

LOCAL NEWS

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Couple's eyes on Myanmar

**Washago residents
keen to return to
troubled country**

By Courtney Whalen

The Packet & Times

Military violence against pro-democracy protesters in Myanmar (formerly Burma) has abated, but Cathy and David Downham, who operate Project Umbrella Burma, want to see international interest remain high.

"The plea is for world help," said Cathy Downham. "I think our hope is our government will put on more pressure than they've ever put before."

The Washago couple hopes international pressure will convince India, China and Thailand to impose trade sanctions on Myanmar, in turn putting pressure on the ruling junta.

Although the couple has seen violence for years



David and Cathy Downham

against the Karen, the ethnic group they work with through Project Umbrella Burma, the bloodshed of the past week still left an impression.

"Things have gotten worse than we thought they possibly could get in that they're debasing the monks," said Cathy Downham.

She expects there will be an increase of people crossing the border into Thailand, where Project Umbrella Burma is based, and said the work they do could be affected in some basic ways.

"The prices, the ability to travel and can we take in more students," she said.

There's also concern over whether their students will be able to visit their families in Myanmar.

"Our children are safe in Thailand right now, but will they be safe getting across the border?" she said.

Originally planning to head back to Thailand in November, David Downham has bumped the date of his return to mid-October.

Previously, he said, the Karen have welcomed those fleeing the junta, but, as the continued victims of violence themselves, they have a weaker position than in the past.

"We haven't had a situation... the same as this," he said.

As events have unfolded, the couple's primary thought has been of their work with the displaced people of Myanmar.

"We feel we should be there, to put it simply," said David Downham.

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