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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by Christian Solidarity Worldwide, 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.

[5 February 2024]

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



The Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar

1. Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) is a human rights organisation specialising in the right to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) for all. This submission seeks to bring the Council's attention to the ongoing situation of human rights, including FoRB, in Myanmar.

Since the 2021 Coup

2. Three years since the 2021 military coup in Myanmar, Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) remains alarmed by the ongoing political, economic, humanitarian, and human rights crisis in the country. The Myanmar military, also known as the Tatmadaw, continue to arbitrarily arrest, detain and even execute those that oppose the regime and persist in targeting civilian populations and infrastructure leading to over 2 million internally displaced peoples in the country. Planned attacks on civilians and their infrastructure including schools, hospitals and places of worship persist.
3. Since the 2021 coup the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) have recorded 4,477 people killed by the junta and 25,951 people arrested.¹ Of those arrested, 20,013 people remain detained, including those who have been sentenced.
4. In recent months, the Tatmadaw have faced increased pressure following significant gains made by armed resistance groups inspired by the success of Operation 1027 mounted in October 2023 in northern Shan State by the so-called Three Brotherhood Alliance – a coalition of three ethnic armed organisations. According to Reuters, the junta has lost control of at least 35 towns largely in the northern border regions.² This appears to have deepened the resolve of the Myanmar military to perpetrate greater violence with impunity, particularly in areas held by resistance groups, to try to regain control of certain areas.
5. Between 1 April 2022 and 31 July 2023, the Tatmadaw conducted around 687 airstrikes, killing at least 281 individuals.³ According to local research group Nyan Lynn Thit Analytica, the junta launched 454 airstrikes in the first four months of 2023 – a rate of attack double that in 2022.⁴

Religion or Belief Violations

6. In June 2023, the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) published a report on the state of FoRB in Myanmar since the coup. It found that the Tatmadaw 'has violated the human rights of religious minorities and destroyed minority religious sites and places of worship in violation of international law and standards.'⁵
7. According to ICJ, between February 2021 and April 2023, 190 sites of religious or sacred significance were destroyed or damaged from sustained targeting using a range of methods including artillery shelling, airstrikes, and arson. They found that the military junta was directly responsible for at least 158 of these attacks. In addition, 64 raids on religious sites and buildings of worship were reported in the same period across the country. Most were Buddhist sites, 15 were churches, five were Islamic places of worship and one was a Hindu temple. Military camps were set up in 110 religious buildings in 12 states and regions. The Tatmadaw violated these sites by conducting interrogations, detentions and even using these locations as killing fields.
8. On the morning of Sunday 7 January 2024, air strikes on the village of Kanan in Saigaing region killed 17 people including 9 children. 20 people were injured in the attack but were prevented from travelling to regional towns with better medical facilities due to military roadblocks and so could only be treated with extremely limited medical supplies.⁶ The timing of the attack, on a Sunday morning when worshippers were leaving and arriving at the church, is likely to have been carefully planned by the military for maximum devastation. These cruel attacks and the obstruction of aid amount to war crimes.

9. According to Radio Free Asia, the junta has destroyed around 200 religious buildings nationwide since the 2021 coup.⁷ These structures have been ravaged through torching, artillery attacks, and air strikes. Chin State, a majority Christian state, has been hardest hit with over 85 churches ruined. Dave Eubank of the humanitarian aid organisation Free Burma Rangers explains - 'since the coup, many churches have been bombed and destroyed in Chin State – not just Chin, but in Karen/Kayin and Karenni/Kayah [too]...one of the biggest churches in Demoso [Karenni state] was hit in 2022, with helicopter gunships directly firing rockets and heavy machine guns into the church steeple.'

Persecution of the Rohingya

10. Since the coup, the Tatmadaw have destroyed a number of mosques and killed or imprisoned Muslim leaders. In April 2021 the United States of America's (US) Office of International Religious Freedom detailed the horrific treatment of one Muslim muezzin who was found hanging, with his body desecrated as an insult to Islam, in a mosque in Yangon region. Locals stated he was likely killed by the regime's security forces.⁸
11. The predominantly Muslim Rohingya people from Rakhine State, and other ethnic and religious minorities are denied citizenship as a result of the discriminatory 1982 Citizenship Law, and so lack any formal protections through Myanmar's constitution, which provides only for citizens.
12. The violent military operations in 2017 (where massacres, rape and arson were widespread military tactics) have been categorised as genocide by the United States of America Department of State.⁹ The UN, numerous CSOs and others have identified these attacks as ethnic cleansing, genocide and crimes against humanity. Human Rights Watch reports over 730,000 Rohingya fled this brutality for flood-prone camps in an increasingly hostile Bangladesh. Approximately 600,000 remain under oppressive rule in Myanmar.¹⁰
13. It has been over six years since the start of 'clearance operations' against the Rohingya yet their situation remains grave, with no justice in sight. The same military units implicated in the 2017 atrocities have been redeployed in operations around the country.

Political Prisoners

14. Since the 2021 coup, 158 people have been sentenced to death by the junta in closed military-controlled courts and four democracy activists were executed in July 2022 for helping to carry out 'acts of terror'. The judicial executions were the first to take place in the country since 1990, demonstrating the lengths the regime will go to establish their rule.¹¹
15. Prominent Kachin Baptist leader Rev. Hkalam Samson, who is internationally known for his humanitarian and community work, was arrested in December 2022 and was sentenced to six years in prison on charges of terrorism and inciting opposition to the military junta. The boldness shown in detaining even internationally well-known figures demonstrates a trampling of international code and a total lack of impunity.
16. Rev. Thian Lian Sang, a Chin Protestant Christian pastor, was arrested in 2021 amid a spate of detentions of faith leaders from minority ethnic and religious communities. He was sentenced to three years imprisonment under counter-terrorism laws. These counter-terrorism laws are frequently weaponised by the junta to crackdown on dissent and minimise civic space.

Recommendations to the Human Rights Council

17. Call for a global arms embargo on Myanmar and continue to support robust, targeted sanctions against the Myanmar military and military-owned enterprises.

18. Adopt a coordinated approach with other UN agencies and international institutions to ensure that in all resolutions, dialogues and exchanges with Myanmar human rights are raised and demands made that Myanmar fulfils its human rights obligations.
19. Urge all relevant UN mechanisms to include the right to freedom of religion or belief in their reporting on Myanmar.
20. Encourage the provision of cross-border humanitarian aid in conflict areas and refugee camps and increase international pressure on the Myanmar military to provide unhindered humanitarian access to ethnic minority states.
21. Call for the release of all political prisoners in Myanmar, including Rev. Hkalam Samson and Rev. Thian Lian Sang.
22. Encourage UN Member States, including China, the Russian Federation, India, Thailand and Viet Nam, to cease all resourcing of, and engagement with, the military junta.
23. Urge the Indian, Bangladeshi, Thai and Indonesian governments to ensure non refoulement of Myanmar refugees, and support efforts to fully quip the UNHCR to accelerate applications for Myanmar nationals at risk of refoulement.
24. Encourage the Lao People's Democratic Republic, as chair of ASEAN for 2024, to work with other ASEAN countries to move beyond the failed 5-Point Consensus and instead adopt a tougher approach to Myanmar's junta – including complying with humanitarian assistance obligations and the immediate cessation of human rights violations.

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 3. OHCHR, Report of the High Commissioner to the 54th session of the Human Rights Council on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, 19 September 2023, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ahrc5459-situation-human-rights-myanmar-report-united-nations-high>
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