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Written statement* submitted by European Centre for Law and Justice, The / Centre Européen pour le droit, les Justice et les droits de l'homme, 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.

[23 August 2023]

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



Requesting that the United Nations Recognize the Continuing Violence against Christians in Myanmar and Take Immediate Action to Protect the Citizens of Myanmar

1. Introduction

It has been two years since the military of Myanmar took control in February 2021.(1) Christians and other civilians continue to face relentless attacks, suffering from bombings and the destruction of their homes, churches, and schools.(2) Since the coup in Myanmar began, the military has burned or damaged nearly 75,000 homes in six regions and seven states.(3) In addition to the destruction of property, almost 1.8 million people are displaced in Myanmar.(4) Before the coup, the estimated number of displaced people was 328,000.(5) Moreover, there are more than 17.6 million people in need of humanitarian assistance.(6) This is a third of Myanmar's overall population that is in desperate need for aid. Political opposition from the government is another issue in Myanmar, with 19,856 political prisoners still being detained and another 3,965 people killed by the Myanmar military.(7)

2. Background

The European Centre for Law and Justice (ECLJ) has previously submitted at least eight reports to this Council highlighting the crimes being committed against innocent Christians and civilians in Myanmar. According to the Open Doors' World Watch List, Myanmar is the fourteenth most dangerous place for Christians.(8) Though Myanmar has dropped down two spots since its twelfth spot in 2022, this is not because the situation has improved. Persecution in Myanmar has actually increased in the past year, but other countries have also experienced an increase in persecution which dropped Myanmar's ranking.(9) Christian persecution in Myanmar is still a pressing issue that requires immediate attention.(10)

Since the military coup in February 2021, innocent civilians in Myanmar have suffered from violent attacks and displacement.(11) This violence disproportionately affects the Christian minority.(12) Christian villages and churches are being attacked and Christian aid workers and pastors are being murdered. Meanwhile, Buddhist monasteries have remained largely untouched.(13) Christians are not being given the same rights and legal protection as Buddhists.(14) It is important to note that the Myanmar government is not the sole source of persecution faced by Christians; Buddhist, Muslim, or tribal communities are also persecuting Christians.(15)

3. Violations

On August 14, 2023, a church was attacked in Hakah, the capital city of Chin State.(16) This was the largest and oldest Baptist church in the city. One of the surrounding residential properties was also damaged by the attack.(17)

On August 12, 2023, three churches were damaged in an airstrike by the Myanmar military.(18) The airstrike specifically targeted predominantly Christian regions.(19) One of the churches, the "Mary Mother of Mercy" church in Htee Thaw Ku village, Kayah State, had its roof, ceiling, and windows destroyed.(20) A local source claims the military deliberately attacked the church.(21) Surrounding houses in the village were also damaged as a result of the airstrike.(22) Another one of the churches that was attacked that day was the church in Lay Wah village.(23) The church was completely destroyed by the airstrike.(24) What once was a house of worship is now a pile of broken wooden scraps. The third church that was attacked was a church in Ramtho village. In addition to the church being destroyed, seven people were injured and four homes were destroyed.(25)

On July 16, 2023, intoxicated soldiers abducted a Presbyterian pastor, Htang Kay, and three deacons, Chai Kay, Hon Chway, and Hon Kay.(26) The pastor and three deacons were accused of leading their church in anti-regime protests.(27) After interrogating, beating, and torturing the pastor, the soldiers thought he had died.(28)

Two days later, they threw him into a ditch.(29) Thankfully, the pastor eventually regained consciousness and was able to escape and receive medical treatment.(30) Unfortunately, the reports indicate that the three deacons died during interrogation.(31)

On April 11, 2023, the Myanmar army launched an aerial attack on an ethnic gathering in Sagaing.(32) This was one of the deadliest attacks, resulting in a mass grave. About 300 men, women, and children had traveled to Sagaing to celebrate the opening of the new administrative office for the people against the junta as well as the start of the Thingyan New Year.(33) The office was opened under the authority of the National Unity Government, as part of the anti-junta resistance.(34) The onslaught became one of the deadliest attacks in the nation since the junta seized power, resulting in the death of at least 165 people, including twenty-seven women and nineteen children.(35) Moreover, thirty people were wounded.(36) Of those wounded, twenty were in serious condition, including a pregnant woman and an eight-year-old child.(37) An eyewitness who was hiding in a tunnel during the attack shared the sight of children dying, women screaming, and dead bodies piling on the floor.(38)

On April 10, 2023, at least eleven civilians were targeted and killed by an airstrike launched by the military junta in Chin State. The aircraft bombed civilians in the Waybula region where the majority of people are Christians.(39) One of the casualties is a Christian pastor.(40)

On April 7, 2023, the day of Good Friday, Pastor Hkalam Samson was sentenced to six years in prison for terrorism, unlawful association, and incitement charges.(41) Pastor Samson was arrested on December 5, 2022, and was in detention until his sentencing in April.(42) He was not allowed to see his family, other than seeing his wife when she served as witness in his trial.(43) In accusing Pastor Samson of the above crimes, it is alleged that Pastor Samson broke Myanmar's Penal Code § 505(a), which prohibits speech with the intent to cause fear or alarm.(44) According to the court, Pastor Samson violated this code during a prayer meeting where he cited the Bible.(45)

4. Request

As seen by the examples from the past few months alone, Myanmar's military is violently oppressing innocent civilians. They are disproportionately targeting the Christian population, resulting in thousands of lives lost or displaced, and hundreds of churches, homes, and schools demolished or severely damaged. Moreover, they are imprisoning pastors and any individual speaking up against the tyrannical reign. We urgently request that the United Nations provide aid and protection for the people of Myanmar and work to put an end to the atrocities they are facing on a daily basis.

(1) Angela Lu Fulton, 'Pray for the End of the Dictatorship': The Cries of Myanmar's Christians, CHRISTIANITY TODAY (Feb. 17, 2023, 1:00 PM), <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2023/february/prayer-myanmar-burma-coup-perseverance-verses.html>.

(2) Id.

(3) Almost 75,000 Homes Incinerated by Junta Forces in Myanmar Since the Coup, THE IRRAWADDY (Aug. 10, 2023), <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/conflicts-in-numbers/almost-75000-homes-incinerated-by-junta-forces-in-myanmar-since-the-coup.html>.

(6) Myanmar: Military's Obstruction of Humanitarian Aid Could Be International Crime, UN NEWS (June 30, 2023), <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/06/1138262>.

(7) Political Prisoners Post-Coup, ASSISTANCE ASSOCIATION FOR POLITICAL PRISONERS (BURMA), <https://aappb.org/> (last visited Aug. 21, 2023).

(8) World Watch List 2023, OPEN DOORS, <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/persecution/countries/> (last visited Aug. 21, 2023).

(9) Id.

(10) Id.

(11) Myanmar, OPEN DOORS, <https://www.opendoorsus.org/en-US/persecution/countries/myanmar/> (last visited Aug. 21, 2023).

- (12) Id.
- (13) Id.
- (14) Id.
- (15) Id.
- (16) Catholic Church Destroyed in Myanmar Attack and 2 other Christian Churches Damaged by the Military, CATHOLIC NEWS WORLD (Aug. 19, 2023), <https://www.catholicnewsworld.com/2023/08/catholic-church-destroyed-in-myanmar.html>.
- (17) Id.
- (18) 3 Churches Damaged in Airstrike by Myanmar Military, UCA NEWS (Aug. 16, 2023, 10:49 AM), <https://www.ucanews.com/news/3-churches-damaged-in-airstrikes-by-myanmar-military/102296>.
- (19) Id.
- (20) Id.
- (21) Id.
- (22) Catholic Church Destroyed in Myanmar Attack and 2 other Christian Churches Damaged by the Military, CATHOLIC NEWS WORLD (Aug. 19, 2023), <https://www.catholicnewsworld.com/2023/08/catholic-church-destroyed-in-myanmar.html>.
- (23) Id.
- (24) Id.
- (25) Id.
- (26) Christian Deacons Presumed Dead After Abduction by Myanmar Military in Chin State, RADIO FREE ASIA (Aug. 2, 2023), <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/christian-clergymen-08022023161429.html>.
- (27) Id.
- (28) Id.
- (29) Id.
- (30) Id.
- (32) Screaming people and bodies everywhere: The horrific aftermath of Myanmar junta airstrike that killed 165, CNN, Apr. 13, 2023), <https://www.cnn.com/2023/04/12/asia/myanmar-junta-deadly-airstrike-aftermath-intl-hnk/index.html>.
- (33) Id.
- (34) Id.
- (35) Id.
- (36) Id.
- (37) Id.
- (38) Id.
- (40) Four Myanmar Christian Leaders Feared Killed in Junta Detention, *supra* note 2.
- (41) Prison Term for Myanmar Pastor Sparks Outrage, UCA NEWS (Apr. 10, 2023, 6:04 AM), <https://www.ucanews.com/news/prison-term-for-myanmar-pastor-sparks-outrage/100930>.
- (42) Id.
- (43) Id.
- (44) Pastor in Myanmar Sentenced to Six Years in Prison, OPEN DOORS (Apr. 13, 2023), <https://www.opendoorscanada.org/pastor-in-myanmar-sentenced-to-prison/>.
- (45) Id.