



## **CHIN ASSOCIATION OF MARYLAND, INC.**

Tel. 443-936-8616 • [info@chinmd.org](mailto:info@chinmd.org) • [www.chinmd.org](http://www.chinmd.org)

**September 13, 2024**

President Joseph R. Biden  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, D.C. 20500

**Subject: The Burmese military's persecution of the Christian minority**

**Dear President Biden,**

We, the undersigned organizations and individuals, are writing to urge the administration to determine that the Burmese military's atrocities against Burma's Christian minority constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity. Such a determination would be an important step towards accountability for the Burmese military, also known as the Tatmadaw, as well as protection for the Christian minority. The persecution of Christian religious minority groups in Burma has persisted since 1962 and escalated dramatically in the aftermath of the February 1, 2021 military coup. The Tatmadaw increasingly launches attacks on Christian communities across the country, particularly in the areas populated by ethnic minorities in Chin State, Kayah State, and Kachin State.

In one of its most egregious acts, the Tatmadaw carried out the destruction of the town of Thantlang, Chin State, over several months in 2021 and 2022, [displacing](#) the town's entire population of 10,000. 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.

Throughout 2023, the Burmese military has carried out regular airstrikes on Christian villages in the countryside. On August 12, 2023, Burmese military jets [bombed](#) Ramthlo Village and Sunthla Village in Chin State, destroying the Ramthlo Baptist Church. Rashad Hussain, U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, [called](#) the attack "part of a long pattern of the military's destruction of sacred places of worship of all faiths in Burma since the February 2021 coup." [UN Special Rapporteur](#) on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Thomas H. Andrews reported to the UN Secretary General that the military "...appears to be intentionally targeting civilian populations, by repeatedly launching air attacks on villages, internally displaced persons camps, schools, hospitals, clinics, churches and monasteries."

On July 12, 2022, the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM) [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. In Sagaing Region, the military has destroyed the [historic](#) 120-year-old Chaung Yoe Church and 129-year-old Church of the Assumption. In Kayah State, the military [fired](#) artillery at the complex of Christ the King Cathedral and occupied it the next day.

As of January 15, 2024, UNHCR [estimates](#) that 2.287 million people have been displaced within Burma, with 60,500 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.

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.” [According](#) to the State Department’s 2022 International Religious Freedom Report, the junta “detained a total of 17 Christian leaders and clerics, including five during the year.” According to the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), 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.” Dr. Samson was [released](#) on July 23, 2024 after serving more than a year in prison. While this news is welcomed, the Burmese military 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 Sngnha Nayaka Committee, the highest Buddhist authority in Myanmar.

In 2023, the ICJ [reported](#) that 87 Christian religious buildings were destroyed or damaged by the Tatmadaw between the period of February 2021 and April 2023. According to Radio Free Asia, nearly 200 Christian religious buildings have been [destroyed](#) since February 2021 up 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 [states](#) “that there shall be immediate cessation of violence in Myanmar and all parties shall exercise utmost restraint.” Similarly, 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 the Biden Administration to recognize the ongoing persecution of Christian minorities by the Burmese military with a determination that they constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity. This would constitute a step towards accountability for the perpetrators as well as the prevention of similar crimes in the future.

Signed

1. Rev. Dr. Roy Medley  
Executive Director, Burma Advocacy Group
1. Rev. Dr. Gina Jacobs-Strain  
General Secretary, American Baptist Churches USA
2. Rev. Dr. Elijah M. Brown  
General Secretary & CEO, Baptist World Alliance
3. Rev. Lakang Dau Qae  
General Secretary, Kachin Baptist Churches USA
4. Rev. Dr. Ceu Lian Thang  
General Secretary, Chin Baptist Churches USA
5. Rev. Saw Ler Htoo  
General Secretary, Karen Baptist Churches USA
6. Rev. Dr. Biak Lian Thang  
General Secretary, Chin Baptist Association of North America
7. Rev. Dr. David Suanza Lian  
President, Zomi Christian Fellowship of USA
8. Rev. Dr. Sandra Hasenauer  
Executive Minister, American Baptist Churches of the Rochester/Genesee Region
9. Rev. Dr. Trisha Miller Manarin  
Executive Director/Minister, District of Columbia Baptist Convention
10. Rev. Dr. James Kelsey  
Executive Minister, American Baptist Churches of New York State
11. Rev. Dr. Steve Van Ostran  
Executive Minister, American Baptist Churches of Rocky Mountain
12. Rev. Dr. Gregg Hemmen  
Executive Minister, American Baptist Churches of the Central Region
13. Rev. Brian D. Johnson  
Regional Executive Minister, American Baptist Churches of Michigan
14. Rev. Dr. Greg Mamula  
Executive Minister, American Baptist Churches of Nebraska and Region Missionary
15. Simon Billenness  
Campaign for a New Myanmar, International Campaign for the Rohingya, and No Business With Genocide
16. Dr. Mathews George Chunakara  
General Secretary Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) Chiang Mai, Thailand
17. Rev. Dr. Jooseop Keum  
General Secretary Council for World Mission (CWM) Singapore

18. Rev. Dr. Setri Nyomi  
Interim General Secretary World Communion of Reformed Churches Geneva,  
Switzerland
19. Dr. Hanns Lessing  
Executive Secretary for Communion and Theology World Communion of Reformed  
Churches Geneva, Switzerland
20. Muna Nassar  
Executive Secretary for Mission and Advocacy World Communion of Reformed Churches  
Geneva, Switzerland
21. Rev. Dr. Philip Peacock  
Executive Secretary for Justice and Witness World Communion of Reformed Churches  
Geneva, Switzerland
22. Scott Stearman, PhD  
Representative at the United Nations, Baptist World Alliance
23. Rev. Dr. Stephen Hre Kio  
Senior Pastor, Indiana Chin Baptist Church
24. David Thang Moe, Ph.D.  
Postdoctoral Associate and Lecturer. Council on Southeast Asia Studies & Department of  
Religious Studies, Yale University
25. Steven T. Taknan  
General Secretary  
Matu Christian Churches, USA
26. Greh Moo  
General Secretary  
Karen Organization of America
27. Rev. Tu Lamung  
General Secretary  
Kachin American Baptist Association (KABA)
28. Pastor Mang Hau  
General Secretary of Zo Christian Association, USA
29. Rev. Dr. May May Latt  
Pastor  
Milwaukee Myanmar Christian Church
30. Rev. Dr. Patti Duckworth  
Acting Interim Executive Minister, Mission Northwest
31. Rev. Patty King Bilyeu  
Executive Minister  
American Baptist Churches of the Great Rivers Region
32. Rev. Dr. Michael P. Friday  
Executive Minister  
American Baptist Churches of Greater Indianapolis
33. Rev. Steve Bills  
Executive Minister  
American Baptist Churches of the Central Pacific Coast
34. Rev. Patty King Bilyeu  
Executive Minister  
American Baptist Churches of the Great Rivers Region
35. Rev. Dr. Cheryl F Dudley

- Regional Minister  
American Baptist Churches Metropolitan New York
36. Rev. Mindi Welton-Mitchell  
Regional Executive Minister  
American Baptist Churches of Wisconsin
37. Rev. Dr. Alfred Fletcher  
Executive Minister  
American Baptist Churches of Maine
38. Zo Tum Hmung, Executive Director and Rev. Tim Siemens, Board Chairman  
Chin Association of Maryland, Inc.

**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. The Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO) published a [report](#) in March 2023 outlining the legal argument that the SAC is carrying out war crimes and crimes against humanity. In the report they outline unlawful tactics deployed by the Burmese military, including the forcible displacement of over 20% of Chin State's civilians; the murder and unlawful executions of hundreds of Chin civilians; the targeting, destruction, and

occupation of Christian and other religious structures; torture; taking hostages and using civilians as human shields; and targeting civilians from the ground and through airstrikes.

7. 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.
8. 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.

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