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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.

[23 August 2023]

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

Continued Instability and Christian Persecution in Myanmar Two Years After Coup

Item 4: Interactive Dialogue on the comprehensive report of the High Commissioner on the situation of human rights in Myanmar

Jubilee Campaign would like to raise to the Council's attention the endless persecution of and violence against the Christian community in Myanmar by Tatmadaw troops.¹

Damage and Destruction of Churches and Religious Properties

In late October 2022, three Tatmadaw fighter jets dropped four bombs on attendees of an anniversary concert hosted by the Kachin Independence Organization, killing 80 civilians and injuring 200 others. Following the incident, Kachin Baptist Convention confirmed that many of the victims were Christian members of their organization, and other local sources informed Chin Association of Maryland, Inc. that two pastors had been killed and that military troops actively prevented fatally wounded civilians from being transported to hospitals.²

In early November 2022, junta troops launched three coordinated attacks upon a Theological Seminary associated with Kachin Baptist Convention, in Shan State, injuring four individuals.³ Later that month, Tatmadaw militants set fire to hundreds of homes and buildings in Mon Hla, a Catholic village in Sagaing Region's Khin-U Township, including a church and a school, both of which were funded by donations raised by local Cardinal Charles Bo Yangon. The widespread arson resulted in the deaths of three civilians, a 7-year-old child, as well as an adult man and adult woman.⁴

At the outset of 2023 on 12 January, Tatmadaw warplanes bombed Lay Wah Village in Karen State, causing five civilian casualties. Two of the deceased include Catholic catechist Saw Re Di and Baptist pastor Saw Cha Aye who were in their churches at the time of the attack. Two days later, in Sagaing region, junta forces ambushed Chan Thar village, burning down homes and occupying the Church of Our Lady of the Assumption before retreating and destroying the historical house of worship by arson alongside the adjacent rectory and convent. Fortunately, the village's 800 residents were able to flee prior to the sustained attack.⁵

In June 2023, Tatmadaw forces launched an aerial attack on the predominantly Christian Khu Don Village Tract, Kawkareik Township, Karen State, cluster bombing an adventist church.⁶

In August 2023 in two separate incidents, the junta bombed two Baptist churches in Chin State's Falam Township and Thantlang Township, injuring seven civilians and additionally destroying multiple local residences.⁷

Persecution of and Violence Towards Chin Christian Pastors and Notable Faith Leaders

In early December 2022, the Tatmadaw formally convicted Chin pastor of Falam Baptist Church, Reverent Thian Lian Sang, of "rebellion against the government and providing weapons to rebels" and sentenced him to 23 years' imprisonment to be served at Obo Prison in Mandalay Region. Two days earlier in the same region, junta forces detained

¹ United Nations General Assembly: Human Rights Council, *Written statement submitted by Jubilee Campaign, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status, A/HRC/51/NGO/103*, August 2022.

² International Christian Concern, "Targeted Airstrikes Kill More than 80 Civilians in Myanmar", 26 October 2022.

³ International Christian Concern, "Kachin Bible School Shelled by Burmese Army", 4 November 2022.

⁴ Chin Association of Maryland, Inc., *Two Years After the 2021 Military Coup: The Worsening Situation of Christians Across Burma*, January 2023.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Premier Christian News, "Myanmar church hit by regime 'cluster bomb' according to Karen Christians", 9 June 2023.

⁷ Radio Free Asia, "Residents say Christian churches attacked by junta in Myanmar's Chin state", 15 August 2023.

Reverend. Dr. Hkalam Samson - who also formerly worked as the General Secretary and the President of the Kachin Baptist Convention - as he was about to board a flight to Bangkok, Thailand for medical treatment. Following hours of interrogation, Reverend Dr. Samson was transported to Myitkyina Prison, Kachin State, where he was arraigned on charges of “criminal defamation, incitement, and unlawful association with an illegal group” and sentenced to six years’ imprisonment in April 2023.⁸

In July 2023, a group of intoxicated Tatmadaw troops ambushed a church - which the junta had previously permitted to operate as a displacement center for civilians fleeing militant violence between the group and local resistance groups - in Chin State’s Mindat Township and kidnapped Christian Pastor Htang Kay and three clergymen Chai Kay, Hon Chway, and Hon Kay. After initially claiming that the four men would be released after interrogation, the Tatmadaw denied knowledge of the incident and a Mindat People’s Administration official reported hearing sounds of torture emanating from the military barracks, leading people to conclude that three of the Christian individuals have been killed during questioning, with the exception of Pastor Kay who had escaped.⁹

Persecution of Christian Communities

In February 2023, the Tatmadaw State Administration Council ordered a 6:00 PM to 6:00 AM curfew and proscription on gatherings surpassing five individuals in 37 townships across Sagaing Region, Magway Region, Bago Region, Tanithargyi Region, Chin State, Kayah State, Karen State, and Mon State.¹⁰ This mandate was extended in March 2023 to include seven additional townships in Chin State, and these “new rules are affecting local Christians as the junta wants them to seek permission for holding Sunday services seven days in advance”.¹¹

Mass Displacement

Widespread, incessant, and increasingly violent attacks have exacerbated the humanitarian crisis. In May 2023, the United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees estimates that there are approximately 48,700 civilians – likely predominantly Christian – internally displaced within Chin State; meanwhile, an estimated 53,500 civilians from Chin State and Sagaing Region have fled into the neighboring Indian states of Mizoram, Manipur, and Nagaland.¹² The independent research group Institute for Strategy and Policy - Myanmar reported that between the initial coup in February 2021 and mid-December 2022, a total of 1,912,769 Burmese citizens became displaced.¹³

Chin refugees are not necessarily safe even in displacement camps, however. In August 2021, the Tatmadaw cut off all humanitarian aid and supply routes to the hilly town of Mindat in Chin State, leaving 50,000 refugees with only two weeks’ worth of food.¹⁴ In June 2022, Chin citizens and refugees were disheartened to learn that Chin State would be excluded from humanitarian aid promised by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)¹⁵, and majority-Christian Kayah State was restricted from NGO humanitarian aid in July 2022.¹⁶ In October 2021 Tatmadaw forces raided a Catholic IDP Camp in Chin State, searching phones and interrogating refugees.¹⁷ In May 2023, the Progressive Karenni People Force confirmed the deaths of 134 refugees due to insufficient food and medical supplies.¹⁸

⁸ Supra note 4. ; Tessa Sanchez, “Myanmar Sentences Baptist Leader to 6 Years in Prison”, *Christianity Today*, 10 April 2023.

⁹ The Irrawaddy, “Four Myanmar Christian Leaders Feared Killed in Junta Detention”, 28 July 2023. ; Radio Free Asia, “Christian deacons presumed dead after abduction by Myanmar military in Chin state”, 2 August 2023.

¹⁰ Union of Catholic Asian News, “Myanmar Christians fear martial law spells more attacks”, 9 February 2023.

¹¹ Union of Catholic Asian News, “Myanmar Christians face harsh curbs on religious activities”, 3 March 2023.

¹² United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Myanmar Emergency Update*, 11 May 2023.

¹³ Institute for Strategy and Policy - Myanmar (ISP-Myanmar), *Data Matters*.

¹⁴ Radio Free Asia, “Myanmar’s Military Blocks Supply Routes to 50,000 Refugees in Chin State Amid Renewed Fighting”, 9 August 2021.

¹⁵ Radio Free Asia, “Refugees in Myanmar’s Chin state excluded from ASEAN humanitarian assistance plan”, 7 June 2022.

¹⁶ International Christian Concern, “Record Number of IDPs in Myanmar”, 5 May 2023.

¹⁷ International Christian Concern, “Burmese Army Raid Catholic IDP Camp in Chin State”, 11 October 2021.

¹⁸ Supra note 16.

Conclusion & Recommendations

Jubilee Campaign urges the member states of the United Nations Human Rights Council to:

Call for the mandate of the United Nations Special Envoy to Myanmar to be filled;

1. Urge the UNHCR to open offices in Chin State, including in Hakha, the capital, as well as Mindat, Paletwa and other townships where there is compelling need. This will allow for enhanced coordination and provision of protection and humanitarian to IDPs and others in need;¹⁹
2. Encourage the UNHCR in Malaysia, India, and Thailand to offer protection to Chins and other Burmese refugees from arbitrary arrest, extortion, deportation, or refoulement; relatedly, ensure refugee access to public education, health care, work authorization, and resettlement;
3. Implore the UN Security Council to adopt a resolution instating a global arms embargo to eliminate the flow of arms into Myanmar, especially in light of the June 2021 General Assembly resolution of the same subject and the fact that that two permanent member nations of the UN Security Council – China and Russia – continue to prop up the military junta by selling them fighter jets and armored vehicles.²⁰

¹⁹ Chin Association of Maryland, Inc., *After the 2021 Military Coup in Myanmar/Burma: Challenges for Internally Displaced Persons and Refugees*, October 2021.

²⁰ United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, “UN report calls for urgent action to halt access to revenue and arms supplies by Myanmar military”, 16 September 2022. ; Heather Chen, “UN expert says Myanmar imported \$1 billion in arms since coup, much of it from Russia and China”, *CNN*, 19 May 2023.