

The Honorable Bob Menendez  
Chairman  
United States Senate  
Committee on Foreign Relations  
528 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable James E. Risch  
Ranking Member  
United States Senate  
Committee on Foreign Relations  
438 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

1 September 2022

Dear Senators,

We, the undersigned, are a group of organizations and individuals, advocates, scholars, faith leaders, practitioners and non-practitioners, that share a common interest in the promotion of international religious freedom as a universal human right. We are writing to request that the United States Senate pass the BURMA Act, [H.R.5497](#), formally the Burma Unified through Rigorous Military Accountability Act of 2022, which was previously passed by the United States House of Representatives and referred to the Senate in early April 2022. The BURMA Act's passage with unanimous consent in the House of Representatives is a testament to the nonpartisanship and collective concern with regards to the humanitarian crisis unfolding in Myanmar since the February 2021 military coup.

We similarly request urgent action to further the Senate's corresponding BURMA Act, [S.2937](#), which was introduced in early October 2021 by Senator Benjamin Cardin and thirteen original co-sponsors, and which has garnered the support of an additional fourteen co-sponsors in the following months.

The bills would, among other things, (1) hold those individuals within the Myanmar military junta – the Tatmadaw – accountable via sanctions for their atrocities and violations of human rights; (2) encourage greater collaboration between the United States government and the United Nations Security Council to work towards a democratic transition in Burma and the release of political prisoners of conscience; (3) require the US State Department to report to Congress on the military coup; (4) establishing a mandate for a coordinator to oversee Myanmar-related policy in the United States; and (5) authorize \$220.5 million worth of humanitarian assistance for victims of Tatmadaw violence and ethnic groups and vulnerable displaced peoples for fiscal year 2023, and \$50 million worth of assistance to Burmese civil society and the independent media each fiscal year from 2022 to 2027.

Since the February 2021 military coup, the state of Myanmar has far exceeded the threshold of humanitarian crisis. In addition to the approximately 5,500 military-inflicted civilian casualties – including the shooting of protesters, aerial shelling of buildings used as safe houses, among broader devastating infrastructural destruction, and violent rampages of entire villages<sup>1</sup> - up to one million Burmese civilians have been internally displaced<sup>2</sup>, the economy and related progress with

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<sup>1</sup> Radio Free Asia, "[New civilian death toll since coup 'unprecedented' in Myanmar's history](#)", 17 May 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Al Jazeera, "[More than 1 million people displaced in Myanmar: UN](#)", 1 June 2022.

regards to poverty mitigation have been decimated, and the nation's healthcare system and infrastructure are practically defunct.<sup>3</sup>

The International Religious Freedom Roundtable participating organizations and individuals have also observed with concern that the February 2021 military coup and subsequent junta activities have dangerous implications for communities of faith. For example, it was reported that the October 2021 torching of Rialti Village Baptist Church in western Chin state by Tatmadaw troops was the first incident in which a church was fully set ablaze, despite that there have been tens of incidents in which Catholic and Christian houses of worship were partially damaged or majorly destroyed due to airstrikes and artillery-based attacks.<sup>4</sup> Other churches that have fallen victim to military targeting and attacks include the Catholic Sacred Heart Church where four Catholics perished in May 2021<sup>5</sup>; St. Joseph's Church in Demoso<sup>6</sup>; Our Lady, Queen of Peace Church in DOUNGANKHA<sup>7</sup>; Hakha Baptist Church whose pastor was detained by troops in February 2021<sup>8</sup>; St. Michael's Church, one of whose boarding students was arrested by military forces in June 2021<sup>9</sup>; and a Kachin Baptist Church in Shan state where troops detained ten religious leaders and church staff for interrogation.<sup>10</sup> More recently, in early July 2022, the Tatmadaw embarked on an aerial bombing campaign which caused damages to a Chat village, Mindat township church and schoolbuilding, and resulted in two civilian casualties.<sup>11</sup>

Chin houses of worship are not the only faith-based institutions targeted by the military's onslaught. In April 2021, during Ramadan and just a few months after the coup, Tatmadaw troops opened fire inside Sule Mosque in Mandalay, killing one Muslim man, injuring two people, and detaining at least five other individuals inside the mosque, three of which were children.<sup>12</sup>

A Buddhist monastery in Sagaing Region sustained major damages from military shelling one day in March 2022 that tragically killed six civilians.<sup>13</sup> That very same day, troops shelled another monastery in Sagaing where 1,500 civilians were seeking refuge; fortunately, no civilian casualties ensued, though three children were severely injured.<sup>14</sup> In the month of June 2021, eight churches in Shan State and Kayah State - where the Shan ethnic minority and the Kareni ethnic minority primarily reside, respectively - were destroyed by junta attacks: the Golden Temple of

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<sup>3</sup> Lindsay Maizland, "[Myanmar's Troubled History: Coups, Military Rule, and Ethnic Conflict](#)", *Council on Foreign Relations*, 31 January 2022.

<sup>4</sup> Khin Maung Nyane & Joshua Lipes, "[Junta troops torch church, homes in Myanmar's Chin State](#)", *Radio Free Asia*, 14 October 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Union of Catholic Asian News, "[Four die in military attack on Myanmar church](#)", 24 May 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Union of Catholic Asian News, "[Another church attacked in conflict-torn eastern Myanmar](#)", 28 May 2021.

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

<sup>8</sup> Gina Goh & Jay Church, "[Caught in the Crossfire: Myanmar's Christian Minorities Under Tatmadaw Rule](#)", *International Christian Concern*, 2021.

<sup>9</sup> International Christian Concern, "[Burmese Military Arrests a Catholic Priest in Chin State](#)", 18 June 2021.

<sup>10</sup> Robin Gomes, "[Myanmar: military raids on places of worship deplored](#)", *Vatican News*, 13 April 2021.

<sup>11</sup> Union of Catholic Asian News, "[Myanmar junta 'ignoring pleas not to target churches'](#)", 5 July 2022.

<sup>12</sup> Myanmar Now, "[As Ramadan begins, soldiers attack sleeping Muslims at Mandalay mosque](#)", 15 April 2021.

<sup>13</sup> Asia News, "[As civil war rages, ruling junta destroys about a hundred religious buildings](#)", 29 March 2022.

<sup>14</sup> Khin Yi Yi Zaw, "[For the second time in one day, Myanmar junta bombs a Buddhist monastery full of civilians](#)", *Myanmar Now*, 9 March 2022.

Jesus, Jeroblo Marian Shrine, Our Lady of Lourdes Cave, Mother Mary's Church, St. Joseph's Church in Demoso, Daw Ngan Khar Village's Catholic Church, and Loikaw's St. Peter's Church.<sup>15</sup>

It is also essential to note that the Tatmadaw, which has taken over leadership of the country and all of its infrastructure, is the same military that in 2017 embarked on a genocidal campaign against the predominantly-Muslim Rohingya minority group. General Min Aung Hlaing, who is currently the *de facto* leader of Myanmar, is considered the “chief architect and perpetrator” of the Rohingya genocide<sup>16</sup>, and has referred to the Rohingya as “unfinished business”.<sup>17</sup> General Hlaing's ironic and hypocritical August 2021 enactment of a law criminalizing genocidal killings and other violent offences committed “with intent to destroy, in whole or in part” any group of people has been deemed lip service, and many activists and analysts have negligible hope that such a law will see the prosecution of military troops involved in the Rohingya genocide.

The Tatmadaw regime's recent executions<sup>18</sup> of four noteworthy individuals – democracy activist Ko Jimmy (Kyaw Min Yu); former lawmaker, hip-hop musician, and ally of civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi, Phyo Zeya Thaw; Hla Myo Aung, and Aung Thura Zaw – have hastened the need for the passage of the BURMA Act and, notably, more international cooperation to work towards the peaceful return of Myanmar to elected democracy.

We, the undersigned, thank you for your attention to this critical issue.

Sincerely,

### ***Organizations***

*American Baptist Churches of Nebraska*

*Asian Children's Education Fellowship*

*Boat People SOS*

*Christian Freedom International*

*Christ's Mandate for Missions*

*Church of Scientology National Affairs Office*

*Committee for Religious Freedom in Vietnam*

*Emmanuel Chin Baptist Church*

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<sup>15</sup> Anugrah Kumar, “[8 churches damaged in last month amid Myanmar conflict; priest abducted as army raids parish](#)”, *The Christian Post*, 21 June 2021.

<sup>16</sup> Myanmar Now, “[Min Aung Hlaing, who oversaw mass killings of Rohingya, enacts genocide law](#)”, 26 August 2021.

<sup>17</sup> Maria Siow, “[Bleak Ramadan for Myanmar's Rohingya Muslims, in danger of further abuses by the military, analysts warn](#)”, *South China Morning Post*, 18 April 2021.

<sup>18</sup> Al Jazeera, “[Myanmar's military says executions were ‘justice for the people’](#)”, 26 July 2022.

*Farthest Corners*

*Global Movement for Myanmar Democracy (GM4MD)*

*International Campaign for the Rohingya*

*International Christian Concern*

*Jubilee Campaign*

*Justice For All: Burma Task Force*

*Law and Liberty Trust*

*Parity*

*Prayer Pioneers*

*Red Eagle Enterprises*

*Set My People Free*

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*Executive Director*

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*Lauren Homer  
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cc:

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The Honorable Tim Kaine  
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