A humanitarian and his motorbike

The Chin State, one of the seven states into which the Union of Myanmar (formerly known as Burma) is divided, is almost the size of Switzerland, but with a population of only slightly over half a million people. The area, located in the Western part of Myanmar, stretching along the border to India, is remote and mountainous. In this still underdeveloped region, a motorcycle has become a lifesaver.

The vehicle belongs to the Cung Hu Volunteer Blood Donor Foundation, founded in December 2004 by Cung Hu, a modest man who owns a bookstore and has a mission. Day and night, whenever donor blood is needed, Cung Hu jumps on the motorbike to pick up a voluntary blood donor and rushes to the General Civil Hospital in the region's main city of Hakha.

The mission of the Cung Hu Volunteer Blood Donor Foundation is to provide blood free of charge for patients in urgent need of blood transfusion who cannot afford it otherwise. Cung Hu's Living Blood Bank has registered more than 400 voluntary blood donors, primarily young people, who are able to supply 95 per cent of the hospital's need for donor blood. Lists are kept of all the potential donors blood types so they can be easily found. The Foundation is financed with profit from Cung Hu's small bookshop. To make this possible, his family economizes and lives on very little.

The expenses for running the Foundation include gas for the motorbike and nutritious food such as "*milk, eggs, cake, and blood builder medicines so that the blood donors would regain their strength and energy*." In addition, Cung Hu's family sponsors seminars for the young blood donors, supplies information material and posters, and pays for the medical testing of new blood donors. The blood donor foundation of Chin State has so far had no other sources of financial support except for that provided by Cung Hu and his family.

Usable donor blood has always been a problem. The hospital has no blood bank and, because the supply of electricity to the town of Hakha is not regular, no blood can be stored. Therefore, before Cung Hu began his Foundation, blood was not always available for transfusion when there was an emergency.

> "*The result was often death*," Cung Hu explains. *"It would be difficult or impossible to continue this project indefinitely with my own money. So I need help*,"
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> "*Chin State is far away from the mainland Myanmar. Most people are simple and ignorant. It is very difficult to educate them about blood donation. I try to convince the people of the importance of giving blood and help them understand the that is a way to save patents from suffering and often save a life. Sometimes they have the wrong conception about giving blood*,"

To help them understand the full situation, blood donors are introduced to the patients' family and moral support is given to both patients and donors.

Since it inception, The Cung Hu Volunteer Blood Donor Foundation has procured over 1000 units of blood for the General Civil Hospital in Hakha, which also has a small number of its own blood donors.

> *"The problem has always been blood. Since the hospital has no blood bank and because the supply of electricity to the town of Hakha is not regular, no blood can be stored. Therefore, no blood was available in time for transfusion when there was an emergency. The result was death,*" Cung Hu explains.

Whenever Cung Hu gets a call from the hospital that donor blood is needed he must immediately find a donor with a matching blood type. This is not without difficulties. The young donors, who depend on being picked up by Cung Hu and his motorbike, live between one and eight miles from the hospital and usually do not own a telephone. In addition, there are no trains, busses, or taxis in the capital of Hakha.

> "*We are usually in a nearly impossible situation, especially during the rainy season. We nevertheless have to send the blood donors to the hospital any time of day or night, rain or shine, or even during storms. Sometimes it can be dangerous*," according to Cung Hu.
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> "*We are thankful that local authorities and health department officials have given us encouragement with regard to carrying on the good work*,"

About the availability of blood in Myanmar
Cung Hu Volunteer Blood Donor Foundation "*is impartial, non-political and non-profit, with no discrimination against race or religion*."

According to the Red Cross, there only exist two blood banks in Myanmar at the moment, one in Yangon (Rangoon) and one in Mandalay, the country's two major cities. "*Thus, unfortunately, the situation described by Mr. Cung Hu is the case in many places in the country,*" a International Red Cross source tells GNBD. Myanmar has an estimated population of 48 million people. On average, life expectancy is less than 63 years

In December of 2008, Cung Hu traveled to Malaysia and Singapore to bring knowledge about his blood donor organization in the remote Chin State to the outside world, meeting with Myanmar communities in the two countries.

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