



CHRISTMAS 2024

Dear godmothers, godfathers and friends of Le Sourire,

Nahu, an 8-year-old girl from the Akha tribe, was born in Burma. We welcomed her to Le Sourire in April 2024 and she has started her second year at primary school in the neighbouring village. Her story, and that of her family, tells of the harmful effects of a country at war and the flight to a safe country in the hope of a better future.

Nahu's grandparents lived in Burma with their ten children in a small village in the mountains, in precarious conditions below the poverty line. The family was frequently turned away by the army and had to move many times. Several times they tried to cross the border into Thailand, but were turned away by the Thai army. Nahu's grandfather tried the impossible to protect his family.

The children grew up and each went their own way. Two boys and a girl managed to cross the border into Thailand. The girl, who was a fighter and skilful, managed to find odd jobs in the fields and orchards and got their parents to come to Thailand. The parents made several attempts to contact their seven other children in Burma, but to no avail. Between Covid-19 and the perpetual war in Burma, a link was almost impossible.

In 2023, the parents were able to visit their native country, and after a long and arduous process, they learned that two of their sons had left for China without a trace. Four others of their offspring had simply 'disappeared' and could not be found. The last had married and divorced shortly afterwards. A little girl, NAHU, was born of this union, but after their separation, neither the mother nor the father wanted to look after her. In a deplorable state and completely left to her own devices, the parents (Nahu's grandparents) took her with them to Thailand to give her a school education.

Schooling for children under the ruling military junta was, and still is, a luxury for many Burmese families. In principle, only 'true Burmese' are admitted, while members of ethnic groups are considered second-class citizens! In fact, only a minority of young people currently complete the academic years of the atrophied and anaemic education system put in place over 50 years ago by the military dictatorship. As a result, educational standards are at an all-time low.

Added to this are the consequences of climate change - flooding and destruction caused by tropical storms - doubling the suffering of the population, which is constantly being displaced or affected by war.

Thailand, historically a land of asylum for Burmese refugees, is trying to help the large families of the various tribes. While the adults remain in Burma, they often entrust their children to families/friends living in Thailand.

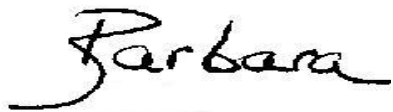
So back to our little Nahu. Once she arrived in Thailand, she spent a year at school in a small village near the border. One of our former residents also lives in this small village and he spoke to the grandparents about Le Sourire. Thanks to one of our former residents, the grandparents gave us Nahu without hesitation. For our part, we went to the village to analyse the family's situation and, above all, to confirm the veracity of Nahu's story.

We are encouraged not to take on undocumented children or to limit their number. But we are keen to recognise the need to raise awareness of the plight of refugees, particularly children. Nahu is a little girl 'from the war', sweet and adorable among thousands of other victims in the same situation. A humanitarian tragedy, the result of countless wars, both known and hidden, that destroys and separates the world's families forever.

Our thoughts are with all those left behind, and we send you our best wishes for a wonderful festival of light and peace, and a huge THANK YOU for your loyalty and trust in our work.

Together with all our young people and staff on the ground, we wish you a very happy and peaceful holiday.

HAPPY NEW YEAR 2025

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Barbara". The script is cursive and fluid.A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Prapapone". The script is cursive and fluid.