Thai-Myanmar border that shelter mainly Karen and Karenni refugees. RSG decided to focus on the 2 Karenni camps that are in Mae Hong Son: Ban Mai Nai Soi and Ban Mae Surin, also known as Camp 1 and 2 respectively.

In July 2025, fortified rice was delivered to 171 vulnerable families in Camp 2 to tide them over the rainy season from August to September, when the dirt tracks to the camp become inaccessible to vehicles due to heavy flooding. Prior training was provided to camp volunteers and staff to educate families on the benefits of the fortified rice they would be receiving.

In September 2025, RSG commenced support for the Goal Boarding House (GBH), a safe place for Karenni child refugees who were displaced from their villages in Myanmar. GBH Founder and Principal Eh Day took 19 of these children under his care to provide them shelter, and advocate for their acceptance into the Thai education system. RSG's interventions at GBH began with psychosocial support, and would progress to other areas, including educational training, and extra-curricular activities like music and sports.

Click [here](#) to find out more about RSG's work in Mae Hong Son.

Contributed by Relief SG

Singapore Humanitarian Network Monthly Catch-Ups in Holland Village

On the 1st Thursday of every month, the Singapore Humanitarian Network holds an informal catch-up at Holland Village in Singapore. It has grown into a space for the humanitarian community in Singapore to meet others working in the field as well as for those simply interested in humanitarian affairs. Since then, colleagues and friends working in various agencies and organisations have taken the opportunity to show up month-after-month to eat, drink and chat with each other, sharing their experiences and lives.

For those interested to join these sessions, please contact Nanthini at isnanthini@ntu.edu.sg.



RECENT PUBLICATIONS

News Articles, Commentaries and Reports

The New Disaster Frontier: AI in Crises

*Dmitry Erokhin and Keith
Paolo C. Landicho*
IDSS Paper
10 December 2025

Click [here](#) to read more.

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11 December 2025

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S. Nanthini
IDSS Paper
12 January 2026

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Alistair D. B. Cook
The Interpreter
24 March 2026

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Navigating Falling Aid Flows in Southeast Asia: The Need to Invest in Political Will

S. Nanthini
IDSS Paper
26 March 2026

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Journal Articles, Chapters and Books

" Humanitarian policy and action in Asia: analysing challenges, exploring opportunities "

*Alistair D. B. Cook, Lina Gong, and Ian
Holliday*
Journal of Asian Public Policy 2025, pp. 1
- 10.

Click [here](#) to read more.

Save the *Date*.

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The **Humanitarian Futures Forum** (HFF) returns in 2026 with a renewed focus on navigating the developments in the humanitarian landscape by bringing together key stakeholders to engage in inclusive dialogue and knowledge-sharing to strengthen regional preparedness and resilience.

To learn more about HFF and explore previous years' programme, please visit our website to find out more: [Humanitarian Futures Forum - RSiS](#).

For further enquiries, please contact us at rsis-hadr@ntu.edu.sg.