

March 7, 2025

The Honorable Marco Rubio  
Secretary of State  
2201 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20520

**Subject: To determine that the human rights abuses and systematic violations of religious freedom or belief targeting Christians in Burma constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes.**

Dear Secretary Rubio:

We, the undersigned organizations, are writing to urge you to determine that the human rights abuses and systematic violations of religious freedom or belief targeting Christians committed by the Burmese military regime, also known as the Tatmadaw, and security forces constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes. Such a determination would be an important step towards accountability for the Tatmadaw, to cease the violence against civilians, and protect ethnic and religious minority groups including Christians.

According to the U.S. Commission on International Freedom (USCIRF) 2024 Report:

“Burma’s population consists of Buddhists (87.9 percent), Christians (6.2 percent), Muslims (4.3 percent), Animists (0.8 percent), and Hindus (0.5 percent). Although the constitution treats Buddhism as the de facto state religion while recognizing Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Animism, non-Buddhist religious and ethnic minorities face longstanding persecution. In 2015, Burma passed race and religion laws with the support of hardline Buddhist nationalist groups such as the Ma Ba Tha. These laws regulate religious conversion, marriage, and births; they also restrict the religious freedom of non-Buddhists, particularly Muslims.” ([2024 USCIRF Report](#))

The report also indicates that the State Administration Council (SAC), the ruling body of the Tatmadaw, relies on assistance from abroad, including \$1 billion in weapons mostly from Russia and China. Using these weapons, the Tatmadaw has instituted brazen acts of violence, including airstrikes and drones which have destroyed “nearly 200 religious buildings across Burma, including 85 churches in Chin State and 40 Buddhist monasteries, a nunnery, six churches, and three mosques in Sagaing” ([2024 USCIRF Report](#)) since 2021.

In [his video remarks](#) at the Chin Association of Maryland’s Congressional Briefing on February 3, 2025, the H.E. Duwa Lashi La, Acting President of the National Unity Government of Myanmar, stated that, “since the February 2021 military coup, almost 500 religious sites, including 147 churches, were burned or destroyed by the Myanmar military in less than four years. In addition, 266 religious leaders were killed and injured.” He also poignantly mentioned that as a “Kachin ethnic and a Christian”, he personally understands the decades long persecution of religious minorities by successive military regimes, who also “brutally repressed Buddhists and the monks who do not share the political stands and goals of the military dictators.”

The U.S. Department of State has designated Burma as a “Country of Particular Concern” on the [recommendation](#) of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) since its inception in 1999 for “systematic, egregious, and ongoing violations of religious freedom.”

Secretary of State Antony Blinken, in his March 21, 2022 [determination](#) of genocide against the Rohingya, acknowledged decades of well-documented killings, rape, and other atrocities against members of other minority ethnic and religious groups.

The International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) reported the number of clergy [detained](#) had risen to 38 as of April 2023. One such case is the arrest and imprisonment of Dr. Hkalam Samson, a Kachin Christian leader, on charges that Human Rights Watch [called](#) “baseless” and a “heavy-handed attempt to chill all dissent among ethnic minority leaders.” While the news of the [release](#) of Dr. Samson on July 23, 2024 after serving more than a year in prison was good, the Tatmadaw continues to repress, imprison, and commit acts of violence towards Christians and other religious minorities. This includes the Burmese military injuring one monk and [killing](#) a 78-year old Buddhist monk in Tada-U Township, Mandalay Region. The monk was a retired member of the State Sangha Nayaka Committee, the highest Buddhist authority in Myanmar.

In the Human Rights Watch (HRW) [World Report 2025](#), HRW also highlighted the “military’s atrocities committed since the February 2021 coup” and that those atrocities “amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity, fueled by decades of impunity.” The report also pointed out that the “ethnic Rohingya are currently facing the gravest threats since the military’s 2017 atrocities.”

The Catholic Bishops Conference of Myanmar, Myanmar Council of Churches, and Myanmar Christ Mission Cooperation Board [expressed](#) their deep concern in response to the February 2021 military coup and the arrest of President U Win Myint and Counselor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, a sentiment echoed by resolutions from the [World Council of Churches](#) and [Baptist World Alliance](#).

In May 2022, Amnesty International [reports](#) damage to “several dozen religious buildings” in Eastern Burma since the coup. The Karenni Human Rights Group issued a report [documenting](#) damage by shelling to eight churches in Kayah State between January and March 2022 alone.’

In a USCIRF Hearing on February 2023, Zo Tum Hmung, Executive Director of the Chin Association of Maryland, testified that the Tatmadaw carried out the destruction of the town of Thantlang, Chin State, [displacing](#) the town’s entire population of 10,000. This is one of the Tatmadaw’s most egregious acts. During this campaign, the Tatmadaw killed Pastor Cung Biak Hum of Thantlang’s Centenary Baptist Church and [burned](#) 21 of the town’s 22 churches. This included the Johnson Memorial Baptist Church, built in the name of American Baptist missionary Robert Johnson, and the Thantlang Baptist Church, which had a congregation of over 3,000 people. Approximately 1,300 homes and businesses were also destroyed.

The Tatmadaw also [targeted Catholic churches](#) across the country. Historic churches such as the Church of the Assumption in Sagaing Region, which is a 129-year-old Catholic church, and

Christ the King's Cathedral of the dioceses of Loikaw in Kayah State were deliberately burned down.

The Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM) in July, 2022 [reported](#), “crimes have been committed in Myanmar on a scale and in a manner that constitutes a widespread and systematic attack against a civilian population. The available evidence suggests that the crimes against humanity of murder; torture; deportation and forcible transfer; rape and other forms of sexual violence; persecution; and imprisonment have been committed.” On June 30, 2023, the IIMM [reported](#) to the UN Human Rights Council that the military has committed three types of war crimes with “increasing frequency and brazenness: (a) indiscriminate or disproportionate targeting of civilians using bombs; (b) killings of civilians or combatants detained during operations; and (c) large-scale and intentional burning of civilian dwellings and other civilian buildings.” The report goes on to include places of worship.

As of January 27, 2025, UNHCR [estimates](#) that 3.25 million people have been displaced within Burma, with 72,200 more seeking refuge in neighboring countries such as India and Thailand since the 2021 coup. These acts of war crimes committed against minority religious Christians and other religious minorities in Myanmar are in direct opposition to the [International Court of Justice's provisional measures](#) calling on the government of Myanmar to “take all measures within its power to prevent all acts that amount to or contribute to the crime of genocide” including extrajudicial killings and the destruction of homes and villages.

On October 7, 2021, the European Parliament [adopted](#) a resolution on the human rights situation in Myanmar, including the situation of religious and ethnic groups, which “condemns the persecution of Christians in the country; urges the Burmese military to stop killing and arresting Christians and to end the shelling and raiding of churches; stresses that the international community has expressed its deep concerns about the violent targeting of Christian communities in Myanmar”.

U Aung Kyaw Moe The Deputy, Union Minister, Ministry of Human Rights of the National Unity Government, indicated in a [congressional briefing](#) on September 18, 2023, that the Burmese military's strategies of destruction and tactics of war crimes used against the Rohingya minority are similarly currently being applied to Christians in the country and should be formally designated as war crimes and crimes against humanity;

On October 29, 2024, Ambassador Joan Plaisted, U.S. Senior Advisor for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, U.S. Mission to the UN, delivered a remarks [remarks](#) at the Third Committee combined interactive dialogue with UN officials concerned with human rights abuses in Myanmar. She said, “We have seen harrowing reports of detention and torture of political opponents, killings of unarmed civilians, sexual violence, aerial attacks on non-military targets such as schools, religious buildings, and hospitals, and other abuses and violations by the military”.

In September 2023, Radio Free Asia reported that nearly 200 Christian religious buildings have been [destroyed](#) since February 2021 through September 2023, including 85 in Chin State, 50 in Sagaing Region, 39 in Shan and Kayah state, and 19 in Magway Region. The Chin Association

of Maryland, Inc. (CAM) [estimated](#) that from February 2021 through December 2023, the Burmese military has destroyed or damaged 220 Christian churches and buildings. Since this time the destruction of Christian churches and buildings has continued. In July 2024 the Burmese military used aerial bombardments to [destroy](#) the Union Theological College, Matupi Baptist Church, and That Dun Memorial Baptist Church in Matupi Township.

The Five-Point Consensus produced by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in April 2021 [states](#) “that there shall be immediate cessation of violence in Myanmar and all parties shall exercise utmost restraint.” Similarly, in December 2022, UN Security Council Resolution 2669 [demands](#) “an immediate end to all forms of violence throughout the country” and urges “all parties to respect human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law.” Min Aung Hlaing, head of the Burmese military junta, has disregarded both statements and continues to commit atrocities against civilians as well as ethnic and religious minorities.

We urge you to determine that the human rights abuses and systematic violations of religious freedom or belief that target Christians in Burma committed by the Tatmadaw constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes. This would be a step towards accountability for the perpetrators as well as the prevention of similar crimes in the future. This determination would also demonstrate that the United States firmly stands with the people of Burma.

#### **Additional Sources:**

1. The United Nation's Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM) produced [Annual Reports on Myanmar on June 30, 2023 and July 12, 2022](#). In both reports they presented to the UN Human Rights Council direct statements on the commission of war crimes and crimes against humanity in Myanmar, and also included examples of those kinds of crimes.
2. U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom's [\(USCIRF\) Annual Report](#) re-designated Burma as a country of particular concern (CPC) for engaging in systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom. The report also indicates specific examples of the Burmese military targeting minority religious communities, including through the violent targeting of houses of worship.
3. In the case of *The Gambia v. Myanmar*, the [International Court of Justice \(ICJ\)](#) issued provisional measures to the government of Myanmar to stop and prevent acts of genocide against the Rohingya. The provisional measures are court ordered and legally binding, and the government of Myanmar is required to report on their progress regularly.
4. The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Thomas H. Andrews has produced several reports on the human rights violations committed by the military in Myanmar. In the report from October 12, 2023, [A/78/527](#) and the report from March 9, 2023, [A/HRC/52/66](#), Special Rapporteur Andrews specifically calls out the airstrikes targeting civilians and churches.

5. An in-depth [report](#) by Myanmar Witness published on January 22, 2024 analyzed 10 cases of damage to Christian churches in Chin State, of which 7 involved airstrikes. Myanmar Witness also examined data from Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED), finding 28 reports of damage to churches in Chin State from February 1, 2023 to September 8, 2023.
6. Testimony by Zo Tum Hmung, Executive Director of the Chin Association of Maryland (CAM), at a USCIRF hearing on February 8, 2023 [called](#) on the U.S. government and the Biden Administration to designate the atrocities against Christians as war crimes and crimes against humanity. Further documentation can be [found](#) in CAM's 2023 Annual Report on the Persecution of Christians in Burma.
7. The International Commission of Jurists [charges](#) that the Burmese military's "systematic violations of the right to freedom of religion or belief, particularly targeting members of Myanmar's sizable religious minorities... could amount to war crimes under international law" and [reported](#) damage to or destruction of at least 87 Christian places of worship since the 2021 military coup.

Sincerely,

1. American Baptist Churches USA
2. American Baptist Churches of the Central Region
3. American Baptist Churches of the Dakotas
4. American Baptist Churches of Greater Indianapolis
5. American Baptist Churches of Indiana and Kentucky
6. American Baptist Churches of Maine
7. American Baptist Churches of Michigan
8. American Baptist Churches of Nebraska
9. American Baptist Churches of New York State
10. American Baptist Churches of Ohio
11. American Baptist Churches of Puerto Rico
12. American Baptist Churches of the Dakotas
13. American Baptist Churches of the Rochester/Genesee Region
14. American Baptist Churches of Wisconsin
15. Baptist World Alliance
16. Baptist World Alliances/Cooperative Baptist Fellowship
17. Burma Advocacy Group
18. Burmese American Catholics for Peace and Justice
19. Burma Campaign UK
20. Burma Research Institute
21. Campaign for a New Myanmar
22. Central Miso Society of America
23. Central Seminary
24. Chin Association of Maryland
25. Chin Baptist Association of North America
26. Chin Baptist Churches USA

27. Chin Evangelical Baptist Church
28. Chin Evangelical Churches USA
29. D.C. Baptist Convention
30. First Baptist Church of Burlington, Vermont
31. First Baptist Church of Chadron
32. First Baptist Church of Lincoln, Nebraska
33. Indiana Chin Baptist Church, Indianapolis, Indiana
34. Insight Myanmar
35. International Campaign for the Rohingya
36. International Institute of Los Angeles
37. International Ministries, American Baptist Churches USA
38. Jubilee Campaign
39. Kachin American Baptist Association
40. Kachin Baptist Churches USA
41. Lake Avenue Baptist Church
42. Matu Christian Churches, USA
43. Ministers Council, Chin Baptist Churches USA
44. Minnesota Lisu Church of Jesus
45. Mission Northwest
46. North America Mizo Christian Fellowship
47. No Business with Genocide
48. US Advocacy Coalition for Myanmar
49. US Campaign for Burma
50. U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants
51. Zomi Baptist Churches of America