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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by Jubilee Campaign, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



The Situation of Christian Minorities in Kayin, Kayah, Chin, Kachin, Shan, Wa States

Jubilee Campaign would like to raise to the Council's attention the humanitarian situation of Christian minority communities in Myanmar's Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Chin, and Shan States, especially following the February 2021 military coup d'état by the Tatmadaw.

February Coup

On 1 February 2021, the military of Myanmar, the Tatmadaw, seized power and officially ousted the duly and democratically-elected government of President U Win Myint, State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, and their National League for Democracy (NLD) party. In the following days and weeks, the Tatmadaw detained government officials, announced a state of emergency, and cut internet services in numerous locations throughout the country. In response to the massive protests by civilians who condemned the coup d'état, the military launched and continue to engage in violence against peaceful demonstrators as well as minorities.¹

In June 2021, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, published a statement expressing concern over the mass human rights violations taking place in Myanmar against civilians, including ethnic and religious minorities: targeted airstrikes; raiding and decimating houses of worship; obstruction of humanitarian access; extrajudicial killings; and more.² A 30 July 2021 update by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimated that no fewer than 170,200 Burmese civilians have been displaced from states in south-eastern Myanmar due to the onslaught of Tatmadaw violence, and that a total of 3 million citizens are in need of immediate humanitarian assistance.³

Kayin State

In Kayin State, Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) the military branch of the ethnic Karen National Union (KNU) responded to the military coup by condemning the Tatmadaw's actions. Concurrently, Burmese military launched "violent night-time raids of civilian homes, businesses, and places of worship, resulting in mass incarceration – including of children, youth, and journalists – and widespread enforced disappearances." The KNLA, as such, has engaged in numerous armed clashes with Tatmadaw forces in Karen State, which have only exacerbated the situation of insecurity and displacement of civilians.⁴ Numerous reports have revealed that in Kayin State, where predominantly Christian Karen minorities have thrived for years, the Tatmadaw has repeatedly targeted churches for attack and has rendered Christians "an easy target for the Tatmadaw [Buddhist] nationalistic rhetoric" by engaging in rape and sexual violence, public beheadings, mass shooting with machine guns, and widespread arson of villages.⁵

Kayah State

In late May 2021, the anti-coup military group Karenni People's Defense Force (KPDF) announced it would be acting against the Tatmadaw; however, it has been relatively unable

¹ Russell Goldman, "Myanmar's Coup and Violence, Explained", The New York Times, 24 April 2021.

² Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Bachelet issues strong warning of imminent further bloodshed and suffering in Myanmar", 11 June 2021.

³ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Myanmar Humanitarian Update No. 9", 30 July 2021.

⁴ Taylor Landis, "Beyond the Coup in Myanmar: Inside Karen State", Harvard Law, 3 May 2021.

⁵ Gina Goh & Jay Church, "Caught in the Crossfire: Myanmar's Christian Minorities Under Tatmadaw Rule", International Christian Concern, 2021.

to prevent drone and artillery attacks by the military.⁶ On 23 May 2021, the military launched an offensive against the Catholic Sacred Heart Church in Kayah State during which four civilians were injured and another four killed; fortunately, the majority of the approximately 300 civilians who were sheltering in the Church prior to the attack escaped prior to the incident.⁷ Three days later, on 26 May, St. Joseph's Church in Demoso was targeted by the military for artillery shelling and suffered some damage, but no deaths were reported.⁸ Concurrently, however, two Catholic individuals and members of St. Joseph's – Alfred Ludo and Patrick Bo Reh – were killed by soldiers.⁹ On 6 June, the Tatmadaw shelled and partially damaged Our Lady, Queen of Peace Church in Doungankha; there were no related casualties as civilians fled the village prior to the assault.¹⁰ In Kayah State's Diocese of Loikaw, ten villages and parishes have since been evacuated with only the priests remaining; civilians have escaped into the jungle where they have set up temporary shelters, though they are suffering from hunger and diarrhea as a result of drinking contaminated water.¹¹ It is estimated that no fewer than 50,000 civilians from Kayah State – whose demography is 25% Catholic – have been forced to flee the region and into adjacent Shan State amidst military attacks.

Chin State

In mountainous Chin State, where 90% of Burmese Chin identify as Christian and Baptist, the Tatmadaw has increasingly targeted houses of worship for attack and religious leaders for abduction. On 27 February 2021, Burmese security forces ambushed Hakha Baptist Church, where they arrested the pastor and used water cannons to disperse church worshippers.¹² On 17 March, Tatmadaw troops killed 25-year-old Pastor Cung Lian Ceu.¹³ On 16 June, military soldiers raided a Catholic church and detained Father Aung Ling for 11 hours on accusations that he had been supporting resistance groups; the same troops also arrested a boarding student from St. Michael's Church.¹⁴ On 26 July, Father Noel Hrang Tin Thang and a catechist were detained by the Chinland Defense Force (CDF) and accused of conspiring with the Myanmar military forces; in reality, Father Thang has been offering tremendous support to internally displaced peoples (IDPs) during the violent aftermath of the military coup. By 5 August, Father Thang and the unnamed catechist were released by CDF after mediation by local Catholic leaders, though many Burmese civilians have stressed that the false allegations and unjust detention of the individuals may tarnish the image of the CDF, who has been a major civil resistance group against the Tatmadaw.¹⁵

Kachin and Shan States

Kachin Christians in Kachin and Shan States have also witnessed an uptick in violence and attacks by the Tatmadaw. In April 2021, it was reported that armed military troops had raided and searched multiple churches in Mohnyin Township, Kachin State, based on false allegations that the churches were engaging in "anti-regime protests".¹⁶ One month prior in March, Tatmadaw forces forcibly trespassed into a Kachin Baptist Church in Shan State, where they arrested 10 religious leaders and church staff who were eventually released after

⁶ Myanmar Now, "Karenni resistance fighters open new front against junta", 26 May 2021.

⁷ Union of Catholic Asian News, "Four die in military attack on Myanmar church", 24 May 2021.

⁸ Union of Catholic Asian News, "Another church attacked in conflict-torn eastern Myanmar", 28 May 2021.

⁹ Supra note 5.

¹⁰ Catholic News Service, "Third Catholic church in eastern Myanmar hit by military strikes", 7 June 2021.

¹¹ Kevin Clarke, "The church is 'under attack' in Myanmar", The Jesuit Review, 15 June 2021.

¹² Supra note 5.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ International Christian Concern, "Burmese Military Arrests a Catholic Priest in Chin State", 18 June 2021.

¹⁵ Union of Catholic Asian News, "Abducted priest, catechist released in Myanmar's Chin State", 5 August 2021.

¹⁶ The Irrawaddy, "Myanmar Military Raids Kachin Churches", 6 April 2021.

questioning.¹⁷ In response to the raids on churches, Reverend Awng Seng explained, “it is unacceptable to carry out these raids on a Christian religious site with armed personnel acting as if they were conducting a military operation. We strongly condemn it. If the army acts in this way in sacred places, we cannot imagine how it behaves in the private homes of people.”¹⁸

Wa State

Christian communities in Wa State face a unique set of challenges due to the fact that the United Wa State Army (UWSA), which controls the generally autonomous state, has close ties to the Chinese Communist Party and similarly cracks down on Christian communities. In particular, following the CCP’s implementation of the 2018 Revised Regulations on Religious Affairs and began to forcibly shutter and demolish churches in Ma, Wa State authorities in Myanmar simultaneously tore crosses off churches and demolished those deemed ‘illegal’ for being built after 1992. The UWSA has vocally supported the Tatmadaw, and fear of greater persecution of Christians in Wa State has mounted greatly in recent months.¹⁹

Recommendations

Jubilee Campaign urges members and observer states of the Human Rights Council to:

1. Commend the establishment of the Interim National Unity Government and its Federal Democracy Charter, which pledges to protect the rights and equality of all ethnic nationalities, including minorities.
2. Call upon the Republic of the Union of Myanmar to immediately cease committing acts of violence against civilians and the specified targeting of religious minorities and their houses of worship for attacks, unwarranted searches, and arbitrary arrests of worshippers and leaders.

¹⁷ Robin Gomes, “Myanmar: military raids on places of worship deplored”, Vatican News, 13 April 2021.

¹⁸ Agenzia Fides, “ASIA/MYANMAR – Military raids on churches and temples: the army violates religious freedom”, 9 April 2021.

¹⁹ Supra note 5.