



Jubilee Campaign and Free Burma Rangers Submission to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief

Regarding his Call for Input for his report on the rights of persons belonging to religious or belief minorities in situations of conflict

MYANMAR/BURMA

I. The Aftermath of the Military Coup in Myanmar

Following the Tatmadaw's seizure of power in Myanmar on 1 February 2021, the status of the nation's civilians, especially peaceful pro-democracy protesters and minorities – religious and ethnic alike – has become incredibly precarious. The dangers were confirmed when military forces began to shoot unarmed demonstrators, having killed no fewer than 600 civilians within the month between 20 February and 27 March alone. The number of individuals who have been arbitrarily detained, physically assaulted, and tortured is much larger.¹

In June 2021, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. 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 destruction of houses of worship; obstruction of humanitarian access; extrajudicial killings; and more.² In this submission, Jubilee Campaign wishes to raise to the Special Rapporteur our concerns regarding persecution of and violence against the aforementioned faith minorities in the Union of Myanmar, specifically Christian minorities and the predominantly Muslim Rohingya minority community.

II. The Situation of Christian Minorities

a. Chin State

¹ Russell Goldman, "[Myanmar's Coup and Violence, Explained](#)", *The New York Times*, 26 October 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.

In the 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 and arrest. On 27 February 2021, Burmese security forces ambushed Hakha Baptist Church, where they arrested the pastor and used water cannons to disperse church worshippers.³ On 17 March, Tatmadaw troops killed 25-year-old Pastor Cung Lian Ceu.⁴ 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.⁵ On 30 October 2021, the Tatmadaw ruthlessly shelled the town of Thantlang, where residents have "had a reputation for their fierce fighting spirit and have put up stiff resistance to military rule"; as a result of the shelling, two local churches and 200 homes were destroyed, 10,000 residents have fled, and about 20 staff and children remain in a local orphanage.⁶ This late October incident resembled an earlier attack in September in the same location; when military launched a heavy artillery airstrike on the residential part of Thantlang, Baptist Pastor Chung Biak Hum took action to attempt to extinguish the resulting flames. Regrettably, military forces shot Pastor Hum twice in the chest, killing him; his body also was missing his ring finger, leading Pastor Hum's friend to believe that the perpetrators sliced his finger to steal his wedding band.⁷

a. Kachin State

Christians in Kachin State have also witnessed an uptick in violence and attacks by military. 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 "antiregime protests".⁸ 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 questioning.⁹ In June 2021, three Kachin State pastors, Koshan Singsar, Z Kaw Htinah, and M Hwang Di were arrested together for organizing interdenominational services to pray for peace and an end to violence; they have been accused of "causing fear, spreading false news, and agitating [...] against government employees" and they could face three years in prison each if convicted.¹⁰ Numerous Kachin State churches have reported military personnel attending worship services to listen in and identify any language about the conflict that would allegedly warrant arrest; troops have similarly raided theological colleges and seminaries.¹¹ In July 2021, three military soldiers raped and stabbed to death an ethnic Kachin woman before leaving her battered body in a forest. The perpetrators are currently being investigated, however the military has publicly alleged that the incident was an accidental killing.¹²

b. Kayah State (Karenni State)

³ Gina Goh & Jay Church, "[Caught in the Crossfire: Myanmar's Christian Minorities Under Tatmadaw Rule](#)", International Christian Concern, 2021.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ International Christian Concern, "[Burmese Military Arrests a Catholic Priest in Chin State](#)", 18 June 2021.

⁶ The Associated Press, "[Army shelling in Myanmar blamed for setting 160 homes ablaze](#)", CBC News, 30 October 2021.

⁷ The Irrawaddy, "[Brother of Slain Myanmar Pastor Says Regime Fails to Take Accountability for Atrocities](#)", 23 September 2021.

⁸ The Irrawaddy, "[Myanmar Military Raids Kachin Churches](#)", 6 April 2021.

⁹ Robin Gomes, "[Myanmar: military raids on places of worship deplored](#)", Vatican News, 13 April 2021.

¹⁰ Union of Catholic Asian News, "[Myanmar pastors charged after holding peace prayers](#)", 1 July 2021.

¹¹ Nu Nu Lusan & Emily Fishbein, "[A living hell: Churches, clergy targeted by Myanmar military](#)", *Al Jazeera*, 14 October 2021.

¹² Radio Free Asia, "[Myanmar Detains Three Soldiers for Alleged Rape and Murder of Kachin Woman](#)", 20 July 2021.

In Kayah State in 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 to prevent drone and artillery attacks by the military.¹³ 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.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ Concurrently, however, two Catholic individuals and members of St. Joseph's – Alfred Ludo and Patrick Bo Reh – were killed by soldiers.¹⁶ 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.¹⁷ In early November 2021, Barnabas Aid reported that Karenni civilians have been increasingly attempting to cross the border into Thailand; though some 250 Christian families have successfully done so, groups of Karenni have been captured and arrested by the Tatmadaw during their attempted escapes.¹⁸ Also in November, Fortify Rights reported that the Tatmadaw has detained no fewer than 14 humanitarian aid workers in Kayah State as well as destroyed medical and food supplies that were being used to aid 3,000 displaced civilians.¹⁹ The Tatmadaw has also recently begun using kidnapped civilians as human shields against anti-junta militias in the region.²⁰

c. Shan State

In November 2021, military forces set fire to 30 homes in La Tu, Pekon Township, Shan State; they also shelled the Sacred Heart Catholic Church and a local convent.²¹ More than 10,000 local Pekon township residents have been displaced, and one Catholic social worker explained that he and many of his neighbors have had no choice but to flee when artillery shell began hitting their neighbors' homes.²²

d. Kayin State (Karen State)

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.²³

III. The Situation of the Rohingya

¹³ Myanmar Now, "[Karenni resistance fighters open new front against junta](#)", 26 May 2021.

¹⁴ Union of Catholic Asian News, "[Four die in military attack on Myanmar church](#)", 24 May 2021.

¹⁵ Union of Catholic Asian News, "[Another church attacked in conflict-torn eastern Myanmar](#)", 28 May 2021.

¹⁶ Gina Goh & Jay Church, "[Caught in the Crossfire: Myanmar's Christian Minorities Under Tatmadaw Rule](#)", International Christian Concern, 2021.

¹⁷ Catholic News Service, "[Third Catholic church in eastern Myanmar hit by military strikes](#)", 7 June 2021.

¹⁸ Barnabas Aid, "[Karenni Christian Refugees Hiding in Thailand Need Your Help Today](#)", 1 November 2021.

¹⁹ Al Jazeera, "[Myanmar military accused of blocking aid to displaced citizens](#)", 10 November 2021.

²⁰ Radio Free Asia, "[Myanmar's military accused of using human shields in Kayah state](#)", 3 November 2021.

²¹ Kantarawaddy Times, "[Junta Attacks Kayan Village in Pekon, Youth Group Open Libraries in Karenni State IDP Camps](#)", 18 November 2021.

²² Union of Catholic Asian News, "[Catholic church shelled again in battle-ravaged Myanmar](#)", 10 November 2021.

²³ Gina Goh & Jay Church, "[Caught in the Crossfire: Myanmar's Christian Minorities Under Tatmadaw Rule](#)", International Christian Concern, 2021.

The predominantly Muslim Rohingya minority community are in a unique position in comparison to their Christian counterparts; already in 2017, the Rohingya community was the target of a massive genocidal campaign led by the same Tatmadaw that is engaging in lawless behavior and human rights violations today. Throughout the Rohingya Genocide, women and girls were raped, boys were slaughtered, and thousands of civilians were murdered; to this day, more than half a million Rohingya individuals live in neighboring nations after they fled four years ago. Now, as the military taking over the country is the same military that killed members of their community, Rohingya living inside Myanmar are fearful that they may be the next target; meanwhile, those living abroad have had their hopes for a safe return to their home country dashed.

In August 2021, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the Simon-Skjodt Center for the Prevention of Genocide published a report assessing the risk of mass atrocities against Myanmar's Rohingya. Highlighting that the Tatmadaw's current violent activities generally against Burmese civilians has already met the threshold to be considered crimes against humanity and war crimes, the report outlines a few possible scenarios: (1) the Tatmadaw, which increasingly "seems unconcerned with international legitimacy", will continue its genocidal campaign against the Rohingya; (2) the Tatmadaw may incite civilians to wage violence against the Rohingya by blaming them for "junta-caused economic devastation and COVID-19 crisis". The report also highlights that the Rohingya may also be in danger of violence from the Aarakan Army (AA) based in Rakhine State. The AA has already extorted Rohingya, seized Rohingya land for redistribution, and occupied their land; if the AA envisions the elimination of Rohingya as part of its project to consolidate Rakhine power, it could wage violence directly against the Rohingya community or incite Rakhine State civilians to take up arms against the Rohingya.²⁴

IV. Question Responses Provided by Free Burma Rangers

Q: Are there observable trends regarding the experiences of persons belonging to a religious or belief minority in conflict situations? When, where and how are they affected on the basis of their identity?

A: Religious minorities are already dehumanized but the regime and conflict then makes it even easier to persecute and kill them. This is an old problem dating back to the Kings of Burma and until there is a representative government with protection for minorities, this will continue.

Q: Among civilians affected by situations of conflict or insecurity, do religious or belief minorities have specific needs? If so, what are they? Are there protection gaps or gaps in accessing remedies and/or lifesaving services for persons belonging to religious or belief minorities who are victims of conflict-related violence?

A: Yes, religious minorities are especially vulnerable and there are currently no protections for them. Whether they are Muslim Rohingyas who are murdered, raped, and displaced with impunity, or Christian Karenni who are killed in their churches, there is no one to stop the Burma military in their attacks against religious minorities. Humanitarian aid is blocked to all the locations of religious minority communities where the Burma military is attacking; places of worship have been destroyed for over 72 years of the civil war, and continue to be destroyed.

²⁴ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum & Simon-Skjodt Center for the Prevention of Genocide, [Risk of Mass Atrocities Against the Rohingya Post-Coup | Policy Brief](#), August 2021.

V. Conclusion & Recommendations

Jubilee Campaign urges members and observer states of the Human Rights Council to call upon the Republic of the Union of Myanmar – currently under control of the Tatmadaw – to:

1. 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 and extrajudicial killings of worshippers and faith leaders. Similarly, make a commitment to eradicate hostilities against Rohingya and other ethnic minorities.
2. Immediately end the extrajudicial killings of and violence against peaceful protesters, and the targeted silencing and detention of journalists reporting on the human rights situation.
3. Meet the government's 2012 commitment to open a country office of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to monitor and report the human rights situation.
4. Cease the State Administration Council's (SAC) practice of "unilaterally amending existing laws to facilitate military rule on an unyielding population"; for example, the revisions of the Penal Code, the Criminal Procedure Code, and the Law Protecting the Privacy and Security of Citizens to criminalize criticism of military authorities and permit these same authorities to conduct arbitrary detentions, searches and seizures, and surveillance.²⁵
5. Lift the martial law which has expanded across Yangon region and has been used to implement military tribunals which summarily sentence civilians *in absentia* with death for crimes and activities.
6. Return internet access to the civilian population.

Free Burma Rangers states that "we pray for a change in the dictators' hearts, but if they do not change then external help is needed for the people of Burma", and makes the following recommendations:

1. Immediate cross-border humanitarian assistance directly to areas of need through ethnic governments and NGOs and direct assistance to the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) in the Burman areas of the plains and cities.
2. Political recognition of the ethnic groups and support of the movement for a democratic and federal government between the ethnic groups, the CDM and pro-democracy political groups such as the CRPH (Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw) and NLD (National League for Democracy).
3. Protection for people under attack from the Burma military and police, both in the cities and in the ethnic areas. Also, the support of safe areas where people targeted by the regime and defectors from the police and army can go. This support includes early warning

²⁵ United Nations Human Rights Council Forty-eighth session, [Written updates of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the Situation of human rights in Myanmar](#), 16 September 2021.

systems, communications, food, shelter, schooling, transport, and protection for the people who flee the Burma Army.

4. Establishment of a no-fly zone over the ethnic areas of Burma to prevent Burma air attacks against the population.