Burma: Severe Violations of Religious Freedom Against Christians

Burma Research Institute

January 2026

Advancing Freedom of Religion or Belief and Human Rights in Burma Through Research and Advocacy

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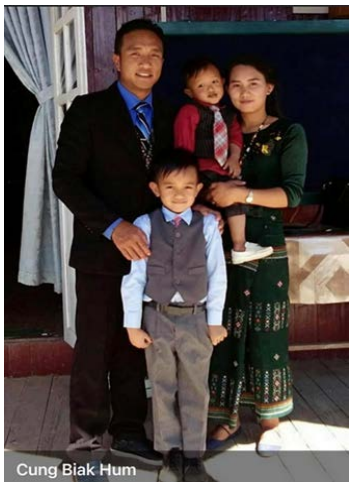
Cover photo:

On June 15, 2023, the Burmese military burned down St. Matthew's Church in Karenni (Kayah) State. (Photo: BRI/CAM source, anonymous for security reasons)

Pastor Cung Biak Hum and his wife (Photo: BRI/CAM source, anonymous for security reasons)



Pastor Cung Biak Hum and Family (Photo: BRI/CAM source, anonymous for security reasons)

The Burmese military shot and killed Pastor Cung Biak Hum of Thantlang Centenary Baptist Church in Thantlang Township on September 18, 2021. Witnesses say that his wedding ring and mobile phone were stolen by Burmese Army soldiers after killing him. At the time of the shooting, the pastor was on his way to organize efforts to put out fires started by the Burmese military.[1] The thirty-year-old pastor is survived by his wife and two children.

Reverend Thian Lian Sang, Chin pastor, preaching at Falam Baptist Church (Photo: BRI/CAM source, anonymous for security reasons)

Reverend Thian Lian Sang, who is a Chin pastor of Falam Baptist Church was arrested by the Burmese military for allegedly aiding resistance forces. He is in Obo Prison in Mandalay Region is now serving a twenty-three-year prison sentence. [2]

[1] Chin Association of Maryland (CAM). "Seventeen Months After the Military Coup in Myanmar/Burma: Escalating Persecution of Chin Christians in Chin State and Sagaing Region." June 2022. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/CRFReport-June-2022-June.22.22-compressed.pdf

[2] CAM. "Two Years After the 2021 Military Coup: The Worsening Situation of Christians Across Burma." January 2023. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/19484-2-Years-After-the-Coup-FIN.pdf

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Maps, Charts, Tables, Case Studies

I. ABOUT THE BURMA RESEARCH INSTITUTE

The Burma Research Institute (BRI), formerly known as the Chin Association of Maryland (CAM), is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization based in Ellicott City, Maryland, in the United States. It conducts research and advocacy primarily focused on freedom of religion or belief in Burma. BRI advocates for human rights and for protection and assistance for refugees and internally displaced persons from Burma. BRI also empowers the local Chin community in Maryland and across the United States to successfully integrate into American society.

Since the February 2021 military coup in Burma, BRI/CAM has conducted research and published nine reports and numerous statements, and press releases. It has presented its findings and recommendations to Congress and the Administration, and to diaspora communities from Burma, UNHCR, and NGOs. BRI has held five Congressional briefings on Capitol Hill.

BRI has participated as a partner in the International Religious Freedom Summit (IRF Summit) since its inception in 2021, raising the issue of religious persecution in Burma. BRI attends and has raised the same issue at the International Religious Freedom Roundtable (IRF Roundtable) on Capitol Hill. BRI has also been active in Refugee Council USA and the Burma Advocacy Group.

BRI's President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) is Zo Tum Hmung, a native of Chin State, Burma. He has a master's in public administration focusing on U.S. foreign policy and negotiation from Harvard University's Kennedy School. A long-time advocate for democracy and human rights in Burma, he advocates for freedom of religion or belief, including by testifying before the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom.

II. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

BRI is grateful to BRI staff and consultants who published BRI/CAM updates, statements and reports about religious persecution committed by the Burmese military against Christians in Burma since the February 2021 coup. These publications were made possible because contacts on the ground in Burma and neighboring countries, especially India and Thailand, who worked closely with BRI to monitor, collect, and report information. The last five years of BRI's work has been brought together in this report.

BRI thanks Billy Ford, BRI Consultant, for writing this report, in close collaboration with BRI President and CEO Zo Tum Hmung. Mr. Ford has worked on peacebuilding and human rights in Burma for 14 years and holds a master's in public policy from the University of California, Berkely. He has worked for the Asia Foundation, Freedom House. and the U.S. Institute of Peace, as well as for several organizations from Burma.

BRI also thanks Dr. Jenny Siegel, Manager of Research, Virginia Farris, Policy Advisor, Zolian Sang Zoong Lwe, PhD Candidate, Kansas State University, Research and Communication Advisor, Esther Far Chin Par, PhD Student, University of Arkansas, Coordinator of Research and Advocacy, and John Indergaard, former Project and Research Coordinator. BRI also thanks Matthew Wilch, J.D., BRI Advisor, who has helped edit this and other BRI/CAM reports. BRI is deeply grateful to contacts inside Burma who courageously provided detailed, credible information, including photos, for this report. Without their help, this report would not have been possible.

BRI has made a good faith effort to describe and analyze the Burmese military's violations of religious freedom in Burma, particularly their atrocities against Christians. However, if we inadvertently make any errors in this report, they are our own.

III. REPORT METHODOLOGY

This report focuses on the Burmese military's systematic, ongoing, and egregious attacks against Christians, ethnic and religious minorities in Burma, since the February 1, 2021, Burmese military coup. It is a compilation of almost five years of research taken from publications by BRI concerning severe violations of religious freedom, targeting Christians. For these publications, BRI relied primarily on sources on the ground from Burma who provided and/or verified the information. The report is supplemented by external reports by UN agencies, other reputable international organizations in the region, reputable U.S.-based nongovernmental organizations, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), the U.S. State Department, and reputable media sources.

This report draws primarily from the following BRI/CAM publications on the BRI website, which focus on severe violation of religious freedom of Christians:

1. "After the 2021 Military Coup in Myanmar/Burma: Challenges for IDPs and Refugees", October 2021 (see pp 21-24)
2. "17 Months After the Military Coup: Escalating Persecution of Chin Christians in Chin State and Sagaing Region", June 2022 (see pp 8-18)
3. "Two Years after the 2021 Military Coup in Burma: The Worsening Situation of Christians Across Burma", January 2023 (see pp 12-21)
4. "Persecution of Christians in Burma", January 2024 (see pp 8-20)
5. BRI/CAM Statements, Monthly Reports, Presentations.
6. BRI/CAM Congressional Briefings.
7. Other briefings at Open Society Foundation, U.S. Institute of Peace, International Freedom Summit, International Religious Freedom Roundtable, and others.[3]

Over these nearly five years, BRI has maintained extensive contacts in Chin State, Burma, and in Mizoram State, India. They have regularly collected and shared reliable information about religious persecution and its humanitarian consequences from internally displaced persons and refugee community leaders on the ground. BRI has contacts, particularly in the Christian community, in Chin State, Kachin State, Karen State, and Karenni State, and in Sagaing Region, and Mandalay Region. While BRI has made the information, they shared public, the identities of community leaders providing information and photographic evidence are kept confidential for security reasons concerning their safety in Burma and Mizoram State, India.

IV. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report catalogues available evidence of religious persecution against Christians in Burma from 2021 to 2025. It relies primarily on incidents reported since the 2021 coup in Burma in reports, statements, updates, and briefings by the Burma Research Institute (BRI), formerly known as the Chin Association of Maryland (CAM). It is supplemented by reporting from other reputable sources. Since Burma's 2021 coup, the Burmese military, also known as the Tatmadaw, has escalated its persecution of Christian communities, particularly in Chin, Kachin, Karenni, and Karen States. Its on-going assault is marked by regular airstrikes, artillery and arson attacks, occupation and destruction of church buildings, and targeted violence against clergy and other Christians.

Due to the widespread violence and instability, it is difficult to gather data, but at least four sources have compiled the number of Christians who have been killed or imprisoned since the 2021 military coup in Burma. According to Open Doors, 149 Christians were killed and 218 imprisoned for faith-related reasons.[4] The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) concludes that the

[3] See Burma Research Institute. https://burmari.org

[4] Open Doors. Full Country Dossier—Myanmar 2023, p 48. https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/persecution/countries/myanmar/ ; and Full Country Dossier--Myanmar 2025, p 29. https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-archive/

Tatmadaw has killed 11 Christian pastors and arrested 21 Christian pastors of whom 13 are still detained.[5] Two of the imprisoned pastors are on the USCIRF Victim's List. (See Table 6 below).[6] Combining statistics provided to BRI from the Ministry of Human Rights of the National Unity Government of Myanmar (MOHR/NUG) and statistics cited by USCIRF, BRI estimates that 343 Christian churches and church-related buildings have been attacked by junta force from 2021 through 2025. (See Table 7). As churches serve as shelters, worship spaces, schools, and clinics, the cost to communities of these attacks is immense. The pattern is not incidental damage: it is sustained, geographically widespread, and directed at protected religious sites that are central to community life.

The Burmese military regime's flagrant violation of religious freedom or belief goes beyond Christians. It includes attacks, exclusion and persecution of all religious minorities. This includes widespread and systematic persecution of Muslims, particularly Rohingya Muslims, who face an on-going genocide at the hands of the Burmese military. The Burmese military also regularly attacks Buddhists, including monks and nuns, who oppose the regime. While this report focuses on Christians, BRI is deeply concerned about all victims of religious persecution in Burma.

As detailed in this report, the humanitarian consequences of the military regime's persecution are severe. While targeting religious sites, these attacks regularly damage or destroy other civilian targets such as schools, hospitals, businesses, and homes and injures or kills civilians, including children. Displacement has reached historic levels. An estimated 7% of the population in Burma is internally displaced, based on recent UNHCR figures of 3.64 million IDPs and a total estimated Burma population of approximately 51 million people, as reported in 2014 and 2024.[7] States and regions where the Tatmadaw has persecuted and severely violated religious freedom of Christians often have an even higher percentage of internal displacement than at the national level. For example, using recent IDP figures from UNHCR and available state population figures published in 2014, the percentage of the Chin State population that is internally displaced is over 20%, and in Karenni (Kayah) State the percentage is over 48%.[8] (See additional examples of internal displacement within states and regions below in in section "IX. Humanitarian Consequence of Persecution and Severe Religious Freedom Violations.") Besides large-scale internal displacement in Burma, 1.59 million people from Burma are forcibly displaced, fleeing as refugees to neighboring countries.[9]

[5]Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) directly provided BRI confirmation of these statistics regarding pastors in Burma, as of December 31, 2025.

[6] USCIRF. "Frank R Wolf Victim's List." https://www.uscirf.gov/victim-search?search=&f%5B0%5D=ethnicity%3AChin

[7] The Global New Light of Myanmar. "Welcome preliminary population statistics for the nation." January 9, 2025. https://www.gnlm.com.mm/welcome-preliminary-population-statistics-for-the-nation/ (estimates total population of Burma as 51,316,756); and Myanmar Ministry of Immigration and Population. "Census Atlas Myanmar: The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census." Page 10. https://myanmar.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/MyanmarCensusAtlas_lowres.pdf (estimates total population of Burma as 51,486,253). And UNHCR. Map: Number Displaced [inside Burma] since the February 2021 coup who remain displaced. December 29, 2025. https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/120459 (estimates 3.64 million total IDPs inside Burma)

[8] Myanmar Ministry of Immigration and Population. "Census Atlas Myanmar: The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census." p 10. https://myanmar.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/MyanmarCensusAtlas_lowres.pdf (estimates 478,800 as total population of Chin State and 287,627 as total population of Karenni (Kayah) State); and UNHCR. Map: Number Displaced [inside Burma] since the February 2021 coup who remain displaced. December 29, 2025. https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/120459 (estimates 104,800 IDPs inside Chin State and 139,900 inside Karenni (Kayah) State)

[9]UNHCR. "Operational Data Portal: Myanmar Situation." November 30, 2025. https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/myanmar

Humanitarian networks on the India and Thailand borders with Burma report continuous inflows of populations who have been displaced by the junta regime's air attacks and scorched-earth tactics. Churches, which are often the only providers of education, clinics, shelter, and aid distribution in conflict zones for Christians and non-Christians alike, have been systematically degraded, compounding the crisis for vulnerable populations and undermining community resilience. These dynamics also threaten regional stability, strain the resources of neighboring refugee host countries, and greatly challenge the governmental and nongovernmental humanitarian aid systems as global assistance budgets rapidly shrink.

This report highlights violence by the Burmese military junta that BRI believes meets legal thresholds under international humanitarian law for crimes against humanity and war crimes. Intentionally directing attacks against civilians and buildings dedicated to religion that are not military targets constitutes a war crime in non-international armed conflict. The cumulative record of repeated strikes on churches across multiple states, killings, detention and intimidation of clergy, and targeted attacks on homes and IDP shelters supports findings of war crimes and crimes against humanity when assessed as part of a widespread or systematic attack on civilian populations. The Burmese military's crimes since the coup are part of a decades-long campaign of violence.

When then Secretary of State Antony Blinken issued his determination that the Burmese military had committed genocide of the Rohingya, he also "acknowledged decades of well-documented killings, rape, and other atrocities against members of other minority ethnic and religious groups [in Burma]."[10]

This violence takes place in a broader environment of sustained violence and oppression, which since the military coup has resulted in the death of more than 7,640 civilians or pro-democracy activists, including at least 1,986 women and 982 children, and the arrest of more than 30,216 people and continued detention of 22,682. Nearly 30% of the deaths occurred in detention.[11]

As a sign of ongoing bi-partisan support from U.S. Administrations and Congress, U.S. policy since the coup has combined sanctions, export controls, humanitarian assistance, refugee protection, resettlement, and democracy support, anchored by Burma's ongoing designation as a "Country of Particular Concern" (CPC) under the *International Religious Freedom Act of 1998*. Congressional action, including the BURMA Act, and executive measures have imposed costs on junta regime and its enablers, but its revenue streams and impunity persist, fueling continued attacks on protected sites and civilian communities.

As the international community withdraws urgently needed aid, the United States must play a decisive role in protecting civilians, sustaining cross-border lifelines, protecting refugees and supporting refugee host countries, maintaining TPS and other legal protections for people from Burma in the United States and advancing accountability of the Burmese military. The nationwide resistance movement in Burma poses an historic opportunity to expel the primary agent of instability in Burma, the Burmese military, and to establish a more stable political system that would enable a free Burma to be a full economic and political partner of the United States.

[10] Burma Research Institute. Letter to Secretary of State, Marco Rubio. March 7, 2025. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Letter-to-Secretary-Marco-Rubio-on-Burma.pdf

[11] Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP). "Daily Briefing in Relation to the Military Coup." Data as of December 25, 2025. https://aappb.org/?p=35759

Members of Congress continue to show bipartisan support for the people of Burma, as seen in their statement at a November 19, 2025, Congressional hearing on Burma: "America must continue to stand with all the people of Burma as they pursue dignity, freedom, and a democratic future."[12]

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Given this opportunity and the urgent need among Christian communities in Burma, we urge the U.S. Administration and Congress to pursue the following actions:

To the Trump Administration

1. ***Make a formal determination that crimes against humanity and war crimes have been committed against Christians.*** The U.S. Government should publicly determine that the Burmese military's atrocities against Christian populations constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes.[13] This would advance the State Department's 2022 Rohingya genocide determination and strengthen accountability measures aimed at ending impunity for the Burmese military.[14]

2. ***Redesignate Burma as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) and enforce accountability, including by imposing vist restrictions and sanctions against the regime and other responsible for the atrocities.*** The U.S. government should adopt a targeted accountability policy for Burma similar to the "Combating Egregious Anti-Christian Violence" initiative used in Nigeria.[15] Specifically, the Department of State should redesignate Burma as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) and impose visa restrictions and other tailored sanctions on individuals and entities in Burma responsible for, complicit in, or otherwise enabling genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and other egregious human-rights violations following the 2021 coup. This policy should build on existing authorities, such as the Global Magnitsky framework, to maximize pressure on perpetrators and protect vulnerable populations.

3. ***Press for the release of detained Christian pastors and other clergy, and for political prisoners, including State Counselor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, President U Win Myint, and others.*** Engage in international advocacy to push for the release of political prisoners and ensure that any sanctions relief is tied to such action.

4. ***Condemn and reject the ongoing sham elections of the Burmese military junta and its outcome which will only prolong the military rule.*** Voting has been limited to areas the military can control, with large parts of the country effectively excluded because of ongoing conflict and insecurity, while the political environment is tightly repressed. Legitimate political representatives are jailed, the National League for Democracy has been dissolved, independent media is silenced, and restrictive laws create a climate where criticizing the process is punishable by lengthy prison terms.

[12] Burma Research Institute. "No Exit Strategy: Burma's Endless Crisis and America's Limited Options." Statement by Ami Bera (D-CA), Young Kim (R-CA), Sydney Kamlager-Dove (D-CA), and Bill Huizenga (R-MI). November 19, 2025. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/PRESS-RELEASE-BRI-Welcomes-the-Joint-Statement-on-Burma-Nov-21-2025.pdf

[13] Refer to letter to Secretary of State Marco Rubio on March 7, 2025. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Letter-to-Secretary-Marco-Rubio-on-Burma.pdf

[14] See this recommendation reflected in December 5, 2025, letter from Congress to US Secretary of State, Marco Rubio: https://www.vanhollen.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/letter_to_state_on_burma_human_rights.pdf

[15] U.S. Department of State. "Combating Egregious Anti-Christian Violence in Nigeria and Globally." December 3, 2025. https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2025/12/combating-egregious-anti-christian-violence-in-nigeria-and-globally; and Secretary of State Marco Rubio. X Post. December 3, 2025. https://x.com/SecRubio/status/1996241392088002737 . Also see Efrat Lachter, Sophia Compton. Fox News. "Trump designates Nigeria as "country of particular concern over widespread Christian persecution, killings," October 31, 2025. https://www.foxnews.com/world/trump-designates-nigeria-country-particular-concern-over-widespread-christian-persecution-killings

5. ***Strengthen Burma's self-reliance by allowing pro-democracy groups and ethnic resistance organizations (ERO) access, for non-lethal assistance, to the $1 billion in Burma funds being held at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York.*** If the resistance movement in Burma could gain access, for non-lethal purposes, to these funds belonging to Burma that have been frozen in the New York Federal Reserve since the coup, or the interests on those funds, it could overcome its dependence on international donors, including the United States.[16] The funds could enable resistance groups to provide humanitarian assistance, health and education assistance, and other forms of non-lethal assistance needed to protect civilians against Burmese military attacks. The funds would help the resistance groups in their efforts to dismantle the international online scams against the American people. The Burmese military is involved in these scam operations. The funds could also be used to fight against the drug trade in Burma, which is a leading source of opium and methamphetamines in the world.[17]

6. ***Sustain strong U.S. religious freedom policy.*** Maintain Burma designation as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) for its egregious violations of religious freedom and implement other USCIRF recommendations, including targeted sanctions tied to severe violations and coordinated multilateral pressure.[18]

7. ***Reinstate Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for people from Burma and remove the travel ban placed on people from Burma.*** TPS enables Christians and others from Burma to remain safely in the United States until dangerous conditions improve in Burma. The travel ban blocks legal pathways for reunification of refugee families.[19]

8. ***Increase resettlement of Christians and others from Burma fleeing religious and political persecution by the military junta.*** Many U.S. Christians are deeply concerned about and committed to welcoming persecuted Christians fleeing Burma.

9. ***Amplify U.S. messaging and diplomacy against Burmese military atrocities against Christians.*** Encourage partner governments and multilateral bodies, such as the UN and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), to do the same and to fund monitoring of Burmese military atrocities.

10. ***Implement the Burma Act of 2022.*** Fund justice initiatives that help hold the junta regime accountable for its crimes; non-lethal assistance to pro-democracy resistance groups to enable civilian protection and stable governance in resistance-held areas; and humanitarian assistance to embattled communities.

[16] Sean Turnell. "The Chance to Save Myanmar." September 30, 2025. https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/chance-save-myanmar

[17] UN. "Myanmar remains the world's leading source of opium and heroin." December 12, 2024. https://www.unodc.org/roseap/en/2024/12/myanmar-opium-survey-report-launch/story.html

[18] USCIRF. "USCIRF Releases Report on Religious Freedom in Burma." October 31, 2024. https://www.uscirf.gov/news-room/releases-statements/uscirf-releases-report-religious-freedom-burma

[19] Burma Research Institute. "Analysis of the DHS's Termination of TPS for Burma." December 11, 2025. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Dec11-2025-Analysis-of-the-DHSs-Termination-of-TPS-for-Burma.pdf

To Congress

1. ***Hold a Congressional Hearing on Religious Freedom in Burma.***

2. ***Urge the Administration to designate Burma as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) and enforce accountability of the junta and other perpetrators of atrocities against Christians.*** Urge a targeted accountability policy for Burma similar to the initiative used in Nigeria, as urged in a letter to the Administration led by Senator Ted Budd (R-NC) and also signed by Pete Ricketts (R-NE), Ted Cruz (R-TX), Josh Hawley (R-MO), and James Lankford (R-OK).[20] Also urge that similar actions be taken after CPC designation of Burma, as outlined in H.R. 860, introduced by Representative Chris Smith (R-NJ) and co-sponsored by Representatives Bill Huizenga (R-MI), Gus Bilirakis (R-FL), and Maria Elvira Salazar (R-FL), related to Nigeria's CPC designation.[21] The proposed legislation addresses not only accountability for religious freedom actions but also strategies for long-term peace and stability.

3. ***Appropriate funds to support the pro-democracy movements, ethnic resistance organizations, and others in Burma, pursuant to the Burma Act of 2022.*** Fund justice initiatives that help hold the junta regime accountable for its crimes; non-lethal assistance to pro-democracy resistance groups to enable civilian protection and stable governance in resistance-held areas; and humanitarian assistance to embattled communities.

4. ***Urge the Trump Administration to unfreeze $1 billion of Burma funds being held at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York and make it available for humanitarian and non-lethal assistance to the pro-democracy groups, ethnic resistance organizations, and others.***

5. ***Continue calling on the Administration to condemn and reject the sham elections and their results and to appoint a special representative and policy coordinator for Burma.***[22]

To USCIRF

1. ***Recommend that the Trump Administration determine that atrocities against Christians committed by the Burmese military constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes.***

2. ***Continue urging the Trump Administration to designate Burma as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC).*** Since 1999, the U.S. State Department has designated Burma as a CPC for its systematic, ongoing, and egregious religious freedom violations. It was last designated CPC in 2023.

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[20] Senator Ted Bud (R-NC), Pete Ricketts (R-NE), Ted Cruz (R-TX), Josh Hawley (R-MO), and James Lankford (R-OK). Letter to Secretary of State Marco Rubio Urging CPC for Nigeria. September 12, 2025. https://www.budd.senate.gov/2025/09/12/senator-budd-leads-colleagues-condemning-violence-against-christians-in-nigeria-calling-for-redesignation-of-cpc-status/

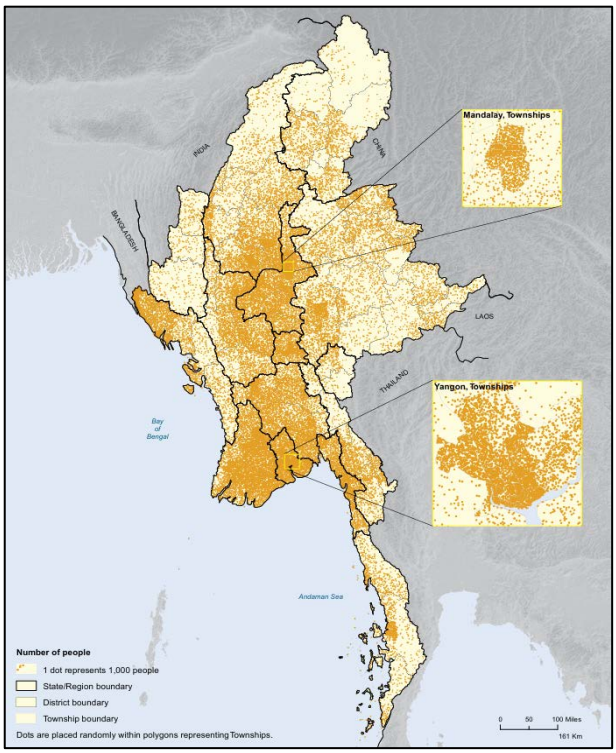
[21] Representative Chris Smith (R-NJ). Press Release: "Legislation Commends President Trump for Nigeria CPC Designation and paves the way for religious freedom in Nigeria." November 5, 2025. https://chrissmith.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=415076

[22] Letter to President Trump Representatives Ami Bera, M.D. (D-CA) and Young Kim (R-CA), Ranking Member and Chair of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on East Asia and Pacific, and Representatives Sydney Kamlager-Dove (D-CA) and Bill Huizenga (R-MI), Ranking Member and Chair of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on South and Central Asia. November 20, 2025. https://bera.house.gov/news/press-releases/reps-bera-kim-kamlager-dove-and-huizenga-issue-joint-statement-on-crisis-in-burma (urging the Administration "to publicly condemn the junta's upcoming sham elections in Burma and to appoint a special representative and policy coordinator for Burma)

VI. BACKGROUND ON DEMOGRAPHICS AND POLITICAL HISTORY

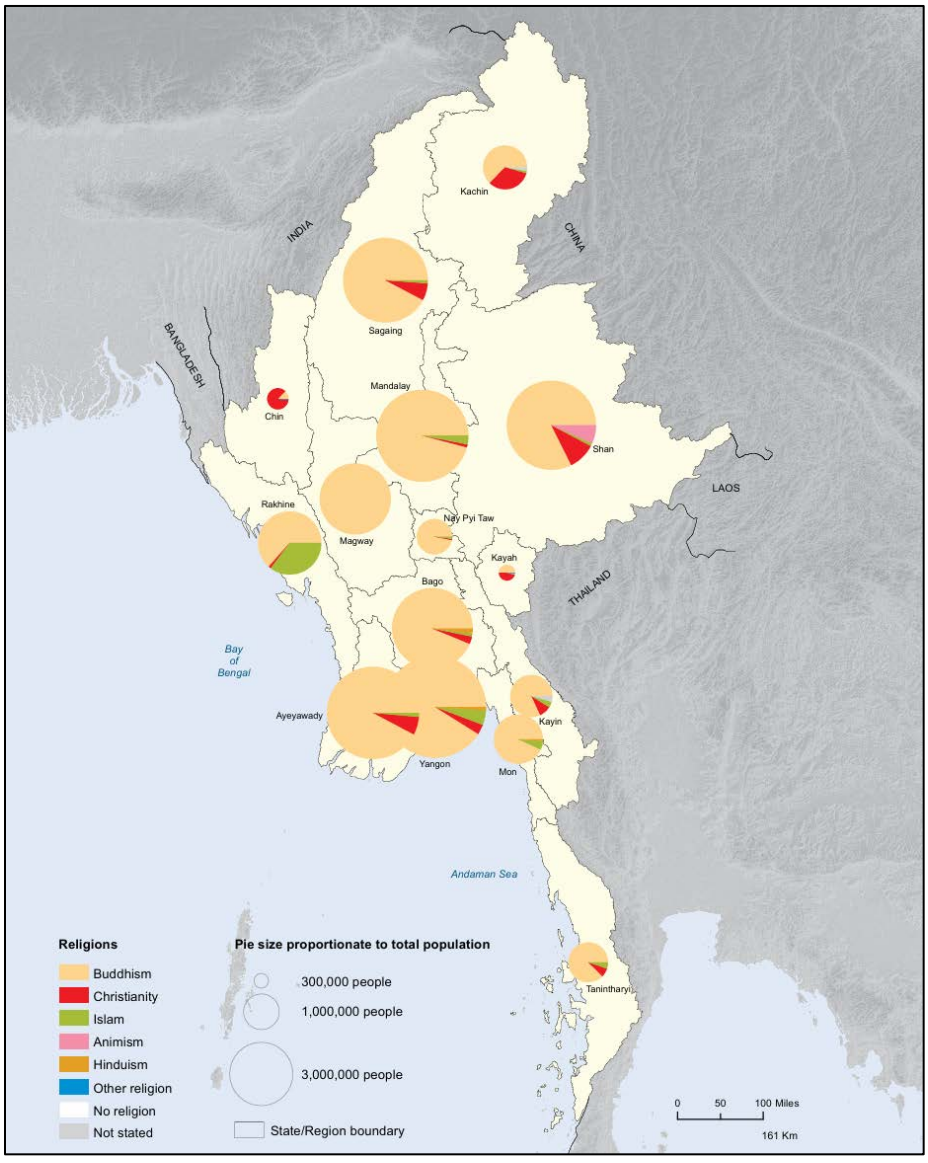
Burma, also known as Myanmar, is the largest country in mainland Southeast Asia with territory covering about 676,577 square kilometers – slightly smaller than the U.S. state of Texas. It is bordered by India, China, Thailand, Bangladesh and Laos. The population is 51,486,253 people, according to a 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census;[23] has decreased to 51,316,756, according to the "preliminary population statistics for the nation" published by the current regime.[24]

Map 1: States, Regions and Districts[25]



Map 2: Population Distribution, 2014[26]

[23] Myanmar Ministry of Immigration and Population. "Census Atlas Myanmar: The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census." Page 10, 13. https://myanmar.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/MyanmarCensusAtlas_lowres.pdf
[24] The Global New Light of Myanmar. "Welcome preliminary population statistics for the nation." January 9, 2025. https://www.gnlm.com.mm/welcome-preliminary-population-statistics-for-the-nation/ (estimates total population of Burma as 51,316,756);\
[25] Myanmar Ministry of Immigration and Population. "Census Atlas Myanmar: The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census." https://myanmar.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/MyanmarCensusAtlas_lowres.pdf
[26] Myanmar Ministry of Immigration and Population. "Census Atlas Myanmar: The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census." https://myanmar.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/MyanmarCensusAtlas_lowres.pdf



Map 3: Religion by State and Region, 2014[27]

According to the 2014 national census, which was the first household census in 30 years, Christians make up roughly 6 percent of the population of Burma, constituting the largest minority religious group. Most of the population of Burma, 89.8 percent, identify as Buddhist.[28] Christians are concentrated in Chin, Kachin, Karenni, and Karen States, with Chin State having the largest proportion of Christians at 85 per cent.[29]

[27] Myanmar Ministry of Immigration and Population. "Census Atlas Myanmar: The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census." https://myanmar.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/MyanmarCensusAtlas_lowres.pdf
[28] Myanmar Ministry of Immigration and Population. "The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census. The Union Report: Religion. Census Report Volume 2-3." July 2026. https://myanmar.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/UNION_2C_Religion_EN.pdf
[29] Myanmar Ministry of Immigration and Population. "The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census. The Union Report: Religion. Census Report Volume 2-3." July 2026. https://myanmar.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/UNION_2C_Religion_EN.pdf

As illustrated below, these states make up almost a quarter of the country's land mass, and they are rich in natural resources. Kachin State, for example, is the only source of imperial jade in the world and the world's largest source of heavy rare earth minerals.[30]

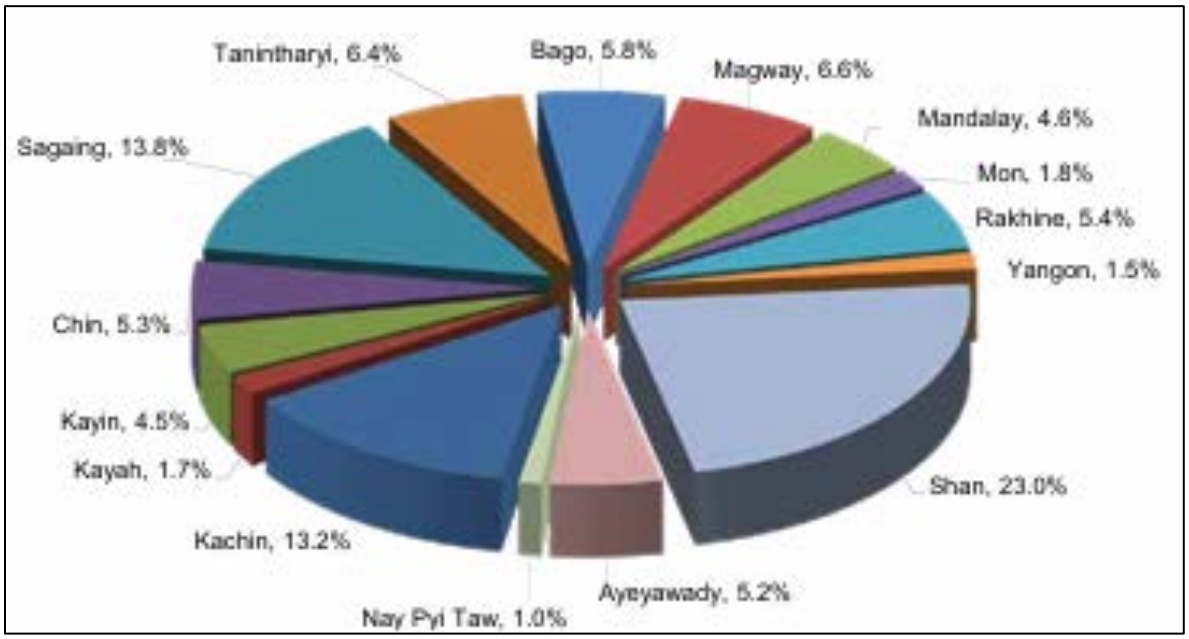


Chart 1: Proportion of Land Area by State/Region, 2014[31]

Burma's modern history has been shaped by colonial fragmentation, contested independence, and prolonged military rule. The British annexed the territory in stages during the nineteenth century and governed Chinland, the Kachin Hills, the Shan States, and Burma Proper under separate colonial regimes, regulations and acts, entrenching political divisions that later complicated independence.[32] On February 12, 1947, Chin, Kachin, and Shan leaders signed the *Panglong Agreement* with General Aung San, committing to form a Union based on equality, autonomy, and self-determination for ethnic nationalities. Burma gained independence in 1948 and experienced brief parliamentary rule under Prime Minister U Nu. The failure to implement the *Panglong Agreement's* federal promises soon contributed to civil war as ethnic minority groups demanded the autonomy they had been promised.

[30] Reuters. "Armed group says it takes control of Myanmar rare earth mining hub." October 23, 2024. https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/armed-group-says-it-takes-control-myanmar-rare-earth-mining-hub-2024-10-23/#:~:text=Last%20year%2C%20Myanmar%20supplied%20China,according%20to%20broker%20Ord%20Minnett.

[31] Myanmar Ministry of Immigration and Population. "Census Atlas Myanmar: The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census." https://myanmar.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/MyanmarCensusAtlas_lowres.pdf

[32] Chin Association of Maryland. "After the 2021 Military Coup in Myanmar/Burma: Challenge for Internally Displaced Persons and Refugees." October 2021. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/After-the-2021-Military-Coup-in-MyanmarBurma.pdf

In 1962, General Ne Win seized power and established a one-party system that repressed dissent and isolated the country for decades. The military retained control after mass protests in 1988. Led by Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, daughter of General Aung San, the National League for Democracy won a landslide victory in the 1990 elections, but the Burmese military annulled it. They entrenched their dominance under a new constitution in 2008. A limited political opening followed the 2015 elections in which the National League for Democracy, again led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, swept into office, but this transition collapsed with the military coup in 2021. After the coup, the junta imprisoned her and many other political opponents.[33] At that time, they formed a new ruling body for the regime called the State Administrative Council (SAC).[34] Recently, on July 31, 2025, they changed the name of the regime's ruling body to the State Security and Peace Commission (SSPC).[35]

Since independence in 1948, Burma's ethnic and religious minorities have faced systemic discrimination and armed repression by successive regimes. As noted above, the country's founding promise of equality under the 1947 Panglong Agreement was never fulfilled, leading many minority groups, including the predominantly Christian Chin, and the Kachin, Karen, and Karenni peoples which have sizeable Christian minorities, to take up arms in defense of their rights and autonomy. The Burmese military's campaigns in these regions to suppress resistance have been marked by widespread abuses: forced labor, village burnings, sexual violence, and the destruction of churches and schools. Periodic ceasefires since the 1990s brought only limited relief, simply shifting atrocities from one region to another. Even during ceasefire periods, severe religious and ethnic persecution continued under the guise of stabilization and "nation-building." Minority communities have maintained organized movements for self-determination for decades, forming local administrations, armies, and faith-based organizations that resist military domination and advocate for federal democracy.[36]

The military coup in 2021 unleashed a national uprising to oppose the return of military rule. The military junta responded to mass protests with brutal force, arresting civilian leaders and crushing dissent. The country quickly descended into armed conflict, which was assessed in 2024 as the second most intense violent conflict in the world.[37] Also, in the same year, the Special Advisory Council for Myanmar (SAC-M), a group of international human rights experts, said that the Burmese military regime did "not have effective control of the country," concluding that "86% of the nation's townships that contain 67% of its population" were not under "stable junta control."[38] While the junta has since received some support from China, its inability to hold an election that is nationwide and to carry out full census activities in large parts of contested areas of Burma indicate a continued struggle to assert effective control over the country."[39] The National League for Democracy (NLG), the party that won the 2020 election, said that the junta's 2025-2026 election only includes one-third of the territory of Burma.[40]

[33] BBC, "Myanmar Profile – Timeline." September 2018. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-12992883
[34] U.S. Treasury Department. Press Release. U.S. targets leaders of Burma Military Coup Under New Executive Order. February 11, 2021. https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy0024
[35] Global New Light of Myanmar. Formation of State Security and Peace Commission. July 31, 2025. https://www.gnlm.com.mm/formation-of-state-security-and-peace-commission/
[36] Council on Foreign Relations. "Backgrounder: Myanmar's Troubled History." Updated January 31, 2022. https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/myanmar-history-coup-military-rule-ethnic-conflict-rohingya
[37] ACLED. "Conflict Index." December 2024. https://acleddata.com/series/acled-conflict-index
[38] Special Advisory Council for Myanmar. Briefing Paper: Effective Control in Myanmar. Page 13. https://specialadvisorycouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/SAC-M-Effective-Control-in-Myanmar-2024-Update-ENGLISH.pdf
[39] See Reuters. "Myanmar junta chief admits election won't be nationwide, as war continues." October 15, 2025. https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/myanmar-junta-chief-admits-election-wont-be-nationwide-war-continues-2025-10-15/
[40] See National League for Democracy. Statement on the Legitimacy of the 2020 General Election and the Current Situation in Burma. October 28, 2025. National League for Democracy, Facebook.

During the conflict, the Burmese military, also known as the Tatmadaw, has committed widespread war crimes, including intentional bombing and arson of religious buildings, particularly churches. Given the scale and intensity of the conflict, displacement has reached historic levels. UNHCR recently reported that 3.64 million people have been internally displaced in Burma,[41] which is an estimated 7% of the national population (the national population of Burma is based on publicly available data from the junta).[42] The percentage of internally displaced persons within individual state populations is often even higher than at the national level. See further details in the section below: "IX. Humanitarian Consequence of Persecution and Severe Religious Freedom Violations. Besides internal displacement in Burma, 1.59 million have been displaced outside of Burma seeking refuge in neighboring countries.[43]

Many ethnic armed organizations that had previously engaged in peace negotiations withdrew from ceasefires and rejoined or intensified armed resistance. New armed groups called People's Defense Forces (PDFs) emerged across Bamar-majority and urban areas and linked with Ethnic Resistance Organizations (EROs) to resist junta forces. The conflict spread into regions that were relatively stable before 2021, including Bamar Buddhist-majority areas of central Burma. Exposure to the forms of violence that had historically only been experienced by ethnic minority communities has transformed public perceptions among many Bamar citizens. These shared experiences have generated a nascent but meaningful sense of inter-ethnic empathy and solidarity, which has been augmented by growing collaboration between newly formed Bamar resistance groups and long-established ethnic armed organizations.[44]

The Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) was formed by elected lawmakers ousted in the February 2021 coup to assert the legitimacy of the 2020 election results and provide a constitutional bridge for restoring civilian rule. Building on that mandate, the National Unity Government (NUG) was established as a parallel, pro-democracy administration to represent the people of Burma against the junta, coordinate resistance governance, and pursue international recognition and support. Together, the CRPH and NUG have anchored the post-coup pro-democracy movement by articulating a federal-democratic vision, and by building working relationships with ethnic resistance organizations, civil society, and other ethnic and religious minorities that have long faced discrimination and persecution. Their strategy has aimed to align the broad anti-junta struggle with long-standing demands for autonomy, equality, and federalism, position in the resistance as a multi-ethnic coalition rather than purely a Bamar-led democracy restoration project or an ethnic minority resistance movement.[45]

Christians in Burma are targeted for multiple, overlapping reasons. In many cases, Christians are targeted for their ethnic minority identity since, as noted earlier, a large share of Christians come from minority groups such as the Karen, Kachin, Karenni (also known as Kayah), and Chin. Chin

[41] UNHCR. Map: Number [Internally] Displaced since the February 2021 coup who remain displaced. December 29, 2025. https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/120459 (fIDPs);

[42] The Global New Light of Myanmar. "Welcome preliminary population statistics for the nation." January 9, 2025. https://www.gnlm.com.mm/welcome-preliminary-population-statistics-for-the-nation/ (estimates total population of Burma as 51,316,756) and Myanmar Ministry of Immigration and Population. "Census Atlas Myanmar: The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census." Page 10, 13. https://myanmar.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/MyanmarCensusAtlas_lowres.pdf (estimates total population of Burma as 51,486,253). And UNHCR. Map: Number Displaced [inside Burma] since the February 2021 coup who remain displaced. December 29, 2025. https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/120459 (estimates 3.64 million total IDPs inside Burma) and UNHCR. "Operational Data Portal: Myanmar Situation." November 30, 2025. https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/myanmar (for refugees).

[44] Jangai Jap and Isabel Chew. "Youth, Identity and Post-Coup Experience in Myanmar." *US Institute of Peace*. March 6, 2023. https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/03/youth-identity-and-post-coup-experience-myanmar

[45] See Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH). https://crphmyanmar.org; and National Unity Government (NUG). https://nugmyanmar.org

State has the country's largest concentration of Christians with about 85% of the state's population identifying as Christian, making Chin communities particularly vulnerable. Nationally, Christians are a small minority, reinforcing the degree to which Christians are treated as a religious "other."[46] Christians are also frequently perceived by the military as aligned with pro-democracy and human rights aspirations that threaten authoritarian rule, and churches often serve as community hubs, including as places of refuge for displaced civilians, placing them in the military junta's crosshairs.[47]

According to the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom's 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) … The 2008 constitution recognizes Buddhism as the de facto state religion, but also recognizes Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Animism. Despite this, religious and ethnic minorities not belonging to the majority Bamar ethnicity and Buddhist faith have faced longstanding persecution."[48]

In addition, Christianity is often framed as a foreign, Western influence, which has fueled suspicion and hostility toward Christian communities and institutions. American Baptist missions helped establish early Chin Christian communities beginning in the late 19th century, and subsequent decades saw the growth of multiple denominations. After the 1962 coup, the military regime moved aggressively to control religious life, nationalizing or restricting missionary-linked institutions and expelling many foreign missionaries, within a broader project of Burman-Buddhist nationalism. Since independence, "Myanmar's military has always been shaped by an extremist Burman, Buddhist nationalist agenda." Not long after independence, Buddhism was briefly established as the state religion under the nationalist slogan, "To be Burmese is to be a Buddhist."[49]

On December 28, 2025, Burma's military junta held the first phase of sham elections. The second phase will begin on January 11, and the third phase will begin on January 25.[50] The elections are an effort by the military to manufacture legitimacy after the 2021 coup. It is not a genuine return to democratic rule. Voting has been limited to areas the military can control, while the political environment is tightly repressed. Legitimate political representatives are jailed, the National League for Democracy has been "dissolved" by the junta along with 40 other parties, independent media is silenced, and restrictive laws create a climate where criticizing the process is punishable by lengthy prison terms. The process is dominated by military-aligned actors. The result is an election that can't credibly reflect public will, but which the junta and its sympathetic external partners will use to claim a constitutional mandate while the war and humanitarian crisis continue.

The sham elections have been condemned or delegitimized by political organization in Burma. The National Unity Government of Myanmar condemned the junta's 2025-2026 elections, noting that the regime has neither the authority nor the legitimacy to organize elections.[51] The

[46] US Department of State. "Burma 2023 International Religious Freedom Report." 2023. https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/547499-BURMA-2023-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf
[47] Chin Association of Maryland. "Chin Association of Maryland 2023 Annual Report: The Persecution of Christians in Burma." January 2024. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/20332-Annual-Report-Persecution.pdf
[48] USCIRF. "2024 Annual Report." May 2024. https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2024-05/USCIRF%202024%20Annual%20Report.pdf
[49] Chin Association of Maryland. "Chin Association of Maryland 2023 Annual Report: The Persecution of Christians in Burma." January 2024. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/20332-Annual-Report-Persecution.pdf
[50] Tian Mae Leod Ji and Grant Peck. AP. Myanmar holds first elections since military seized power, but critics say the vote is a sham. https://apnews.com/article/myanmar-election-yangon-suu-kyi-hlaing-military-f361d4962d30b9c5c4741110bb1271ef
[51] National Unity Government. "Statement on the Terrorist Military's Sham Election." August 25, 2025.

Committee Representing Pyidauungsu Hluttaw (CRPH), the parliamentary body which the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) recognizes as the country's legitimate representative, urged the international community to reject the junta elections as "unfair" and "illegitimate." [52] The National League for Democracy (NLD), the party that won the 2020 election, did not recognize or accept the junta's 2025-2026 elections as legitimate, saying that the election "does not meet democratic standards and can only be held in approximately one third of the country's territory.[53] Tom Andrews, UN Special Rapporteur for Myanmar, said after the first round of voting which occurred on December 28, 2025, "By all measure, this is not a free, fair, nor legitimate election." [54] U.S. media has also raised serious questions about the legitimacy of the junta's elections. As reported in the Washington Times, the junta's "bid for legitimacy is marred by the absence of formerly popular opposition parties and reports that soldiers used threats to force voters' participation."[55]

Also, on November 20, 2025, a bi-partisan letter from Congress urged President Trump "to condemn the upcoming sham elections" and to appoint a U.S. special representative and policy coordinator for Burma, to help address the crisis. Signatories included Representatives Ami Bera, M.D. (D-CA) and Young Kim (R-CA), Ranking Member and Chair of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on East Asia and Pacific, and Representatives Sydney Kamlager-Dove (D-CA) and Bill Huizenga (R-MI), Ranking Member and Chair of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on South and Central Asia.[56]

VII. U.S. POLICY TOWARD BURMA

The United States has maintained bipartisan support for democracy and human rights in Burma for more than 30 years. After the violent suppression by the Burmese military regime of pro-democracy protests in 1988, the U.S. imposed targeted sanctions, suspended aid, and supported resolutions condemning human rights abuses at the United Nations. During the 1990s and 2000s, the United States worked closely with pro-democracy and resistance groups to advance democracy and human rights, while channeling humanitarian assistance to refugees along the Thai–Burma border. *The Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act of 2003*[57] and successive Treasury sanctions restricted trade and financial flows linked to the junta, while the *Tom Lantos Block Burmese JADE Act of 2008*[58] expanded restrictions on gemstones and military-linked enterprises.

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https://nugmyanmar.org/announcement/statement-on-the-terrorist-militarys-sham-election/

[52] The Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH). "CRPH urges global parliament to reject legitimacy of junta's planned elections at IPU assembly." October 24, 2025. https://eng.mizzima.com/2025/10/24/27542; The Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH). Statement

[53] See National League for Democracy. Statement on the Legitimacy of the 2020 General Election and the Current Situation in Burma. October 28, 2025. National League for Democracy, Facebook.

[54] United Nations News. "Myanmar elections marked by fear as UN warns civilians are coerced from all sides." December 23, 2025. https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/12/1166662; Tom Andrews, UN Special Rapporteur for Myanmar. UN Expert: First round of voting [on December 28, 2025,] in Myanmar exposes junta orchestrated election as illegitimate." January 8, 2026. https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2026/01/un-expert-first-round-voting-myanmar-exposes-junta-orchestrated-election

[55] Tian MacLeod, Ji and Grant Peck, Associated Press. Washington Times. December 28, 2025. https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2025/dec/28/critics-say-vote-sham-myanmar-holds-first-election-since-military/

[56] Letter to President Trump Representatives Ami Bera, M.D. (D-CA) and Young Kim (R-CA), Ranking Member and Chair of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on East Asia and Pacific, and Representatives Sydney Kamlager-Dove (D-CA) and Bill Huizenga (R-MI), Ranking Member and Chair of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on South and Central Asia. November 20, 2025. https://bera.house.gov/news/press-releases/reps-bera-kim-kamlager-dove-and-huizenga-issue-joint-statement-on-crisis-in-burma (urging the Administration "to publicly condemn the junta's upcoming sham elections in Burma and to appoint a special representative and policy coordinator for Burma)

[57] Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act of 2003, Pub. L. No. 108-61, 117 Stat. 864 (2003). https://www.congress.gov/bill/108th-congress/house-bill/2330

[58] Tom Lantos Block Burmese JADE Act of 2008, H.R. 3890, 110th Cong. (2008), Pub. L. 110-286, 122 Stat. 2632. Available at: https://www.congress.gov/bill/110th-congress/house-bill/3890

After a quasi-civilian regime formed, initiated reforms, and released political prisoners in 2011, the U.S. restored diplomatic relations, eased many sanctions and invested heavily in development assistance programs for Burma. The U.S. sharply reversed its policy position after the military take-over in 2021.

Senate Resolution 52

S.Res.52 reaffirms religious freedom as a fundamental human right and a core U.S. foreign policy priority. It expresses grave concern about escalating global threats to religious practice and urges the State Department to step up diplomatic engagement and support for activists and civil society defending religious freedom. It also calls on the United States to use available accountability tools, especially those under the International Religious Freedom Act and Global Magnitsky sanctions, to hold violators responsible. The resolution mentions Burma four times as a site of egregious religious persecution especially since the 2021 coup as the junta has destroyed and occupied religious sites, including churches.

Since the February 2021 coup, the United States has taken a range of executive, legislative, and diplomatic actions to isolate the military regime and support the pro-democracy movement. Immediately after the coup, Washington imposed targeted sanctions, export controls, and visa restrictions on junta leaders and military-linked conglomerates, while redirecting humanitarian aid toward civil society, ethnic minority organizations, and resistance-controlled areas. Congress has reinforced these measures through the BURMA Act of 2023 and related bipartisan bills, authorizing assistance for democracy activists and accountability efforts, while maintaining pressure on the Burmese military junta and Burma's designation as a "Country of Particular Concern" (CPC) under the In*ternational Religious Freedom Act of 1998*.

On February 4, 2025, Senator James Lankford (R-OK) introduced a Senate Resolution 52 (S.R. 52) which recognizes "religious freedom as a fundamental right". The resolution expresses "support for international religious freedom as a cornerstone of U.S. foreign policy, and [sic] concern over increased threats to and attacks on religious freedom around the world." The resolution mentions Burma four times as a country experiencing egregious religious persecution, especially since the 2021 military coup. On June 26, 2025, the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations passed S.R. 52 and it was placed on the Senate Legislative Calendar under General Orders.[59]

Over the past three decades, U.S. humanitarian assistance to people affected by the crisis in and around Burma has been substantial, though it was severely cut in 2025. Funds have supported lifesaving aid for those forcibly displaced inside the country and for those seeking refuge in neighboring states. Specialized funding also supported protection and cross-border assistance efforts. Beyond the region, the U.S. resettlement of refugees from Burma has been a vital means of protection for the many resettled refugees and of support for and solidarity with the refugee host countries. Over several decades, the U.S. has repeatedly expressed bi-partisan solidarity with the people of Burma in public statements, hearings, and regular engagements with civil society and faith leaders.

[59] Senate Resolution 52. February 4, 2025. https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/senate-resolution/52

Table 1 below provides a brief description of U.S. policy actions since the 2021 military coup that have strengthened religious freedom for people in Burma.

Table 1: U.S. Policy Actions Since the 2021 Coup that Strengthen Religious Freedom in Burma

Policy	Impact
Executive Order 14014 (Feb. 2021)	Declared a national emergency and imposed sanctions, asset freezes, and trade and financial restrictions targeting the Burmese military leadership and related entities.[60]
Treasury sanctions & designation of military-linked entities	Repeated rounds of sanctions on senior generals, state-owned enterprises, Myanma Oil & Gas Enterprise, and military conglomerates.[61] Sanctions against militias and others affiliated with the Burmese military that operate scam centers.[62]
Export controls & trade restrictions	More stringent export controls and review requirements (e.g. on defense or dual-use goods) for the Burmese military and the junta's law enforcement ministries.[63]
Congressional appropriations & oversight	For fiscal years (FY) 2024 and 2025, Congress allocated $121 million annually for democracy, human rights, governance, and humanitarian programs connected to Burma.[64] While Congress has not passed FY 2026 appropriations, it has passed a continuing resolution until January 30, 2026, under which funding connected to Burma continues at FY2025 levels.[65]
Legislation: BURMA Act	Congress incorporated the BURMA Act into the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) 2023, giving authority, but not funding appropriations, to impose further sanctions, provide non-lethal support to resistance actors, and promote accountability.[66] The U.S. Senate has also passed the "Scam Compound Accountability and Mobilization Act" (S.2950), targeting scam centers in Burma that harm Americans.[67]
Legislative proposals	In 2025, the U.S. House advanced three bipartisan bills on Burma: the BRAVE Burma Act (H.R. 3190), the Burma GAP Act (H.R. 4140), and the No New Burma Funds Act (H.R. 4423) which call for support to pro-democracy groups and maintaining pressure on the junta.[68] Congress also advanced the Dismantle Foreign Scam Syndicates Act (H.R. 5490) which targets scam operations run by the Burmese military and affiliates, and establishes a scam center task force to implement its main elements.[69]

[60] Office of Foreign Asset Control. "Burma-Related Sanctions." https://ofac.treasury.gov/sanctions-programs-and-country-information/burma
[61] U.S. Department of State. "Burma Sanctions." January 31, 2024. https://2021-2025.state.gov/burma-sanctions/?safe=1
[62] U.S. Department of the Treasury. "Treasury Sanctions Burma Warlord and Militia Tied to Cyber Scam Operations." May 5, 2025. https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sb0129
[63] Axios. "U.S. imposes fresh export controls on Myanmar over military coup." March 4, 2021. https://www.axios.com/2021/03/04/myanmar-coup-commerce-export-controls-entity-list
[64] Ibid
[65] Congressional Research Services. "Continuing Resolutions: Overview of Components and Practices." March 27, 2025. https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/R46595
[66] Center for Strategic & International Studies. "What the BURMA Act Does and Doesn't Mean for U.S. Policy in Myanmar." February 6, 2023. https://www.csis.org/analysis/what-burma-act-does-and-doesnt-mean-us-policy-myanmar
[67] S. 2950. "Scam Compound Accountability and Mobilization Act." https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/senate-bill/2950
[68] Democratic Voice of Burma. "U.S. Congress advances three bipartisan Myanmar bills in one day." July 23, 2025. https://english.dvb.no/u-s-congress-advances-three-bipartisan-myanmar-bills-in-one-day
[69] H.R. 5490. "Dismantle Foreign Scam Syndicates Act." https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/5490

Designation as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC)	The State Department has maintained Burma's 2023 designation as a CPC under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, reinforcing the U.S. legal framework for action.[70] USCIRF has urged the State Department to extend that designation. [71]
Visa restrictions for the Junta and diplomatic pressure	The U.S. adopted visa bans and travel restrictions on junta members and affiliates, and has consistently condemned the coup in diplomatic, multilateral forums, and UN settings.[72]

As illustrated in Table 1, the U.S. Government has demonstrated a long term, bi-partisan commitment to the people of Burma, supporting their pursuit of federal, democratic reform and freedom of religion. It has helped to protect displaced people inside Burma, and those from Burma in nearby countries who have been forcibly displaced as a result of religious and political persecution by the Burmese military regime. It has supported Burma's refugees who have fled to neighboring countries, and has also supported the host countries by providing humanitarian aid. For some, the United States has offered safety and a new life on American soil through refugee resettlement.

Over several decades, the United States has welcomed over 197,000 refugees from Burma.[73] This includes 176,536 who arrived between 2001 and 2020. According to the State Department Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM), the ethnic breakdown of those refugees during that period was as follows: 2,577 Arakanese (Rakhine); 6,607 Burmese; 63,087 Chin; 4,169 Kachin; 74,460 Karen; 13,401 Karenni (Kayah); 20 Lahu; 2,221 Mon; 115 Pa-Oh; 9,189 Rohingya; 1,218 Shan; 12 and Wa.[74]

For the period of October 1, 2020, to September 30, 2025, PRM reported 20,469 refugees from Burma came to the United States. Beginning in 2020, PRM stopped reporting ethnicity of refugees from Burma resettled to the United States. They reported the following total annual number of arrivals from Burma: 776 in FY2021; 2,215 in FY2022; 6,263 in FY2023; 7,540 in FY2024; and 3,675 in FY2025. From 2001 until 2020, 176,536 refugees from Burma resettled in the U.S. and 20,469 resettled in the U.S. from 2020 to 2025. The total number of resettled refugees from Burma is 197,005.[75] Altogether, U.S. actions show a strong, long-term U.S. commitment to religious freedom, democracy, and refugee and humanitarian protection for people from Burma.

[70] U.S. Department of State. "Burma 2023 International Religious Freedom Report." https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/burma/
[71] USCIRF, "A Religious Freedom Lifeline to Burma's Persecuted People of Faith Needs to be Extended," October 29, 2025. https://www.uscirf.gov/news-room/releases-statements/religious-freedom-lifeline-burmas-persecuted-people-faith-needs-be
[72] United States Mission to the United Nations. "Remarks at the UNGA Plenary Meeting on the Responsibility to Protect and the Prevention of Genocide, War Crimes, Ethnic Cleansing, and Crimes Against." July 1, 2025. https://usun.usmission.gov/remarks-at-the-unga-plenary-meeting-on-the-responsibility-to-protect-and-the-prevention-of-genocide-war-crimes-ethnic-cleansing-and-crimes-against
[73] Refugee Processing Center, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, Department of State. https://www.rpc.state.gov/archives/
[74] Refugee Processing Center, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, Department of State. https://www.rpc.state.gov/archives/
[75] Refugee Processing Center, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, Department of State. https://www.rpc.state.gov/archives/

On the other hand, as seen in Table 2, several recent actions have been taken, mostly tied to broader policy objectives rather than to Burma, which weaken religious freedom protections, undermine the pro-democracy movement, and degrade support for vulnerable communities from Burma. [76]

Table 2: U.S. Policy Actions Since the 2021 Coup That Weaken Religious Freedom in Burma

Policy	Impact
USAID Eliminated (July 2025)	Terminates most USAID programming, including millions for assistance to Burma. Raises risk of humanitarian gaps and slower, less predictable assistance flows affecting displaced and conflict-affected populations from Burma.[77]
TPS termination for Burma (November 2025)	Temporary Protected Status (TPS) will be terminated for nationals of Burma effective January 26, 2026.[78] This increases insecurity for those who are lawfully present in the U.S. under TPS and heightens fear for families with mixed status.[79]
Presidential Proclamation 10949 (June 2025)	Establishes a blanket restriction on the entry of nationals from Burma, among other countries, without citing how this protects Americans or aligns with broader foreign policy objectives [80]. Disrupts travel, family reunification, and mobility for Burma nationals. Even with asylum carve-outs, it creates a practical chilling effects and processing delays are likely significant.
FY 2026 Presidential Determination cuts refugee ceiling (September 2025)	Sets the global FY2026 refugee ceiling at 7,500, a 94% cut from 125,000 the prior year, and states that admissions shall primarily be allocated to Afrikaners from South Africa. Dramatically reduces resettlement capacity precisely as displacement needs grow.[81]

[76] Burma Research Institute. "Analysis of the DHS's Termination of TPS for Burma." December 11, 2025. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Dec11-2025-Analysis-of-the-DHSs-Termination-of-TPS-for-Burma.pdf

[77] The effort to end USAID's role in administering foreign assistance began with President Trump's Executive Order 14169, "Reevaluating and Realigning United States Foreign Aid," January 20, 2025. https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/01/30/2025-02091/reevaluating-and-realigning-united-states-foreign-aid On July 1, Secretary of State Marco Rubio ordered that "USAID will officially cease to implement [U.S.] foreign assistance." Secretary of State, "Making Foreign Aid Great Again," July 1, 2025. https://statedept.substack.com/p/making-foreign-aid-great-again There continues to be litigation challenges to these actions. See Lawfare, "USAID", *Trump Administration Litigation Tracker*, https://www.lawfaremedia.org/projects-series/trials-of-the-trump-administration/tracking-trump-administration-litigation#:~:text=Three%20former%20USAID%20employees%20sued,board%20on%20May%207%2C%202025.

[78] U.S. Federal Register. "Termination of the Designation of Burma (Myanmar) for Temporary Protected Status" November 25, 2025. https://federalregister.gov/d/2025-21069

[79] BRI. "Analysis of the DHS's Termination of TPS for Burma: Why the Administration Should Reinstate Temporary Protected Status for Burma (Myanmar) Nationals." December 11, 2025. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Dec11-2025-Analysis-of-the-DHSs-Termination-of-TPS-for-Burma.pdf

[80] The White House. "Fact Sheet: President Donald J. Trump Further Restricts and Limits the Entry of Foreign Nationals to Protect the Security of the United States." December 16, 2025. https://www.whitehouse.gov/fact-sheets/2025/12/fact-sheet-president-donald-j-trump-further-restricts-and-limits-the-entry-of-foreign-nationals-to-protect-the-security-of-the-united-states/

[81] Federal Register. Presidential Determination on Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2026. September 30, 2025. https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/10/31/2025-19752/presidential-determination-on-refugee-admissions-for-fiscal-year-2026

President Donald J. Trump has demonstrated concern for Christians being persecuted and killed in parts of the world. BRI is hopeful that this concern will lead to positive U.S. policies towards the people of Burma, including those outlined in the recommendations above. During his first term, President Trump showed concern for the persecution of Christians in Burma. On September 11, 2019, President Trump met with Reverend Dr. Hklam Samson, then General Secretary of the Kachin Baptist Convention, who was part of a delegation highlighting religious persecution around the world.[82] Reverend Samson described to the President the oppression against Christians by the Burmese military (see Table 6 below).

Following news about the Oval Office visit, the Burmese military filed a complaint against Reverend Samson, accusing him of defaming the military, to which the U.S. State Department expressed "deep concern." The complaint was later dropped.[83]

During his second term, President Trump issued public statements and conducted airstrikes against targets in Nigeria whom he accused of killing Christians.[84] The Administration designated Nigeria a Country of Particular Concern (CPC), for its egregious violation of religious freedom occurring there, and it imposed travel bans against Nigerian officials implicated in the atrocities.[85]

VIII. U.S. POLICY RELATED TO INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

In addition to Burma-specific policy actions on Burma, the *International Religious Freedom Act of 1998* (IRF Act) has been an important instrument in U.S.-Burma policy since its passage. The IRF Act created the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, the Office of International Religious Freedom in the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) as an independent legislative branch agency.[86]

The IRF Act authorizes designations of Countries of Particular Concern (CPC) for countries where regimes engage in or tolerate severe violations of religious freedom. The IRF Act also outlines actions the U.S. may take in response to CPC or Special Watch List designations. They include harsh economic sanctions. The Department of State has designated Burma as a CPC every year since 1999. Burma's CPC status was last designated in 2023, and it will be important that the Department of State agrees with the USCIRF recommendation to extend the CPC designation Burma for 2026.[87] At a BRI briefing on December 16, 2025, Commissioner Stephen Schneck of USCIRF re-iterated USCIRF's recommendation that Burma should be re-designated as a CPC, noting that "religious freedom conditions in Burma declined significantly in 2024."[88]

[82] USCIRF. "Hkalam Samson". https://www.uscirf.gov/religious-prisoners-conscience/forb-victims-database/hkalam-samson
[83] RFA. "Myanmar Military Withdraws Defamation Lawsuit Against Ethnic Kachin Pastor." September 9, 2019. https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/myanmar-military-withdraws-defamation-lawsuit-09092019160904.html
[84] See Clifford D. May. Washington Times. "The War Against Christians: Trump is Giving attention to this Matter." November 11, 2025. https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2025/nov/11/war-christians/
[85] U.S. Department of State. "Countries of Particular Concern, Special Watch List Countries, Entities of Particular Concern". https://www.state.gov/countries-of-particular-concern-special-watch-list-countries-entities-of-particular-concern
[86] International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, H.R. 2431, 105th Cong. (1998), Pub. L. 105-292, 112 Stat. 2787. Available at: https://www.congress.gov/bill/105th-congress/house-bill/2431
[87] USCIRF, "A Religious Freedom Lifeline to Burma's Persecuted People of Faith Needs to be Extended," October 29, 2025. https://www.uscirf.gov/news-room/releases-statements/religious-freedom-lifeline-burmas-persecuted-people-faith-needs-be
[88] Remarks by Commissioner Stephen Schneck. Congressional Briefing. December 16, 2025. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Schneck-USCIRF-Remarks-for-BRI-Burma-Briefing-on-US-Policy-Held-on-Dec-16-2025.pdf

Continuously since 1999, the United States has designated Burma as a "Country of Particular Concern" (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 due to the systemic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom in Burma. The last designation was made in 2023.

Options for Presidential Actions (IRFA 6445)

USCIRF provides the following summary of 15 actions the President may take, among others, pursuant to IRFA to respond to any religious freedom violations and to violations that occur after a CPC designation.[89]

Actions available in response to any religious freedom violations

1. A private demarche
2. An official public demarche
3. A public condemnation
4. A public condemnation within one or more multilateral fora
5. The delay or cancellation of one or more scientific exchanges
6. The delay or cancellation of one or more cultural exchanges
7. The denial of one or more working, official, or state visits
8. The delay or cancellation of one or more working official or state visits

Actions available following a CPC designation

9. The withdrawal, limitation, or suspension of United States development assistance
10. Denials of credit loans under OPIC or the Export-Import Bank
11. The withdrawal, limitation, or suspension of United States security assistance
12. Directing the U.S. executive directors of international financial institutions to oppose and vote against loans primarily benefiting the specific foreign government, agency, instrumentality, or official found or determined by the President to be responsible for violations
13. Denials of exports under certain instruments such as the Arms Export Control Act
14. Prohibiting U.S. financial institutions from making loans or credit to the government, entities, or officials responsible for violations under IRFA
15. Prohibiting the U.S. government from procuring goods or services from the government, entities, or officials responsible for the violations.

[89] Kirsten Lavery and Elizabeth Cassidy. USCIRF. Factsheet: International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA). March 2021. https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2021-03/2021%20Legislation%20Factsheet%20-%20IRFA.pdf

In addition to urging the Administration to re-designate Burma as a CPC county, USCIRF has encouraged the Administration to redesignate and extend Temporary Protect Status (TPS) for people from Burma. Citing egregious violations of religious freedom targeting minority ethnic religious groups in Burma, including Christians, USCIRF Chair Vicki Hartzler said, "USCIRF urges the Administration to extend and redesignate Burma for TPS to support the religious freedom of Burma's religious minorities."[90]

Outside of government, a broad, multi-faith civil society ecosystem sustains IRF attention and coalition-building, including the annual International Religious Freedom Summit, which convenes diverse faith traditions and advocacy organizations, and the IRF Roundtable, which is a convening space where NGOs, religious actors, and government officials of all faiths and beliefs coordinate advocacy and responses to violations of religious freedom. This architecture matters for Burma because it provides bipartisan, institutional channels inside and outside the U.S. government to elevate the persecution of and violated religious freedom of Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, and other communities; to press for accountability; and to ensure that religious freedom and protection concerns are integrated into diplomacy and humanitarian policy.

Recent Congressional and civil society actions underscore that IRF continues to be a bipartisan policy value. Senator James Lankford (R-OK) has been a champion of IRF for years. He has continued to lead bipartisan IRF measures, including by introducing a Senate resolution reaffirming international religious freedom as a cornerstone of U.S. foreign policy and highlighting global threats across religious communities.[91] The resolution refers to Burma, "where in addition to violence targeted at religious minorities, strict laws in favor of the Buddhist majority regulate religious conversion, marriages, and births of non-Buddhists such as Muslims and Christians."[92]

Senator Lankford was party to a bicameral letter in 2021 highlighting the importance of the United States promoting IRF, "especially in countries where people are violently targeted for their faith such as Burma."[93] Senators Chris Coons (D-DE) and Thom Tillis (R-NC) issued a similar statement in March 2024 highlighting religious freedom in Burma, focusing especially on the genocide of Rohingya.[94]

USCIRF has issued focused analysis and public statements warning that the junta and affiliated forces have targeted religious gatherings and places of worship and has urged stronger U.S. policy responses.[95] Burma-focused civil society organizations have likewise used IRF convenings to press for protection and accountability measures tied to atrocities against religious

[90] USCIRF. "Religious Freedom Lifeline to Burma's Persecuted People of Faith Needs to be Extended." October 29, 2025. https://www.uscirf.gov/news-room/releases-statements/religious-freedom-lifeline-burmas-persecuted-people-faith-needs-be

[91] S.Res.52. "A resolution recognizing religious freedom as a fundamental right, expressing support for international religious freedom as a cornerstone of United States foreign policy, and expressing concern over increased threats to and attacks on religious freedom around the world." June 26, 2025. https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/senate-resolution/52/text

[92] S.Res.52. "A resolution recognizing religious freedom as a fundamental right, expressing support for international religious freedom as a cornerstone of United States foreign policy, and expressing concern over increased threats to and attacks on religious freedom around the world." June 26, 2025. https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/senate-resolution/52/text

[93] Rep. French Hill. "Press Release: Rep. Hill, Senator Press Biden on Need for US Leadership to Promote International Religious Freedom." May 5, 2021. https://hill.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=8444

[94] Senator Chris Coons. "Senators Coons, Tillis mark two-year anniversary of Rohingya genocide determination." March 21, 2024. https://www.coons.senate.gov/news/press-releases/senators-coons-tillis-mark-two-year-anniversary-of-rohingya-genocide-determination

[95] USCIRF. "A Religious Freedom Lifeline to Burma's Persecuted People of Faith Needs to be Extended." October 29, 2025. https://www.uscirf.gov/news-room/releases-statements/religious-freedom-lifeline-burmas-persecuted-people-faith-needs-be

minorities.[96] And in the run-up to the Burmese junta's sham "election", Congressional communications have explicitly framed Burma's crisis as involving the systematic persecution of ethnic and religious minorities and warned against legitimizing a "sham" political process.

This is a crucial moment for U.S. policy toward Burma. The United States must both intensify pressure on the military junta for its atrocities, including its egregious persecution of ethnic and religious minorities, and reinforce refugee protection and humanitarian policy for the junta's victims. As noted above, political organizations in Burma, the UN, and Congress have already signaled that the junta election polls are a "sham" and should not be treated as a path to legitimacy. Continued military rule must be condemned and any election outcome should be rejected if it is produced under coercion, mass displacement, and systematic rights abuses.

IX. BACKGROUND ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM VIOLATIONS AGAINST ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

Discrimination against religious minorities has deep roots in Burma's modern state. Successive military regimes have promoted a narrow vision of Burma's national, ethnic, religious identity built around Bamar-Buddhist nationalism. This vision has been used for decades to divide the majority population from ethnic and religious minorities, and to persecute those minority populations. This ideology is embedded in the 2008 Constitution, which recognizes the "special position" of Buddhism, and the 1982 Citizenship Law, which establishes a hierarchy of citizenship that denies full rights to many ethnic and religious minorities. It is enforced through a policy of "Burmanization," under which the Burmese military promotes Buddhism in minority areas and often compels non-Buddhist religious minorities, including Christian communities, to fund or assist in building Buddhist pagodas in their communities. As part of this campaign, authorities also restrict the construction and renovation of churches and mosques, further marginalizing non-Buddhist communities. Reports from Chin[97] and Karen[98] States also document systematic destruction and forced removals of non-Buddhist religious symbols, including crosses and other Christian iconography.

In 2015, Burma's parliament enacted four laws collectively known as the *Race and Religion Protection Laws*. The laws were drafted under pressure from burgeoning Buddhist nationalist networks such as *Ma Ba Tha*. The laws regulate population control, religious conversion, interfaith marriage, and monogamy, requiring permission from the junta to change religion, imposing restrictions on Buddhist women marrying non-Buddhist men, and authorizing local officials to enforce birth-spacing measures. The law blatantly discriminates against non-Buddhist minorities, threatens women's rights, and violates the freedom of religion and belief.[99]

The most horrendous example of such persecution came soon after the passage of the 2015 laws. In 2017, the Burmese military launched a deliberate campaign against the Rohingya, a Muslim minority in Burma, that included a "scorched earth" campaign resulting in mass killings and forced displacement of more than 700,000 people to Bangladesh. This genocidal campaign marked the culmination of years of persecution by the Tatmadaw. For decades the Burmese state denied citizenship to the mostly Muslim Rohingya, leaving them stateless and without access to state

[96] BRI. "Burma Research Institute Releases the Remarks of President Zo Tum Hmung at the IRF Roundtable with the U.S. Government." December 4, 2025. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/PRESS-RELEASE-Remarks-by-ZTHmung-IRF-Roundtable-Given-on-Nov-25-2025.pdf

[97] CHRO. "Burma's Junta Guilty of Mounting A Campaign of Ethnocide Against Chin Christians." May 2004. https://www.chinhumanrights.org/burmas-junta-guilty-of-mounting-a-campaign-of-ethnocide-against-chin-christians/

[98] KHRG. "Foundation of Fear: 25 Years of Villagers' Voices from Southeast Myanmar." October 2017. https://www.khrg.org/2017/12/foundation-fear-25-years-villagers-voices-southeast-myanmar

[99] Library of Congress. "Burma: Four 'Race and Religion

services. Since August 2017, the U.S. government has provided more than $2.5 billion for the regional Rohingya humanitarian response for the refugees and for the host communities.[100]

On March 21, 2022, BRI, then known as CAM, welcomed and applauded then U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken's declaration that the Burmese military committed genocide and crimes against humanity against the Rohingya ethnic and religious minority in Rakhine State, Burma.[101] BRI urges the U.S. to take further steps to hold the Burmese military accountable for this ruthless brutality against the Rohingya Muslims of Rakhine State.

BRI likewise applauds the case against the Burmese military in the International Court of Justice (ICJ). Beginning January 12, 2026, the ICJ began public hearings regarding the charge of genocide of the Rohingya against the Burmese military.[102] BRI urges that just as the Burmese military must be condemned and held accountability for their brutality against the Rohingya as well as for the atrocities it has committed against Christians and other religious minorities across Burma.[103]

Drawing a similar conclusion, U Aung Kyaw Moe, Deputy Union Minister, Ministry of Human Rights of the National Unity Government, himself a Rohingya, delivered remarks at a Congressional briefing organized by BRI/CAM, entitled, "Escalating Atrocities Against Christians in Burma." The briefing was held at Russell Senate Office Building, (S.R. 188), Washington, D.C., on September 18, 2023.

U Aung Kyaw Moe stated, "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."[104]

As detailed in the following section, severe violations of the religious freedom of Christians have escalated sharply in both intensity and scope since the 2021 coup. The Burmese military's airstrikes and ground assaults have destroyed an estimated 343 Christian churches and Christian buildings, especially in Chin, Kachin, Karenni, and Karen States, and killed or detained numerous clergy. Christian institutions, which are often the primary providers of education and humanitarian aid in these regions, have been raised or forced to close. The pattern of targeting religious sites and leaders, long documented in areas inhabited by ethnic minority communities, has now spread into Bamar-majority areas, symbolizing the junta's broader war on civilian life and social organization. Despite these conditions, Christian networks continue to play a vital role in humanitarian relief, cross-ethnic solidarity, and advocacy for federal democracy.

Protection Laws' Adopted." September 14, 2015. https://www.loc.gov/item/global-legal-monitor/2015-09-14/burma-four-race-and-religion-protection-laws-adopted

[100] State Department. Media Note. U.S. Announces New Funding for Rohingya Refugees and Host Communities. September 24, 2024. https://2021-2025.state.gov/united-states-announces-new-funding-for-rohingya-refugees-and-host-communities/

[101] CAM. "Statement on the Determination of Genocide Against Rohingya." March 22, 2022. https://burmari.org/2022/03/30/cam-statement-on-the-determination-of-genocide-against-rohingya/

[102] The International Court of Justice (ICJ). Press Release. The ICJ will hold public hearings in the case concerning *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (The Gambia* v. *Myanmar: 11 States intervening)* from Monday 12 to Thursday29 January 2026. December 19, 2025. https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/178/178-20251219-pre-01-00-en.pdf

[103] CAM. "CAM Monthly News Update March 2022." March 2022. https://burmari.org/cam-monthly-news-update-march-2022/

[104] BRI/CAM. Congressional Briefing, Russell Senate Office Building (S.R. 188), Washington, D.C., organized by CAM. "Escalating Atrocities Against Christians in Burma." September 18, 2023. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Letter-to-Secretary-Marco-Rubio-on-Burma.pdf

X. THE BURMESE MILITARY'S SYSTEMATIC, ONGOING, EGREGIOUS VIOLATIONS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AGAINST CHRISTIANS

After the 2021 coup, Burmese military atrocities quickly spread to Christian-majority areas. Christian communities in Chin, Karenni, Karen, and Kachin States began to experience persistent Tatmadaw attacks within months of the coup. As conflict escalated, churches became a critical lifeline for displaced communities. They were a safe space for Christian and non-Christian communities alike to shelter and access essential services. Given the junta's strategy of causing maximum suffering and displacement of the civilian population and severing its link to and support for the resistance movement, the sources of community resilience, like churches, became a regular target of Tatmadaw violence. Independent monitors documented repeated airstrikes, artillery attacks, and raids on churches and religious compounds, which constitute war crimes.

In late 2023, the UN Special Rapporteur for the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar published a report highlighting this disturbing trend. The report said, "The military appears to be intentionally targeting civilian populations, repeatedly launching air attacks on villages, IDP camps, schools, hospitals, clinics, churches, and monasteries. In many cases, airstrikes on villages have followed attacks on military units by opposition armed groups, suggesting they are being used as a form of collective punishment."[105]

Other international, regional, and national religious leaders, political leaders, and religious and humanitarian organizations have echoed deep concern about the disturbing trends in Burma:

- **Pope Leo XIV** said on October 19, 2025: "The news from Myanmar is sadly distressing: there are reports of ongoing armed clashes and aerial bombardments, including the targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure."[106]
- **Dr. Elijah Brown, General Secretary and Chief Executive Officer of the Baptist World Alliance,** stated at a Congressional Briefing on Burma hosted by BRI on April 28, 2025: "Since February 2021, military officials have entered seminary facilities and targeted faculty, arrested and imprisoned key leaders, bombed and destroyed churches, shot and killed pastors, and have forced thousands to flee as internally displaced [persons] and as refugees."[107]
- **The Baptist World Alliance General Council** wrote in Resolution 2022.2, July 2022: "Under the military rule, civil and religious freedoms have been dismantled. The [Burmese military] has furthermore waged a campaign of terror and violence, particularly against minority religions, including Christians, the great majority of whom are Baptists. Since the coup, the military has terrorized communities in Kachin, Karen, Kayah State, Chin State, and Sagaing Region, by burning villages, destroying churches, and detaining pastors and religious leaders."[108]

[105] UNOHCHR. "Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar." A/78/527. October 12, 2023. https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/a78527-report-special-rapporteur-situation-human-rights-myanmar

[106] Aleteia. "Myanmar situation is 'sadly distressing', says Pope Leo." October 19, 2025. https://aleteia.org/2025/10/19/myanmar-situation-is-sadly-distressing-says-pope-leo/

[107] Rev. Elijah M. Brown, General Secretary and Chief Executive Officer of Baptist World Alliance. Statement for Congressional Briefing organized by BRI, "Burma: Humanitarian Crisis and Violations of Religious Freedom," Rayburn Office Building, Washington, DC. April 28, 2025. (link to statement on May 5, 2025, BRI Press Release) https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2026/01/un-expert-first-round-voting-myanmar-exposes-junta-orchestrated-election

[108] Baptist World Alliance. "BWA General Council Resolution 2022.2." July 10-15, 2022. https://files.constantcontact.com/b365685a001/586cd314-6058-4bb7-b6c9-f61392b056ed.pdf?rdr=true

- **World Council of Churches and Christian Council of Asia** said in the first of five points made in their statement of March 31, 2021: "The WCC and CCA condemn the declaration of the army generals that the November 2020 election, won by the National League for Democracy (NLD) with an overwhelming majority, was null and void. The democratically elected civilian government reflects the aspiration of the people. The will of the people and the outcome of the elections have to be respected, and democratic processes must be restored. As we believe that the rule of law and democracy must be the cardinal parameters for ensuring peace with justice, we firmly denounce the military coup which has now returned full power to the generals."[109]

- **National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA** said in a statement on February 4, 2021: "As the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA (NCC) has been consistent in its history regarding the affirmation of peace with justice and reconciliation among peoples and countries, we denounce the military coup d'etat in Myanmar and stand with the people of Myanmar in their efforts to achieve peace, democracy, and freedom."[110]

- **The Catholic Bishop Conference of Myanmar, Myanmar Council of Churches, and Myanmar Christ Mission Cooperation Board** said in a statement on February 9, 2021: "We, share the fears and serious concern of all people in Myanmar over the [Burmese military's] control of power following the recent declaration of a one-year state of emergency in the country. We call on the [Burmese military] to immediately release President U Win Myint, State Counselor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and others detained and request the pursuance of reconciliation."[111]

- **The European Parliament** in a Joint Motion on November 25, 2025**:** "Strongly condemns the persecution of religious minorities, including Christians, Muslims and other religious groups in the country; urges the [Burmese military] to end the killings and arrests of people belonging to religious minorities, as well as the shelling and raiding of places of worship; expresses its deep concern about the frequent attacks on churches, mosques, monasteries, schools and medical facilities, and the arrests of religious leaders; highlights the growing concern of the international community over the violent targeting of religious minorities in Myanmar; calls for respect for religious freedom in Myanmar."[112]

- **The European Centre for Law and Justice** said through a written submission to the UN Human Rights Council on August 23, 2023: "[The Burmese junta is] disproportionately targeting the Christian population, resulting in thousands of lives lost or displaced, and hundreds of churches,

[109] Joint statement of the World Council of Churches and the Christian Conference of Asia on the continuing deterioration of the situation in Myanmar. March 31, 2021. https://oikoumene.org/resources/documents/joint-statement-of-the-wcc-and-the-cca-on-the-continuing-deterioration-of-the-situation-in-myanmar

[110] NCC. "Statement on the Military Coup in Myanmar." February 4, 2021. https://nationalcouncilofchurches.us/statement-on-the-military-coup-in-myanmar/

[111] Statement of Catholic Bishop Conference of Myanmar, Myanmar Council of Churches, and Myanmar Christ Mission Cooperation Board. February 9, 2021. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/After-the-2021-Military-Coup-in-MyanmarBurma.pdf

[112] European Parliament. "Joint Motion For a Resolution on the political situation in Myanmar including the humanitarian crisis of the Rohingya." November 25, 2025. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/RC-10-2025-0508_EN.html

homes, and schools demolished or severely damaged. Moreover, they are imprisoning pastors and any individual speaking up against the tyrannical reign. We urgently request that the United Nations provide aid and protection for the people of Myanmar and work to put an end to the atrocities they are facing on a daily basis."[113]

- **Stephen Schneck, Commissioner, U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF)** at a USCIRF hearing on February 8, 2023, an excerpt from his Opening Remarks: "The [Burmese military has] attacked, bombed, burned, and otherwise targeted Churches, Christian leaders, and their communities. The [Burmese military] has pinned its legitimacy, in part, on the state sponsorship of hardline Buddhist nationalists, some of whom have openly advocated for violence against religious minorities. The [Burmese military] has also pledged to "protect" Buddhism through the law, by prosecuting blasphemy and allegations of insults to that religious tradition. It is clear to USCIRF that religious freedom is not a priority of the [Burmese military]. It is therefore logical to conclude that a Burma run exclusively by the [Burmese military] will not prioritize religious freedom."[114]

- **The U.S. State Department** stated in a Press Release on October 31, 2021**:** "The United States is gravely concerned by reports of gross violations of human rights that Burmese security forces have perpetuated in Chin State, including reports that forces have set fire to and destroyed more than 100 residences as well as Christian churches. We condemn such brutal actions by the Burmese regime against people, their homes, and places of worship, which lays bare the regime's complete disregard for the lives and welfare of the people of Burma. These abhorrent attacks underscore the urgent need for the international community to hold the Burmese military accountable and take action to prevent gross violations and abuses of human rights, including by preventing the transfer of arms to the military."[115]

- **The U.S. State Department** stated in a letter on March 27, 2025, to numerous churches and religious organizations, including BRI, "Burma's military regime committed atrocities against members of ethnic and religious minority groups across Burma for decades, and impunity has quelled more violence in the aftermath of the 2021 coup… We unequivocally condemn the military regime's escalating violence against civilians, destruction of houses of worship, and systematic persecution and discrimination against members of all religious and ethnic minority groups."[116]

- **Senator Charles Grassley (R-IA)** from a April 11, 2025, letter he submitted for a Congressional briefing on Burma on April 28, 2025, organized by BRI: "The [Burmese military's] attacks on places of worship, including the burning of churches are deeply troubling and highlight the ongoing violence against innocent people that is characteristic of this regime… Iowa has a strong connection to Burma, with many Burmese refugees having settled in our state, and I know violence there is deeply felt in our communities... I stand

[113] UNHCR. "Written statement* submitted by European Centre for Law and Justice, The / Centre Europeen pour le droit, les Justice et les droits de l'homme, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status." August 23, 2023. https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/54/NGO/108

[114] USCIRF. Opening Remarks at USCIRF Hearing "Two Years after the Coup: Religious Freedom in a Contested Burma," February 8, 2023. https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/Schneck%20Remarks.pdf

[115] U.S. State Department. Press Release "The United States Condemns Reported Attacks in Chin State." October 31, 2021. https://2021-2025.state.gov/the-united-states-condemns-reported-attacks-in-chin-state/

[116] Sean K. O'Neill, Senior Bureau Official, Bureau of East Asia and the Pacific (on behalf of Secretary of State Marco Rubio). State Department. March 27, 2025. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/032725-Department-of-State-Response.pdf

with the people of Burma and support their pursuit of freedom and democracy."[117]

- **U.S. Senators Van Hollen (D-MD), Klobuchar (D-MN), Bennet (D-CO), Welch (D-VT), Gillibrand (D-NY), Kaine (D-VA), Kim (D-NJ), Merkley (D-OR), Duckworth (D-IL)** on December 5, 2025, expressed deep concern in a Letter to U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio: "The junta's ruthless campaign has devastated all of Burma's people, but religious and ethnic minorities remain especially at risk. The Rohingya continue to face genocidal violence reminiscent of 2017. Christians have endured church burnings, arrests, and worship restrictions, particularly in Chin State. Other ethnic minorities—Kachin, Karen, Karenni, and Shan—face forced displacement, military assaults, and systemic repression. These abuses demand a robust U.S. response rooted in moral leadership and strategic interest...We urge you to follow up on the State Department's 2022 Rohingya genocide determination by initiating a new atrocity determination process to assess whether the Tatmadaw has committed genocide, war crimes, or crimes against humanity against Burma's other ethnic and religious minority groups following the 2021 coup." [118]

- **Amnesty International** urged on February 8, 2024, after a Burmese military bombing of St. Peter's Baptist Church in Sagaing Region killed 17 people, including 8 children: "These attacks must be investigated as war crimes, and the UN Security Council should refer the situation in Myanmar to the International Criminal Court. The perpetrators of these crimes under international law must be brought to justice." [119]

As summarized by the quotes above and as detailed in the tables below, the Burmese military has undertaken a consistent and brutal campaign against Christian communities from 2021 until the present. Houses of worship, particularly Christian churches, have been a consistent target of Burmese military war crimes for the past five years. The incidents documented below have all been reported by BRI, previously known as CAM, and other human rights and community-based organization and reputable media. In addition to regular attacks on Christian churches and communities, many Christian schools and clinics have been forcibly closed by junta forces during this period.

The remainder of this section begins with brief descriptions of 18 incidents from February 2021 to December 2023 of Systematic Burmese Military Attacks on Christian Clergy, Community, and Churches in Table 3, and 14 incidents from January 2024 to December 2025 in Table 4. Table 5 provides overall statistics concerning destroyed Christian churches and other Christian buildings in Burma since the 2021 military coup.

[117] Senator Charles Grassley (R-IAA). Letter to BRI for April 28, 2025, Congressional Briefing, "Burma: Humanitarian Crisis and Violations of Religious Freedom and Human Rights," at Rayburn House Office Building, Room 2200, Washington, DC, organized by BRI. April 11, 2025. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Press-Release-05.01.2025.pdf

[118] U.S. Senators Van Hollen (D-MD), Klobuchar (D-MN), Bennet (D-CO), Welch (D-VT), Gillibrand (D-NY), Kaine (D-VA), Kim (D-NJ), Merkley (D-OR), Duckworth (D-IL). Congressional letter to Secretary of State Marco Rubio. December 5, 2025. https://www.vanhollen.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/letter_to_state_on_burma_human_rights.pdf

[119] Amnesty International. "Myanmar: Military air strikes that killed 17 civilians 'must be investigated as war crimes'." February 8, 2024. https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/02/myanmar-military-air-strikes-that-killed-17-civilians-must-be-investigated-as-war-crimes/

Table 3: Systematic Burmese Military Attacks on Christian Clergy, Community, and Churches *February 2021 through December 2023*
1. On May 23, 2021, artillery struck Sacred Heart Church in Loikaw, Karenni State, while civilians sheltered inside. The attack killed four and injured many others. The blast damaged the building.[120] Just 3 days later, St. Joseph's Church in the nearby town of Demoso, Karenni State, was hit by military shelling. The strike damaged the parish and forced further displacement of local residents.[121]
2. On June 6, 2021, shelling damaged Our Lady Queen of Peace Church in Daw Ngan Kha, Karenni State, along with nearby homes. Parishioners had already fled, but the building sustained significant structural harm.[122]
3. On August 7, 2021, artillery fire landed on Kanpetlet Baptist Church in Chin State amidst broader attacks in the area. Damage to the church compounded displacement and loss of community spaces.[123]
4. Between November 9 and 11, 2021, artillery rounds struck the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart in Pekon Diocese, southern Shan State. Local sources described it as at least the third time the cathedral compound had been hit since the coup. Reports indicate that the bishop's car and an ambulance were hit during the attack.[124]
5. On November 24, 2021, Thantlang Centenary Baptist Church in Chin State was among dozens of structures burned following junta shelling and raids in Thantlang town. Churches in the town were repeatedly destroyed in late 2021 and early 2022 as it was razed by junta forces.[125] [126] (See Case Study 2 and photos below.)
6. On March 12, 2022, junta troops torched Chaung Yoe Catholic Church in Taze Township, Sagaing Region.[127] The church and surrounding buildings were destroyed.[128] The column of junta forces moved to a nearby Christian village where they interrogated three nuns in their seventies from Mary Help of Christians Church. Junta forces have destroyed more than 100,000 homes in arson attacks since the coup, mostly in Sagaing Region.[129]

[120] Vatican News. "Four Catholics killed in military attack on Myanmar church." May 24, 2021. https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2021-05/myanmar-catholic-church-attack-military-four-dead.html
[121] National Catholic Reporter. "Third Catholic church in eastern Myanmar hit by military strikes." June 7, 2021. https://www.ncronline.org/news/third-catholic-church-eastern-myanmar-hit-military-strikes
[122] ibid
[123] Chin Human Rights Organization. "Reign of Terror." August-September 2021. https://www.chinhumanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Reign-of-Terror-ReportCHRO-1.pdf
[124] Catholic News Agency. "Catholic cathedral hit by artillery shelling in Burma." November 11, 2021. https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/249561/catholic-cathedral-hit-by-artillery-shelling-in-burma
[125] US Commission on International Religious Freedom. *Testimony by Zalai Za Uk Ling*. February 27, 2025. https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF_Draft_Final_CHRO.pdf
[126] Chin Association of Maryland. "List of Churches Burned in Thantlang Town of Chin State, Burma." July 6, 2023. https://burmari.org/news/
[127] Chin Association of Maryland (CAM). "The Situation of IDPs in Myanmar/Burma and Refugees in Neighboring Countries." May 2022. https://burmari.org/cam-monthly-news-update-may-2022/
[128] International Christian Concern. "Junta Sets Places of Worship on Fire in Sagaing Region." March 23, 2022. https://persecution.org/2022/03/23/junta-sets-places-of-worship-on-fire-in-sagaing-region-2/
[129] UNOCHA. "Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Thomas H. Andrews (A/80/490)." October 20, 2025. https://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/report-special-rapporteur-situation-human-rights-myanmar-thomas-h-andrews-a80490-advance-unedited-version

7. On May 24, 2022, the junta burned Johnson Memorial Baptist Church to the ground. The Church was initially attacked in September 2021 and had stood as the second largest church in Thantlang, hosting eight pastors and 2,800 members. During the same raid, Burmese military forces burned 135 homes to the ground, marking the 28th arson raid by junta forces in Thantlang.[130] (See Case Study 2 and photos below.)
8. On June 15, 2022, junta soldiers burned St. Matthew Church in Dognekhu (Loikaw Diocese), Karenni State, after occupying the area. The destruction eliminated a key community refuge for local Catholics.[131] [132] (See Case Study 1 and photos below.)
9. On November 24, 2022, the Burmese military junta razed most of Mon Hla, a Catholic-majority village in Khin-U Township, Sagaing, setting fire to hundreds of homes. Junta forces killed three civilians, including a 7-year-old child, a 40-year-old woman, and a 30-year-old man. They also destroyed about 200 of the village's 700 structures, including a church and school that had been supported through fundraising by Cardinal Charles Maung Bo of Yangon. Mon Hla is the hometown of Cardinal Bo and Archbishop Marco Tin Win of Mandalay, and is one of Sagaing's historic Bayingyi villages, whose residents trace their roots to Portuguese settlers and Catholic missionaries who arrived some 400 years ago.[133]
10. On December 24, 2022, Burmese military forces carried out a deadly attack along a highway in Hpruso Township, Karenni (Kayah) State, stopping vehicles and killing 35 civilians before burning their bodies and cars. The victims included women and children. The attack took place on Christmas Eve, underscoring its brutality. The international nongovernmental organization Save the Children later confirmed that two of its staff members were among those killed.[134] (See Case Study 3 and photos below.)
11. On January 12, 2023, the Burmese military carried out airstrikes on Lay Wah Village in Mutraw District, Karen (also known as Kayin) State, killing five civilians, among them two Christian leaders and a child. The victims included Catholic catechist Saw Re Di and Baptist pastor Saw Cha Aye, who died when bombs struck and destroyed their churches.[135]
12. From January 15 to 17, 2023, junta forces burned down a 129-year-old Catholic church in Ye-U Township of Sagaing Region.[136] The Assumption Church was built in 1894. A local resident said, "Nothing much is left of the church as they torched every major building. They even destroyed the prayer hall and the buildings for the nuns and the priest", forcing thousands to flee.[137] [138] (See Case Study 1 and photos below.)

[130] CAM. "Seventeen Months After the Military Coup in Myanmar/Burma: Escalating Persecution of Chin Christians in Chin State and Sagaing Region." June 2022. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/CRFReport-June-2022-June.22.22-compressed.pdf
[131] CAM. "Two Years After the 2021 Military Coup: The Worsening Situation of Christians Across Burma." January 2023. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/19484-2-Years-After-the-Coup-FIN.pdf
[132] UCA News. "Catholic church set ablaze in conflict-torn Myanmar." June 16, 2022. https://www.ucanews.com/news/catholic-church-set-ablaze-in-conflict-torn-myanmar/97677
[133] CAM. "Two Years After the 2021 Military Coup: The Worsening Situation of Christians Across Burma." January 2023. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/19484-2-Years-After-the-Coup-FIN.pdf
[134] Chin Association of Maryland (CAM). "Two Years After the 2021 Military Coup: The Worsening Situation of Christians Across Burma." January 2023. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/19484-2-Years-After-the-Coup-FIN.pdf
[135] CAM. "Two Years After the 2021 Military Coup: The Worsening Situation of Christians Across Burma." January 2023. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/19484-2-Years-After-the-Coup-FIN.pdf
[136] CAM. "Two Years After the 2021 Military Coup: The Worsening Situation of Christians Across Burma." January 2023. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/19484-2-Years-After-the-Coup-FIN.pdf
[137] Myanmar Now. "Military destroys historic church, more than 100 houses in Catholic village." January 17, 2023. https://myanmar-now.org/en/news/military-destroys-historic-church-more-than-100-houses-in-catholic-village/
[138] ECSPE. "Christian Persecution Intensifies as Myanmar Military Destroys Churches." June 4, 2024. https://ecspe.org/christian-persecution-intensifies-as-myanmar-military-destroys-churches/

13. On April 27, 2023, a junta airstrike on Tlanglo village in Thantlang Township killed two civilians and damaged around 30 homes and three churches.[139] Imagery confirmed major structural damage to the Presbyterian Church's south wall and roof.[140] (See Case Study 2 and photos below.)
14. On August 12, 2023, the Burmese military bombed Ramthlo village in Falam township of Chin State, injuring seven civilians and directly striking the Baptist Church. The church's roof and façade were torn apart, with debris scattered across the sanctuary.[141]
15. "On October 9, 2023, the Burmese junta air force bombed Munglai Hkyet, a village north of Laiza Kachin State, home to hundreds of displaced civilians."[142] "The attack killed 30 civilians, including women and children, and injured many others. It also destroyed a church, schools, civilian homes, and IDP shelters."[143]
16. On November 20, 2023 "the junta launched an aerial attack in Kwel Thawdaw village in Demoso Township, Karenni (Kayah) State, injuring two civilians…That same evening, the junta launched an airstrike targeting a Catholic church in Daw Rot Khu village, Demoso Township in Karenni (Kayah) State. The attack injured 11 internally displaced persons, including a social worker sheltering in the church, and damaged the church building."[144]
17. On November 26, 2023, the pastoral center in the Christ the King Cathedral compound in Loikaw, Kayah (Karenni) State, was bombed by the junta regime.[145] The complex was subsequently occupied by junta troops. Clergy and displaced families sheltering there were forced to flee.[146] (See Case Study 1 and photos below.)
18. On November 27, 2023, "A group of displaced civilians and Christian clergy and nuns were forced to flee after the junta troops took over a church in Kayah (Karenni) State capital, Loikaw."[147]

[139] CAM. "April 29: The Burmese military's air strikes on Tlanglo village in Chin State, Burma Killed Civilians and Destroyed Christian Churches and Residences." April 28, 2023. https://burmari.org/news/
[140] Myanmar Witness & the Centre for Information Resilience. "Conflict-stricken churches: The impact of conflict on church buildings across Chin State." January 2024. https://www.info-res.org/app/uploads/2024/10/186c16_391e7553bf7242fda23cd10c4be2a8bc.pdf
[141] Myanmar Witness & the Centre for Information Resilience. "Conflict-stricken churches: The impact of conflict on church buildings across Chin State." January 2024. https://www.info-res.org/app/uploads/2024/10/186c16_391e7553bf7242fda23cd10c4be2a8bc.pdf
[142] Chin Association of Maryland (CAM). "Two Years After the 2021 Military Coup: The Worsening Situation of Christians Across Burma." January 2023. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/19484-2-Years-After-the-Coup-FIN.pdf
[143] Fortify Rights. "Crashing Down on Us: Myanmar Military Junta Aerial Attacks, War Crimes and Impunity in Kachin and Karenni States." September 2025. https://www.fortifyrights.org/downloads/Crashing%20Down%20on%20Us%20-%20Fortify%20Rights%20Report.pdf
[144] Fortify Rights. "Crashing Down on Us: Myanmar Military Junta Aerial Attacks, War Crimes and Impunity in Kachin and Karenni States." September 2025. https://www.fortifyrights.org/downloads/Crashing%20Down%20on%20Us%20-%20Fortify%20Rights%20Report.pdf
[145] CAM. "Tatmadaw Occupies Cathedral Compound in Loikaw, Karenni." November 28, 2025. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/CAM-Statement-11.28.23-Karenni.docx.pdf
[146] Catholic News Agency. "Catholic cathedral complex bombed, bishop flees with refugees in worsening Myanmar civil war." November 29, 2023. https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/256136/catholic-cathedral-complex-bombed-bishop-flees-with-refugees-in-worsening-myanmar-civil-war
[147] Chin Association of Maryland. "Tatmadaw Occupies Cathedral Compound in Loikaw, Karenni." November 28, 2025. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/CAM-Statement-11.28.23-Karenni.docx.pdf

Table 4: Systematic Burmese Military Attacks on Christian Clergy, Communities, and Churches *January 2024 through December 2025*
1. On January 7, 2024, Burmese military airstrikes near St. Peter Baptist Church in Sagaing Region hit Sunday worshipers, killing 17 people including nine children and injuring more than 20.[148] Amnesty International and USCIRF both declared the attack a likely war crime.[149]
2. On February 5, 2024, junta airstrikes in Demoso Township, Karenni (Kayah) State struck a church and damaged other buildings, including a school.[150]
3. On August 15, 2024, a Burmese military airstrike hit a church in Kyeintali Town, Gwa Township of Rakhine State, killing 11 civilians, including two children, and injuring at least 11 others. Multiple local outlets reported the church was sheltering civilians at the time. Residents said that there was no fighting in the village and the "junta military deliberately targeted and bombed the church."[151]
4. On October 30–31, 2024, the junta conducted more airstrikes on Mon Hla village in Sagaing Region, damaging St. Michael's Church and other structures. Mon Hla village is the home village for Burma's most prominent Christian, Cardinal Charles Maung Bo.[152] (See description of prior attack in Table 1, 9 above.)
5. "On November 15, 2024, around 3:30 p.m., the Burmese military bombed a Kachin Baptist church in Konlaw village, Momauk Township, Kachin State. There had been no armed clashes on the ground, and the area was under junta control. More than 70 displaced people had sought refuge in the church. The attack killed nine people, including an entire family of six."[153]
6. "On November 18, 2024, the [Burmese military] attacked the [IDP] camp [in Pekon Township, of Karenni (Kayah) State] again with six bombs, killing a 46-year-old internally displaced person and destroying ten structures, including a church and multiple displaced persons' shelters. Fortify Rights spoke with three survivors who lived through both airstrikes." [154]
7. Six days after the Sacred Heart of Jesus Church in Mindat, Chin State, was designated a cathedral on January 25, 2025, a Burmese military airstrike blew off the roof and shattered its windows. The building became unusable. Civilian areas had been evacuated before the attack.[155]

[148] Chin Association of Maryland. "Airstrikes on Kanan in Burma Destroy Churches." January 16, 2025. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Statement-Kanan-Jan-16-2024.pdf
[149] Amnesty International. "Myanmar: Military air strikes that killed 17 civilians 'must be investigated as war crimes'." February 8, 2024. https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/02/myanmar-military-air-strikes-that-killed-17-civilians-must-be-investigated-as-war-crimes
[150] USCIRF. "USCIRF Country Update: Burma." October 2024.
[151]Narinja News. Junta airstrikes on Kyeintali church kill 11 including 2 children and injure 11 others. August 17 17, 2024. https://www.narinjara.com/news/detail/66c0b681e5b24527f950ac7c. And Burma News International. "Junta airstrike kills eleven, injures eleven in Kyeintali town, Rakhine State." August 19, 2024. https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/junta-airstrike-kills-eleven-injures-eleven-kyeintali-town-rakhine-state
[152] Radio Free Asia. "Church in village of Myanmar's Catholic leader bombed in junta raid." October 31, 2024. https://www.rfa.org/english/myanmar/2024/10/31/myanmar-church-christian-leader-damged
[153] Fortify Rights. "Crashing Down on Us: Myanmar Military Junta Aerial Attacks, War Crimes and Impunity in Kachin and Karenni States." September 2025. https://www.fortifyrights.org/downloads/Crashing%20Down%20on%20Us%20-%20Fortify%20Rights%20Report.pdf
[154] Fortify Rights. "Crashing Down on Us: Myanmar Military Junta Aerial Attacks, War Crimes and Impunity in Kachin and Karenni States." September 2025. https://www.fortifyrights.org/downloads/Crashing%20Down%20on%20Us%20-%20Fortify%20Rights%20Report.pdf
[155] International Christian Concern. "Military Junta in Myanmar Bombs New Catholic Cathedral." February 12, 2025. https://persecution.org/2025/02/12/military-junta-in-myanmar-bombs-new-catholic-cathedral

8. On March 3, 2025, a junta airstrike destroyed the pastoral center at St. Michael's Catholic Church in Bhamo Diocese of Kachin State. A local priest said that mass was already being celebrated outside because "it is too dangerous to be in the church, and the building has already been hit and damaged."[156]
9. On March 16, 2025, St. Patrick's Cathedral in Bhamo, Kachin State was set on fire by Burmese military forces during a military offensive, severely damaging the cathedral complex.[157][158] The assault occurred just a day before the feast of the Cathedral's patron saint. Local sources say that the attack on the cathedral took place after the Burmese military had already burned the priest's residence, diocesan offices and a high school on the same grounds.[159] (See Case Study 1 and photos below)
10. In the immediate aftermath of the magnitude 7.7 earthquake on March 28, 2025, human rights groups report that junta airstrikes "hit at least three Christian churches in the predominantly Christian Chin State during the Easter week religious period, when large crowds of Christians attend church services. On Palm Sunday, April 13, 2025, the Myoma Baptist Church in Mindat was bombed and destroyed. A few days earlier, on April 8, Christ the King Catholic Church in Falam was hit by Burmese junta airstrikes."[160] [161] (See Case Study 1 and photos below)
11. On April 18, 2025, junta jets destroyed a Christ the King Catholic Church in Falam, Chin State. The church was targeted a week before Easter and had only been constructed in November 2023.[162] (See Case Study 1 and photos below)
12. On September 17, 2025, Saint Theresa's Church in Tananukwe Village, Demoso Township, Karenni (Kayah) State (part of the Loikaw Diocese) was destroyed by a Burmese military airstrike. According to information received by the BRI from sources on the ground, fighter jets targeted the church, reducing it to ruins. Images document the site before and after the attack.[163] (See Case Study 1 and photos below)
13. On November 20, 2025, junta airstrikes destroyed the Assembly of God church in Thuklai village, Chin State. A source familiar with the situation on the ground told BRI that there was no active conflict between resistance forces and the Burmese military at the time of the bombing.[164]

[156] The Catholic Register. "Pastoral center in northern Myanmar among latest Catholic sites bombed by governing military junta." March 7, 2025. https://www.catholicregister.org/item/1846-pastoral-center-in-northern-myanmar-among-latest-catholic-sites-bombed-by-governing-military-junta
[157] BRI. BRI letter to Dr. Stephen Schneck, Chair of the USCIRF. March 31, 2025. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Letter-to-USCIRF-Chair-3.31.25.pdf
[158] Vatican News. "Myanmar: Fire set by military devastates Cathedral of Banmaw." March 18, 2025. https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2025-03/myanmar-fire-set-by-military-devastates-cathedral-of-banmaw.html
[159] Vatican News. "Myanmar: Fire set by military devastates Cathedral of Banmaw." https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2025-03/myanmar-fire-set-by-military-devastates-cathedral-of-banmaw.html
[160] Burma Research Institute (BRI). "Airstrikes Destroyed the Catholic Church in Chin State, Burma." April 18, 2025. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Falam-Christ-the-King-Catholic-Church.pdf
[161] Fortify Rights. "Myanmar Junta Bombs Civilians During Ceasefire, Hits Earthquake Zones." May 2, 2025. https://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/WO2505/S00035/myanmar-junta-bombs-civilians-during-ceasefire-hits-earthquake-zones.htm
[162] BRI. "Airstrikes Destroyed the Catholic Church in Chin State, Burma." April 18, 2025. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Falam-Christ-the-King-Catholic-Church.pdf
[163] BRI. "Burma Research Institute Releases the Statement of President Zo Tum Hmung at the IRF Roundtable with U.S. Government." October 3, 2025. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/PRESS-RELEASE-Remarks-by-ZTHmung-IRF-Roundtable-with-US-Govt-9.29.2025.pdf
[164] BRI. "Burma Research Institute Releases the Remarks of President Zo Tum Hmung at the IRF Roundtable with the U.S. Government." December 4, 2025. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/PRESS-RELEASE-Remarks-by-ZTHmung-IRF-Roundtable-Given-on-Nov-25-2025.pdf

14. In early December 2025, the Burmese military ordered that all Christian churches celebrate Christmas early to make way for the junta's elections, [165] which Tom Andrews, UN Special Rapporteur for Burma, describes as illegitimate.[166] (See Case Study 3 and photo below)

Table 5 below presents data from several reliable sources concerning these egregious attacks on churches and church related building. Sources include the Ministry of Human Rights of the National Unity Government (MOHR/NUG), the USCIRF, and Open Doors. MOHR/NUG provided its data about damaged and destroyed Christian churches to BRI. It did not include data for 2021 and 2022.To estimate the total number for 2021-2025, BRI added together the figures USCIRF reported for 2021, 2022, 2023—which total 220--with the MOHR/NUG figures for 2024 and 2025—which total 123. Thus, BRI estimates the total number of churches and related buildings destroyed since the coup to be 343.

Table 5: Damaged and Destroyed Christian Churches and Christian Buildings by the Burmese Military 2021-2025

Source	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Subtotal 2021-2023	Subtotal 2024-2025	Total 2021-2025
MOHR/NUG[167]			67	88	35	67	123	**190**
USCIRF[168]	220					220		**220**
Open Doors[169]		23	100	32	80	123	112	**235**
MOHR/NUG, USCIRF[170]								**343**

[165] CSW. "Military orders Christians to celebrate Christmas early, forcibly conscripts reverend in lead-up to sham elections." December 12, 2025. https://www.csw.org.uk/2025/12/12/press/6693/article.htm

[166] E.g., UNOCHR Press Release: "UN Expert: First Round of Voting in Myanmar Exposes junta as illegitimate." January 8, 2026. ("By all measures, this is not a free, fair nor legitimate election."). https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2026/01/un-expert-first-round-voting-myanmar-exposes-junta-orchestrated-election

[167] Data shared with BRI by the Ministry of Human Rights of the National Unity Government of Myanmar (MOHR/NUG]. Note that MOHR/NUG did not provide data for 2021 and 2022.

[168] USCIRF Burma Update —October 2024, page 3. https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2024-10/2024%20Burma%20Country%20Update.pdf

[169] Open Doors, Full Country Dossier—Myanmar 2023, p 48, https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/persecution/countries/myanmar/ and Open Doors, World Wide List 2025, Myanmar Persecution Dynamics Dossier, p 29. https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-archive/ (press Myanmar Persecution Dynamics Dossier link).

[170] USCIRF estimates that 220 Churches and Christian buildings were damaged or destroyed from 2023-25. USCIRF Burma Update —October 2024, page 3. https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2024-10/2024%20Burma%20Country%20Update.pdf To reach the 2021-2024 estimate of 343, BRI added the USCIRF figure of 220 for 2021-23, with the 123 reported to BRI by MOHR/NUG for 2024-25

Table 6 below describes seven Christian leaders who have been murdered or imprisoned for their faith since 2021. Table 7 provides overall statistics for Christians who have been murdered or imprisoned since 2021, as documented by Open Doors.

Table 6: Seven Christian Leaders Murdered or Imprisoned for their Beliefs

In addition to aerial attacks on Christian churches and communities, faith leaders report to BRI that they face strict limitations in their ability to worship and provide pastoral care to their congregations. Clergy have also been targeted by the Burmese military regime with many experiencing arrest, intimidation, assault, and assassination. The select incidents below have been reported by BRI/CAM or by other human rights and community organizations.

Imprisonment of Reverend Dr. Hkalam Samson: Reverend Samson is a prominent Kachin Baptist pastor who has served as the president of the Kachin Baptist Convention. He has been an outspoken proponent of human rights. He was arrested by the Burmese military while at the Mandalay airport on December 5, 2022, and sentenced to six years in prison. He was released on April 1, 2024, but re-arrested on the same day. The Burmese military released him on July 23, 2024, but imposed travel restrictions on him and banned him from preaching at IDP camps.[171] Previously, in 2019, Samson was threatened with persecution by the Tatmadaw in 2019 after meeting with U.S. President Donald Trump to discuss religious freedom in Burma.[172] [173]

Reverend Dr. Hkalam Samson (Photo: BRI source anonymous for security reasons)

Informing President Trump about religious persecution in Burma (Photo: Global Christian Relief)

Murder of Pastor Cung Biak Hum: The 31-year-old Chin pastor was murdered by the Burmese military on September 18, 2021. He was the pastor of Thantlang Centenary Baptist Church and was killed during a junta offensive on Thantlang Town as the pastor attempted to organize community members to extinguish fires started by the military. Soldiers cut off his finger and stole his wedding

[171] USCIRF Hearing. Remarks by Kachin Christian leader, Sin Wa. February 27, 2025. https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/Final%20Draft%20of%20Testimony%20for%20USCIRF_Kachin%20Christian%20Pastor.pdf
[172] USCIRF. "Hkalam Samson." https://www.uscirf.gov/religious-prisoners-conscience/forb-victims-database/hkalam-samson
[173] Global Christian Relief. "Myanmar pastor who called out abuses to Trump escapes criminal prosecution." September 11, 2019. https://globalchristianrelief.org/stories/myanmar-drops-complaint-against-pastor-who-called-out-abuses-to-trump/

ring during the incident.[174] [175] [176] [177] [178] (see Pastor Cung Biak Hum's photo on page 3 above).

Two pastors shot in Kachin State. In April 2024, masked gunmen entered St. Patrick's Church in Monyin Township during a service and shot **Father Paul Khwi Shane Aung**. He survived but was severely wounded.[179] The assailants fled and were not identified.[180] The shooting came just weeks after **Reverend Nammye Hkun Jaw Li**, a pastor from the Kachin Baptist Convention, was fatally shot nearby. The affiliation of the killers remains unknown, but the Kachin Baptist pastor had been a strong voice for the people in Kachin State. A proponent of free speech, he led an important anti-drug organization in the opium-ravaged region.[181]

Reverend Om Kee found dead after junta arrest. Reverend Om Kee is a Chin Christian pastor who was arrested at his home in Bakon Village, Kanpetlet Township, and killed by junta police. His body, riddled with gunshot wounds, was found on the side of the road two days later on December 13, 2021.[182] [183] [184]

Reverend Thian Lian Sang imprisoned: Reverend Thian Lian Sang is the pastor of Falam Baptist Church in Falam, Chin State. He was arrested by the Burmese military junta on September 16, 2021, in front of his house. Junta forces subsequently pillaged his house. Reverend Sang remains in Obo Prison in Mandalay.[185]

[174] Chin Association of Maryland (CAM). "Chin Association of Maryland, demands justice for those who killed Pu Ral Tu, Pu Hram Cung and Pastor Cung Biak Hum." September 30, 2021. https://burmari.org/2021/09/30/cam-chin-association-of-maryland-inc-demands-justice-for-those-who-killed-pu-ral-tu-pu-hram-cung-and-pastor-cung-biak-hum
[175] CAM. "Seventeen Months After the Military Coup in Myanmar/Burma: Escalating Persecution of Chin Christians in Chin State and Sagaing Region." June 2022. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/CRFReport-June-2022-June.22.22-compressed.pdf
[176] CAM. "Two Years After the 2021 Military Coup: The Worsening Situation of Christians Across Burma." January 2023. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/19484-2-Years-After-the-Coup-FIN.pdf
[177] Zo Tum Hmung. "U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom Hearing: Two Years after the Coup: Religious Freedom in a Contested Burma." February 8, 2023. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/U.S.-Commission-on-International-Religious-Freedome-Hearing-02.08.2023.pdf
[178] BRI. Letter to Secretary Marco Rubio "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." March 7, 2025. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Letter-to-Secretary-Marco-Rubio-on-Burma.pdf
[179] USCIRF Hearing. Remarks by Kachin Christian leader, Sin Wa. February 27, 2025. https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/Final%20Draft%20of%20Testimony%20for%20USCIRF_Kachin%20Christian%20Pastor.pdf
[180] Catholic News Agency. "Myanmar priest shot while celebrating Mass amid violent conflict." April 12, 2024. https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/257370/myanmar-priest-shot-while-celebrating-mass-amid-violent-conflict
[181] UCA News. "Myanmar Baptist pastor shot dead, attackers' identity unclear." March 20, 2024. https://www.ucanews.com/news/myanmar-baptist-pastor-shot-dead-attackers-identity-unclear/104509
[182] CAM. "Statement on the death of Christian Pastor Om Kui in Burma." December 15, 2021. https://burmari.org/2021/12/15/statement-on-the-death-of-christian-pastor-om-kui-in-burma/
[183] CAM. "Seventeen Months After the Military Coup in Myanmar/Burma: Escalating Persecution of Chin Christians in Chin State and Sagaing Region." June 2022. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/CRFReport-June-2022-June.22.22-compressed.pdf
[184] CAM. "Two Years After the 2021 Military Coup: The Worsening Situation of Christians Across Burma." January 2023. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/19484-2-Years-After-the-Coup-FIN.pdf
[185] CAM. "Seventeen Months After the Military Coup in Myanmar/Burma: Escalating Persecution of Chin Christians in Chin State and Sagaing Region." June 2022. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/CRFReport-June-2022-June.22.22-compressed.pdf

Imprisonment of Salai Ayla Lone Wai: Salai Ayla Lone Wai is an ethnic Chin pastor who was arrested by Burma's military authorities on December 28, 2021, after returning from a Christmas prayer service in Bago Region. Authorities accused him of links to resistance forces, held him incommunicado, and interrogated him at a battalion base in Pyay. On October 21, 2022, he was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment. The case of Salai Ayla Lone Wai and Reverend Thiang Lian Sang were raised by the Stephen Schneck, USCIRF Commissioner during BRI's Congressional Briefing on December 16, 2025. Commissioner Schneck said, "We remain concerned for other religious prisoners such as Salai Ayla Lone Wai and Thian Lian Sang—both of whom are featured on our Victim's List—whose trumped-up charges imposed by the junta has led to years of imprisonment and possible torture. We call for their unconditional release."[186] See these victims' names on the USCIRF website.[187]

Frank R. Wolf Freedom of Religion or Belief Victim List

Thian Lian San is a Chin Pastor imprisoned by the Tatmadaw for his religious leadership role on September 2021. (Placed on the list February 21, 2021.)

Salai Ayla Lone Wai imprisoned by the Tatmadaw for religious activity, leadership and ethnoreligious identity after arrest on December 28, 2021. (Placed on the list January 23, 2025.)

Life Imprisonment of Biak Mawi Sung: A former pastor Biak Mawi Sung, a 45-year-old Christian from Hakha in Chin State, was arrested by the Burmese military on May 22, 2023, while traveling to Mandalay for a medical checkup, and was later sentenced to life imprisonment. She was accused of providing financial support to the Chinland Defense Force – Hakha. Her trial took place under martial law in Chin State, without proper legal procedures. She escaped prison in Hakha and is currently seeking refuge. Pastor Sung, a mother of two children, served multiple churches and has cared extensively for displaced people.[188]

[186] Stephen Schneck, USCRIF Commissioner. Statement at Congressional Briefing "U.S. Policy in Burma: Opportunities and Challenges," Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C., organized by BRI. December 16, 2025. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Schneck-USCIRF-Remarks-for-BRI-Burma-Briefing-on-US-Policy-Held-on-Dec-16-2025.pdf;
[187] USCIRF. "Frank R Wolf Victim's List." https://www.uscirf.gov/victim-search?search=&f%5B0%5D=ethnicity%3AChin
[188] CAM. "Life Imprisonment for Chin Pastor Biak Mawi Sung." November 17, 2023. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/CAM-Statement-11.17.23-Pastor-Sung.docx.pdf

Table 7 summarizes data from Open Doors about the killing and imprisonment of Christians since the February 2021 military coup. Also, AAPP reports that the Tatmadaw has killed 11 Christian pastors and arrested 21 pastors of whom 13 are still detained.[189]

Table 7: Summary of Christians Killed and/or Imprisoned for Faith-related Reasons since 2022

Years	Source	Killed	Imprisoned
2021	Open Doors	No data	No data
2022	Open Doors[190]	13	16
2023	Open Doors[191]	42	100
2024	Open Doors[192]	34	18
2025	Open Doors[193]	60	100
Total	Open Doors	**149**	**218**

This section of the report concludes below with three case studies focusing on patterns of Tatmadaw behavior as they seriously violate Christians' religious freedom.

[189] Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) directly provided BRI confirmation of these statistcs regarding pastors in Burma, as of December 31, 2025.
[190] Open Doors. Full Country Dossier—Myanmar 2023, p 48. https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/persecution/countries/myanmar/
[191] Open Doors, Full Country Dossier—Myanmar 2023, p 48. https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/persecution/countries/myanmar/
[192] Open Doors, World Wide List 2025, Myanmar Persecution Dynamics Dossier. p 29. https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-archive/ (press Myanmar Persecution Dynamics Dossier link).
[193] Open Doors, World Wide List 2025, Myanmar Persecution Dynamics Dossier, p 29. https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-archive/ (press Myanmar Persecution Dynamics Dossier link).

Case Study 1: Burmese military targeted and destroyed Catholic churches in Kachin, Karenni (Kayah), and Sagaing

Across Karenni (Kayah) State, the Burmese military has repeatedly attacked Catholic sites that function as both spiritual centers and civilian sanctuaries. In Loikaw, fighting in November 2023 spilled into the Christ the King Cathedral compound, which was then sheltering large numbers of displaced people. BRI reports indicate that heavy weapons and air power were used on the cathedral area, which became a focal point of military pressure. That pattern continued in Demoso Township when fighter jets bombed and destroyed Saint Theresa's Church in Tananukwe Village on September 17, 2025. BRI documented the strike via sources on the ground who shared before and after imagery of the ruined church. The Burmese military conducted other similar operations in Karenni State to destroy Mary Queen of Peace Catholic Church in Dounganka and St. Matthews Catholic Church in Dawnyaykhu in Phruso Township, on June 6, 2021, and June 15, 2022, respectively.[194][195][196]

On June 15, 2022, the Burmese military destroyed St. Matthews Catholic Church, Karenni (Kayah) State. (Photos: BRI/CAM source, anonymous for security reasons)

[194] National Catholic Reporter. June 7, 2021.Third Catholic Church in Myanmar hit by military strikes. https://www.ncronline.org/news/third-catholic-church-eastern-myanmar-hit-military-strikes

[195] Chin Association of Maryland. "2023 Annual Report: The Persecution of Christians in Burma." January 2024. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/20332-Annual-Report-Persecution.pdf

[196] Burma Research Institute. "Burma Research Institute Releases the Statement of President Zo Tum Hmung at the IRF Roundtable with U.S. Government." October 3, 2025. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/PRESS-RELEASE-Remarks-by-ZTHmung-IRF-Roundtable-with-US-Govt-9.29.2025.pdf

Photos before and after the Tatmadaw bombed St. Theresa's Church in early December 2025 in Tananukwe Village, Demoso Township in Karenni State. (Photos: BRI/CAM source, anonymous for security rreason)s

At 10 a.m., September 17, 2025, jet fighters bombed St. Theresa's Church in Tananukwe Village, Demoso Township, in Loikaw Diocese, Karenni State. BRI's anonymous source said most had already fled the town, and the Tatmadaw attacked to frighten people into not retuurning for the elections beginning in December.[197]

On June 6, 2021, the Tatmadaw destroyed Mary Queen of Peace Catholic Church, Karenni State. (Photos: BRI/CAM source, anonymous for security reasons)

In Kachin State, the assault on the Catholic community in the Banmaw Diocese has included both bombardment and arson. For example, BRI source on the ground report that junta forces set fire to St. Patrick's Cathedral in Banmaw on March 16, 2025, framing it as part of a broader campaign targeting Christians.[198]

[197]BRI received the story and photo from a source that was anonymous for security reasons.
[198] BRI. Letter to Dr. Stephen Schneck, USCIRF Chair. March 31, 2025. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Letter-to-USCIRF-Chair-3.31.25.pdf (a source, anonymous for security reasons, provided this information to BRI)

On March 16, 2025, St. Patrick's Cathedral, Banmaw, Kachin State (Photos: BRI/CAM source, anonymous for security reason)

On January 14, 2023, the Tatmadaw destroyed the Church of Our Lady of the Assumption, Sagaing Region (Photos: BRI/CAM source, anonymous for security reasons)

Meanwhile in Sagaing Region, a similar scorched-earth approach has hit historic Catholic institutions. In January 2023, soldiers burned the Church of Our Lady of the Assumption in Chan Thar, also torching a nearby convent and driving mass displacement. Separate reporting from BRI sources on the ground indicate that troops used the church as a camp before burning down the 129-year-old Catholic church.[199]

Pope Francis said shortly after this church was bombed, "My thoughts, with pain, go in particular to Myanmar, where the church of Our Lady of the Assumption in the village of Chan Thar, one of the oldest and most important places of worship in the country, was set on fire and destroyed," during the Angelus prayer in the Vatican."[200]

[199] Chin Association of Maryland. "Two Years After the 2021 Military Coup: The Worsening Situation of Christians Across Burma." January 2023. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/19484-2-Years-After-the-Coup-FIN.pdf
[200] LIC/S.news. Pope Francis appeals for prayers for 'forgiveness, love, and peace' in Myanmar. January 23, 2023.

Case Study 2: Tatmadaw burned down and destroyed Thantlang Town and 21 of its 22 Churches

Thantlang Town in Chin State has been systematically devastated by the Burmese military since the 2021 coup. According to extensive data collection, BRI can confirm that the Tatmadaw destroyed 21 of the town's 22 churches, leaving only Olive Baptist Church standing. The destroyed churches span nearly every denomination represented in town (see list below). Zo Tum Hmung, BRI President and CEO, grew up in a village near Thantlang Town and frequently attended church services there.

The attack on religious freedom has gone hand-in-hand with the destruction of civilian infrastructure and mass displacement. The entire population of about 10,000 people has been forced to flee, with many escaping toward the border and some taking refuge in India's Mizoram State. One emblematic case is Thantlang Baptist Church, the town's largest congregation with over 3,000 members, which was set on fire in October 2021 and later demolished into rubble in June 2022. Another major church, Johnson Memorial Baptist Church, was burned down in May 2022. Its members have been displaced inside Burma and across the border in Mizoram.[201]

On September 13, 2024, Christian churches and community organizations, including BRI (then CAM), sent a letter urging then President Joseph Biden to determine that the Tatmadaw's atrocities against Christians in Burma constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes.

The letter specifically describes the burning of Thantlang Town and churches, "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."[202]

https://www.licas.news/2023/01/23/pope-francis-appeals-for-prayers-for-forgiveness-love-and-peace-in-myanmar/

[201] Chin Association of Maryland (CAM). "Seventeen Months After the Military Coup in Myanmar/Burma: Escalating Persecution of Chin Christians in Chin State and Sagaing Region." June 2022. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/CRFReport-June-2022-June.22.22-compressed.pdf

[202] CAM. Letter to President Joseph Biden from Churches and NGOs, including BRI. September 13, 2024. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Letter-to-the-President-Biden-Sept.13.2024.pdf

The following churches have been destroyed by the Burmese military in Thantlang:[203]

1. Thantlang Baptist Church
2. Presbyterian Church of Myanmar
3. Johnson Memorial Baptist Church
4. Church on the Rock
5. Thantlang Centenary Baptist Church
6. Seventh Day Adventist
7. Believer Church of Myanmar
8. Evangelical Free Methodist Church
9. Assembly of God Myanmar
10. United Pentecostal Church
11. Church of Jesus Christ
12. Mara Evangelical Church
13. Church of Jesus Christ
14. St. Nicholas Catholic Church
15. The Church
16. Evangelical Holiness Church
17. Sabbath
18. Gospel Baptist Church
19. Mara Baptist Church
20. Methodist Church
21. Shalom Baptist Church

Burmese military's scorched earth attacks on Thantlang began September 18, 2021, when they destroyed 18 properties and 2 hotels. Attacks continued until the area was leveled with 21 of 22 Churches destroyed. (Photo: BRI/CAM sources, anonymous for

On October 29, 2021, heavy shelling by the Burmese military destroyed 164 buildings including two hotels, two churches –Church on the Rock and Presbyterian church—and over 90 houses. Attacks continued over the next year that levelled the town and destroyed 21 of 22 Thantlang churches.[204]

[203] CAM. "List of Churches Burned in Thantlang Town of Chin State, Burma." July 6, 2023. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Statements-2.pdf

[204] CAM. After the 2021 Military Coup in Myanmar/Burma: Challenges for Internally Displaced People and Refugees. October 2021. Page 28. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/After-the-2021-Military-Coup-in-MyanmarBurma.pdf

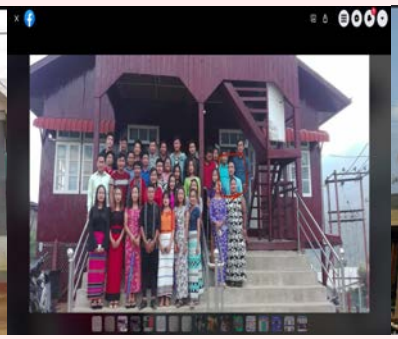
Johnson Memorial Baptist Church before and after the Burmese military destroyed it on May 24, 2022
(Photos: BRI/CAM sources, anonymous for security reasons)

Thantlang Baptist Church before and after the Burmese military burned it down on June 9, 2022
(Photo: BRI/CAM sources, anonymous for security reasons)

Assembly of God before and after attacks. *Believers Church before and after attacks.*
(Photos: BRI/CAM source, anonymous for security reasons)

The photos below are from BRI/CAM sources, anonymous for security reasons. They come from before the Burmese military attacks in 2021 and 2022. BRI/CAM has received confirmation that all of these churches are among the 21 of 22 Thantlang churches that have been destroyed by the Burmese military. Note that Pastor Cung Biak Hum, who was killed by the Burmese military, is circled in red in the photo of Centennial Baptist Church.

United Pentecostal Church



Centennial Baptist Church

Methodist Church

Presbyterian Church

Church on the Rock

Association of Baptist Churches of Thantlang

Case Study 3: Burmese military airstrikes destroyed churches on major Christian holy days: Christmas, Easter, and Palm Sunday

Christmas: On December 25, 2025, the Burmese military returned to Mindat Town in Chin State. Fighter jets destroyed seven houses in the east ward. Credible sources, anonymous for security reasons, informed BRI that the Burmese military likely targeted those houses believing that people had gathered there to celebrate Christmas.[205]

Two houses in Mindat Town, Chin State, destroyed by Burmese military airstrikes Christmas 2025 (Photos: BRI source, anonymous for security reasons)

On December 3, 2025, Kachin News Groups reported that the Burmese military in Kachin State ordered churches to hold Christmas celebrations at least 20 days early to avoid interfering with the December 28, 2025, election. [206]

Site where the bodies were discovered (Photo: Independent Catholic News)

[205] Burma Research Institute (BRI). Statement, On Christmas Day, the Burmese military airstrike destroyed 7 houses in Mindat Town, Chin State. December 31, 2015. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Christmas-Day-Mindat-town-bombing-Statement-Dec-31-2025.pdf

[206] Kachin News Group. The military regime has ordered that Christmas celebrations be held early in Kachin." December 5, 2025. (translated from Burmese by BRI). https://burmese.kachinnews.com/2025/12/05/zz1-324/

On Christmas Eve, December 24, 2021, the Burmese military killed at least 35 people near Mo So Village in Hprusotow Township, in Karenni (Kayah) State, including four children and two Save the Children staff members. [207]

Cardinal Charles Maung Bo, Archbishop of Yangon, responded to the Christmas eve 2021 massacre in Karenni (Kayah) State: "The fact that the bodies of those killed, burned and mutilated were found on Christmas Day makes this appalling tragedy even more poignant and sickening." [208] The U.S. Embassy in Burma said they were "appalled by the barbaric attack" and "will continue to press for accountability."[209] Then Secretary of State Antony Blinken later responded, saying, "On December 24th, 2021, the [Burmese] military massacred at least 35 people, including women, children, two humanitarian aid workers in Kayah [Karenni] State, and then burned their bodies. According to a doctor who examined the bodies, almost every victim's skull was fractured."[210]

Palm Sunday On Palm Sunday, April 13, 2025, around 4 pm Myanmar Time, the Burmese military bombed Mindat Town in Chin State, destroying the Mindat Baptist Church.[211]

Rev. Dr. Roy Medley, Executive Director of Burma Advocacy Group and General Secretary Emeritus of the American Baptist Churches, said the timing was deliberate: "Their choice of Palm Sunday—the beginning of the holiest week for Christians—was purposeful and part of their ongoing attempt to destroy the Christian faith in Burma."[212]

Mindat Baptist Church, Mindat, Chin State, before (left) and after (center) Tatmadaw airstrike. (Photo: Mindat Baptist Church Facebook. April 13, 2025) Christ the King Church, Falam, Chin State (right) after Tatmadaw airstrikes. (Photo: RVA Hakha Chin Facebook, April 17, 2025)

[207] Independent Catholic News. Myanmar: Army burns alive at least 35 civilians. December 24, 2021. https://www.indcatholicnews.com/news/43760
[208] Cardinal Charles Maung Bo. Statement. 26th December 2021. https://www.catholicarchdioceseofyangon.com/newview.php?id=172
[209] U.S. Embassy. Twitter. https://x.com/usembassyburma/status/1475061469771276294?s=27
[210] Secretary of State Antony Blinken. State Department. Secretary Antony J. Blinken on the Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity in Burma. March 21, 2022. https://2021-2025.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-at-the-united-states-holocaust-memorial-museum/
[211] Burma Research Institute. "Burmese Military's Airstrikes Destroyed Mindat Baptist Church in Chin State, Burma on Palm Sunday." April 15, 2025. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Mindat-Baptist-Church-April-15-2025.pdf
[212] Baptist Standard. "Palm Sunday airstrikes hit Ukraine, Myanmar and Gaza". April 14, 2025. https://baptiststandard.com/news/world/palm-sunday-airstrikes-hit-ukraine-myanmar-and-gaza/

Easter Sunday: On April 8, 2025, Burmese military airstrikes destroyed Christ the King Catholic Church in Falam, Chin State, less than two weeks before Easter on April 20. All church members were displaced.[213] "They destroyed the walls of the church, but not the faith. Our faith remains strong; the people of God in Falam continue to believe and hope. The faithful will rebuild the Church of Christ the King; everyone will do their part," said Bishop Lucius Hre Kung Diocese of Hakha, during a pastoral visit to the ruins of Christ the King.[214]

Christ the King Church, Falam, Chin State (Photos: RVA Hakha Chin Facebook. April 17, 2025)

"They destroyed the walls of the church, but not the faith"

-Bishop Lucius Hre Kung

[213] Burma Research Institute. "Airstrikes Destroyed the Catholic Church in Chin State, Burma." April 18, 2025. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Falam-Christ-the-King-Catholic-Church.pdf
[214] Vatican News. "Airstrikes destroy Myanmar church, but bishop says faith remains unbroken." April 14, 2025. https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2025-08/myanmar-church-destroyed-chin-state-bishop-faith.html

XI. THE BURMESE MILITARY'S INTERNATIONAL CRIMES AGAINST CHRISTIANS

International humanitarian law prohibits attacks on civilians and on buildings dedicated to religion. In non-international armed conflict, it is a war crime to intentionally direct attacks against buildings dedicated to religion that are not military objectives. The same law prohibits indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks.[215] The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court codifies these prohibitions. Article 8(2)(e)(iv) addresses attacks on buildings dedicated to religion in non-international armed conflicts. Other provisions criminalize intentionally directing attacks against civilians.[216]

The evidence summarized above includes airstrikes and shelling that damaged or destroyed churches. It also includes killings of clergy and harassment of Christian congregations. Where churches were not used for military purposes, their targeting is unlawful. There is no evidence that the attacks listed above targeted religious buildings that were being used for military purposes. Multiple, repeated strikes on churches across Chin, Karenni, Karen, and Kachin States, and Sagaing Region show a widespread practice that is systematic in nature. The destruction of protected sites and the killing of religious workers support a finding that war crimes were committed.[217]

Crimes against humanity are defined as acts, such as murder and persecution, committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack against a civilian population[218]. Persecution includes severe deprivation of fundamental rights on religious grounds.[219] The record reflects murder, forcible displacement, and persecution of civilians in Christian areas. In many incidents, attacks on churches coincided with attacks on homes and civilian shelters. The cumulative pattern indicates a systematic attack on civilian populations in those areas.

International humanitarian law also protects civilians from forced displacement.[220] The arbitrary displacement of civilians for reasons related to the conflict is prohibited. Documented mass displacement from Christian areas supports a finding of serious violations. U.S. law and policy reinforce this assessment. Under the IRF Act, Burma is designated a Country of Particular Concern for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. USCIRF recommends targeted sanctions and accountability measures for egregious violations.

Taken together, the legal standards and the facts meet threshold elements. In a non-international armed conflict like the one in Burma, churches are protected objectives; attacks on protected objects and civilians, when intentional or indiscriminate, constitute war crimes.[221] When murder, forcible transfer, and persecution on religious grounds occur as part of a widespread or systematic attack on civilians, they are crimes against humanity.[222] The documented incidents and patterns provide a reasonable basis to make such a claim.

On March 7, 2025, U.S.-based religious and community organizations, including BRI, sent a letter to U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio urging him 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

[215] International Committee of the Red Cross. Customary International Humanitarian Law - Rules 1, 7 and 38. https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/customary-ihl/v1
[216] Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. https://legal.un.org/icc/statute/99_corr/cstatute.htm
[217] Rome Statute, Art. 8(2)(e)(iv)
[218] Rome Statute, Article 7
[219] Rome Statute, Article 7(1)(h)
[220] UN Human Rights Instruments. "Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 and Relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (Protocol II)." June 8, 1977. https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/protocol-additional-geneva-conventions-12-august-1949-and-0
[221] Rome Statute Article 8(2)(e)(iv) and Customary IHL Rules 11–12 & 14
[222] Rome Statute Art. 7 and ICC Elements of Crimes

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." On March 27, 2025, BRI received an encouraging response from Sean K. O'Neill, Senior Bureau Official, on behalf of Secretary of State Rubio. In its response, the State Department condemned the atrocities committed by the military regime against ethnic and religious minorities in Burma, including Christians and committed to working with us "to support the people of Burma." [223]

"Religious Freedom is a fundamental human right for all human beings. Unfortunately, the people of Burma – especially religious minorities in Burma such as Christians, Hindus, and Muslims – have lost this very basic human right for several decades under successive military regimes. I know it personally, as a Kachin ethnic and a Christian. The majority of Buddhists were not spared either. Successive military regimes have brutally repressed the Buddhists and the monks who do not share the political stands and goals of the military dictators."

--Duwa Lashi La, Acting President of the National Unity Government at a Congressional briefing organized by BRI on February 3, 2025

XII. HUMANITARIAN CONSEQUENCES OF PERSECUTION AND SEVERE VIOLATIONS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Attacks on Christian clergy, communities, and churches have direct human costs. Families lose grandparents, parents, children, uncles, aunts, cousins, pastors, friends, and neighbors. Survivors endure loss, deprivation, trauma, and fear. Communities lose safe spaces and access to schools, clinics, and to humanitarian assistance. In many cases, Burmese military attacks displace whole communities, forcing them to flee into forests, caves, informal sites, or across borders into India or Thailand or further on to Malaysia.

Displacement is a central military strategy for the Burmese military regime. It is no surprise, then, that Burma is the site of one of the worst displacement crises on earth. According to UNHCR, as of December 29, 2025, an estimated 3,394,900 people from Burma have been internally displaced (IDP) since the coup, making the total number of pre-coup and post-coup IDPs 3,639,400. [224] As mentioned above, the estimated percentage of the national population of Burma that is internally displaced is 7%, and the percentage of displacement in states and regions where the Tatmadaw has been persecuting and severely violating the religious freedom of Christians is often much higher than the national average. For example, in Karenni State, the estimated percentage of the state population that is internally displaced is over 49%; in Sagaing Region, over 24%; in Chin State, over 20%, in Karen State over 16%; and in Kachin State over 14%.[225] BRI believes that with

[223] See BRI, et al. Letter to Secretary of State Marco Rubio from U.S. Churches and organizations coordinated, including BRI, (March 7, 2025): https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Letter-to-Secretary-Marco-Rubio-on-Burma.pdf; Secretary of State Marco Rubio. Letter to Religious and Community Organizations, including BRI, responding to March 7, 2025, Letter from BRI, et al, to Secretary Rubio. March 27, 2025. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/032725-Department-of-State-Response.pdf

[224] UNHCR. Map: Number [Internally] Displaced since the February 2021 coup who remain displaced. December 29, 2025. https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/120459

[225] Myanmar Ministry of Immigration and Population. "Census Atlas Myanmar: The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census." p 10. https://myanmar.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/MyanmarCensusAtlas_lowres.pdf (provides estimates of population of each state or region); and UNHCR. Map: Number Displaced [inside Burma] since the February 2021 coup who remain displaced. December 29, 2025.

updated state population information, the percentages of internally displaced persons overall and in individual state and regions may show the percentage to be even higher.

As detailed in Table 9 below, as of November 30, 2025, the number of refugees from Burma fleeing to six neighboring countries, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, and Thailand, since the February 2021 coup is 283,420. Combined with the refugees from Burma in these countries from before the coup, 1,592,991 are displaced as refugees across borders. The total number of IDPs (as of December 29, 2025) and refugees from Burma (as of November 30, 2025) has risen to more that 5,232,391.[226]

Table 8: Total IDPs[227] and Refugees[228] from Burma

Forcibly Displaced	Pre-2021 military coup	2021-2025	Total
Refugees	1,319,571	283,420	1,592,991
IDPs	244,500	3,394,900	3,639,400
TOTAL	1,564,071	3,678,320	5,232,391

BRI has conducted multiple missions to the India-Burma border to assess the consequences of systematic persecution of Christian communities from Chin State, including the scale of displacement. After its latest trip, it "estimated 33,709 people from Burma, including 12,877 children, have taken refuge in neighboring Mizoram State, India" and "47,200 internally displaced persons (IDP) remain in Chin State, Burma."[229] Many seeking refuge in Mizoram are school-age children with little access to education and other basic services.

Many of the internally displaced persons since the coup have been from western Burma, including 1,300,300 from Sagaing; 100,300 from Chin State; 234,900 from Rakhine State; 165,600 from Kachin State; and 265,400 from Magway Region. In sum, roughly 1,866,500 persons have been displaced in the six states in western Burma bordering or near India--Kachin, Chin, Rakhine, Sagaing, and Magway. This significantly exceeds the post-coup displacement of 1,071,000 persons in the six states along the Thai-Burma border.[230] There are now more than 1 million people displaced along Burma's eastern border with Thailand, in addition to 57,300 refugees since the coup for a total of 138,200 refugees from Burma in Thailand. Displacement in Burma has sparked regular episodic refugee flows into Thailand since the 2021 coup.[231]

https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/120459 (the chart within the IDP map shows total IDPs per state or region)

[226] UNHCR. "Operational Data Portal: Myanmar Situation." November 30, 2025. https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/myanmar

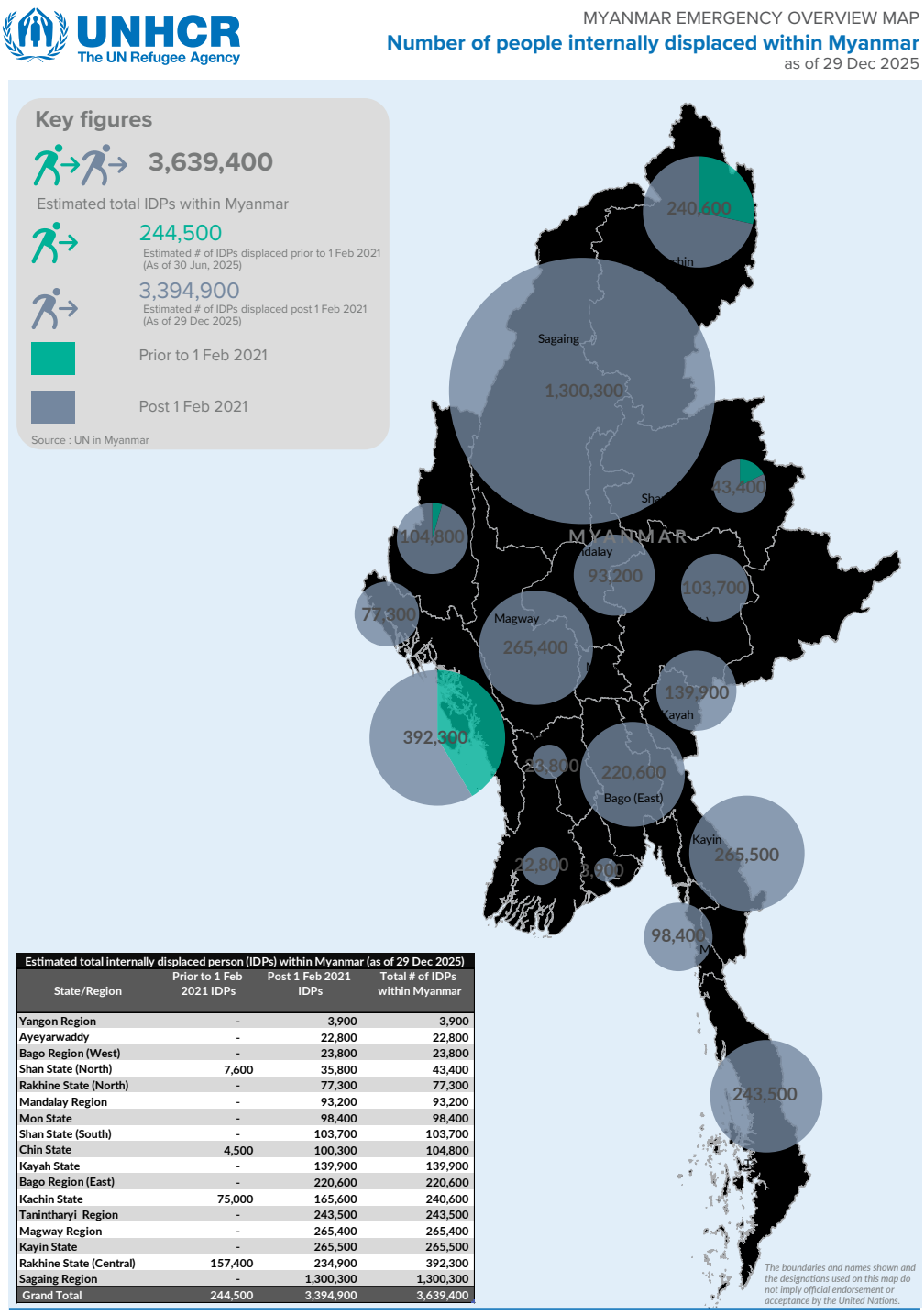
[227] UNHCR. Map and IDP Chart: Number Internally Displaced since the February 2021 coup who remain displaced. December 29, 2025. https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/120459

[228] UNHCR. "Operational Data Portal: Myanmar Situation." November 30, 2025. https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/myanmar

[229] Burma Research Institute. "India-Burma Border: Strengthening Education for Chin Refugees and Mizoram Host Communities." April 2025. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/21447-India-Burma-Border-V2-P2_compressed.pdf

[230] UNHCR. Map and IDP Chart: Number Internally Displaced since the February 2021 coup who remain displaced. December 29, 2025. https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/120459

[231] UNHCR. "Annual Results Report: 2024 Thailand MCO." May 25, 2025. https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2025-06/Thailand%20MCO%20ARR%202024.pdf



Estimated total internally displaced person (IDPs) within Myanmar (as of 29 Dec 2025)

State/Region	Prior to 1 Feb 2021 IDPs	Post 1 Feb 2021 IDPs	Total # of IDPs within Myanmar
Yangon Region	-	3,900	3,900
Ayeyarwaddy	-	22,800	22,800
Bago Region (West)	-	23,800	23,800
Shan State (North)	7,600	35,800	43,400
Rakhine State (North)	-	77,300	77,300
Mandalay Region	-	93,200	93,200
Mon State	-	98,400	98,400
Shan State (South)	-	103,700	103,700
Chin State	4,500	100,300	104,800
Kayah State	-	139,900	139,900
Bago Region (East)	-	220,600	220,600
Kachin State	75,000	165,600	240,600
Tanintharyi Region	-	243,500	243,500
Magway Region	-	265,400	265,400
Kayin State	-	265,500	265,500
Rakhine State (Central)	157,400	234,900	392,300
Sagaing Region	-	1,300,300	1,300,300
Grand Total	244,500	3,394,900	3,639,400

Creation date: 30 Dec 2025
For feedback and clarifications, please write to < myayaim@unhcr.org > 2

Map 4: UNHCR, People Internally Displaced within Burma, [232]

[232] UNHCR. Map: Number Displaced since the February 2021 coup who remain displaced. December 29, 2025. https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/120459

There are also large numbers of refugees who have fled Burma since the coup living across Southeast Asia, adding to already large numbers seeking refuge in those countries. See Table 9 below:

Table 9: Refugees from Burma in Neighboring Countries[233]

Countries	Refugees Since 2/2021 Coup	Total refugees
Bangladesh	139,400	1,173,171
India	62,400	87,200
Indonesia	2,200	2,700
Malaysia	21,900	191,500
Sri Llanka	220	220
Thailand	57,300	138,200
Total	283,420	1,592,991

In evaluating the overall humanitarian challenges for the people of Burma in 2026, the UN concluded, **"**Since the military takeover in 2021, Myanmar has been gripped by expanding armed conflict, repeated natural disasters and economic collapse. Fighting and disasters have already [internally] displaced an estimated 3.6 million people, with the figure expected to climb to around four million next year."

In the recent UN "Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan" for Burma, the UN makes clear that forced displacement is only part of the challenge. It warns that over 16 million people in Burma, including five million children, will require life-saving assistance and protection in 2026.[234] Beyond Burma's borders, long-term persecution, large-scale displacement and violence bring added challenges to the region as well, particularly for those refugees from Burma fleeing the oppression, and for the refugee host communities in neighboring countries that are welcoming them.

Given the growing needs, assistance from the national and international levels is urgently needed. Churches, philanthropies, government donors and civil society organizations must step up to fill funding gaps. Resources are increasingly limited, particularly given the elimination of USAID and significant reductions in foreign aid budgets around the world. "The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) projects a 9 to 17 percent drop in official development assistance in 2025. This comes on top of a 9 percent drop in 2024."[235]

[233] UNHCR. "Operational Data Portal: Myanmar Situation." November 30, 2025. https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/myanmar
[234] Vibhu Mishra. UN News. "Almost invisible crisis: UN urges world not look away from Myanmar. December 14, 2025. https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/12/1166618 (for the 2026 plan use the following link https://myanmar.un.org/en/306830-conflict-fuels-suffering-myanmar-un-publishes-humanitarian-report-forecasting-most-urgent)
[235] OECD. "Cuts in official development assistance" June 26, 2025. https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/2025/06/cuts-in-official-development-assistance_e161f0c5/full-report.html

Faced with the increasing humanitarian challenges and decreasing resources, there has been one promising breakthrough. In a decision that will hopefully encourage refugee host countries throughout the region, Thailand approved legal work rights for roughly 80,000 refugees from Burma, enabling some refugees to support their families without relying on aid.[236] The policy has been praised by the international community and refugee advocates, and could offer a blueprint for other countries. Malaysia has considered a similar policy and may begin a pilot phase in 2026.[237]

BRI and others have also raised a promising proposal to bring UN agencies to Mizoram State, India, to help the refugee host communities there address the humanitarian crisis related to people fleeing to Mizoram from the bordering state of Chin State, Burma. It is the subject of a report by BRI (then known as CAM).[238] As witnessed repeatedly by the CAM delegation travelling to Mizoram, the people there share ethnic and religious ties with Chin Christians fleeing religious persecution and they welcome the Chins "as brothers and sisters." Nonetheless, the local community has limited resources. As one local community leader said, "We have open arms but empty pockets."[239]

This current challenge for Mizoram as a refugee host community harkens back to 1988. At that time, many Chins fled the Burmese military regime's crackdown against the pro-democracy opposition, and they sought refuge in Mizoram State, India. They were assisted by the central government of India, which provided protection and humanitarian assistance, including food and shelter.[240] India's central government has also helped with the current crisis.[241]

While welcoming communities in Mizoram State, the central government of India, and non-governmental sources provide a good foundation for the. current humanitarian response to the Chin refugees, BRI is urging that UN agencies, such as UNICEF and the World Food Program initiate operations in Mizoram to augment that existing support.[242] Those agencies are already operational in Mizoram's neighboring Indian states of Assam and Meghalaya.[243] UN agencies could not only help those from Burma seeking refuge in Mizoram but could also support and show solidarity with the local Mizoram communities that are welcoming the refugees from Burma.

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[236] Reuters. "Thailand grants some Myanmar refugees right to legal work." August 27, 2025. https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/thailand-grants-some-myanmar-refugees-right-legal-work-2025-08-27/

[237] The Star. "Refugee registration system being tested with Jan 1 launch targeted, Dewan Rakyat told." December 2, 2025. https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2025/12/02/refugee-registration-system-being-tested-with-jan-1-launch-targeted-dewan-rakyat-told

[238] CAM. "Chin Refugees in India's Mizoram State: Helping the Refugees and Supporting the Local Communities Welcoming Them." June 2023. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/CAM-Chin-Refugees-in-Indias-Mizoram-State-June-2023-xyz.pdf

[239] Chin Association of Maryland (CAM). "Chin Refugees in India's Mizoram State: Helping the Refugees and Supporting the Local Communities Welcoming Them." June 2023. Pages 12-13. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/CAM-Chin-Refugees-in-Indias-Mizoram-State-June-2023-xyz.pdf

[240] Matthew Wilch, Zo Tum Hmung, Jenny Yang. "Seeking Refuges: The Chin People in Mizoram State, India. 2011." Page 17. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Seeking-Refuge-The-Chin-People-in-Mizoram-State-India.pdf

[241] CAM. "Chin Refugees in India's Mizoram State: Helping the Refugees and Supporting the Local Communities Welcoming Them." June 2023. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/CAM-Chin-Refugees-in-Indias-Mizoram-State-June-2023-xyz.pdf

[242] CAM. Chin Refugees in Mizoram State, India: Helping the Refugees and Supporting the Local Communities Welcoming Them. June 2023. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/CAM-Chin-Refugees-in-Indias-Mizoram-State-June-2023-xyz.pdf

[243] Ibid. page 19. (UNICEF is in Assam State, India and WFP is in Meghalaya State, India.)

XIII. CONCLUSION

At this crucial juncture, BRI urges the U.S. government to continue standing firm with the people of Burma. As detailed in the recommendations above, BRI urges President Trump and Congress to determine that the Burmese military's persecution and violence against Christians in Burma constitutes severe violations of religious freedom, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. The U.S. should seek accountability that will help to stop the atrocities and their dire humanitarian consequences. The U.S. should continue providing strong, non-lethal, defensive assistance, and political and diplomatic support for the resistance and democracy movement in Burma to enable them to achieve a stable federal democracy. BRI also urges the President and Congress to continue humanitarian support, protection, and durable solutions for displaced people inside of Burma. This includes support for those from Burma seeking refuge in neighboring countries, and support and solidarity for the countries hosting those refugees.

The current resistance and democracy movement has an historic opportunity to expel from power the primary agent of instability, the Burmese military, and to establish a more stable political order so that the people of Burma can become a full economic and political partner for the United States and its regional partners.

If BRI's recommendations are pursued, it would help to blunt the Burmese military's campaign against Christian communities, reduce human suffering, protect and provide humanitarian support and durable solutions for internally displaced persons and refugees, support refugee host countries, and align U.S. policy with its legal and moral commitments.

Additional Sources

1. Letter to Secretary of State Marco Rubio from Churches and community organizations including BRI in the United States, (March 7, 2025): https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Letter-to-Secretary-Marco-Rubio-on-Burma.pdf
2. Letter by State Department Responding to Letter of March 7, 2025, from Churches and community organizations including BRI in the United States, (March 27, 2025): https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/032725-Department-of-State-Response.pdf
3. Letter by BRI to Dr. Stephen Schneck, Chair of U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (March 31, 2025): https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Letter-to-USCIRF-Chair-3.31.25.pdf
4. Letter to President Joseph Biden from Churches and community organizations including BRI in the United States, (September 2024): https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Letter-to-the-President-Biden-Sept.13.2024.pdf
5. Zo Tum Hmung, Executive Director, Chin Association of Maryland (now known as Burma Research Institute). Testimony at the USCRIF's Hearing on Burma, February 8, 2023. https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/Testimony%20-%20Z%20T%20Hmung.pdf

"They destroyed the walls of the church, but not the faith"

- *Bishop Lucius Hre Kung*

Back Cover: The back cover includes two rows, altogether eight photos, of reports published by Burmese Research Institute (BRI), formerly known as Chin Association of Maryland (CAM), since the February 2021 military coup in Burma. The third row includes four photos of four 2025 events organized by BRI.

BRI Research, Advocacy, and Education

The activities of Burma Research Institute (BRI), formerly known as Chin Association of Maryland (CAM), focus on Research, Advocacy, and Education. Priorities are religious freedom and humanitarian issues. We also provide opportunities for Chin youth in the United States to do research and writing. Chin Youth also participate in advocacy activities, such as at BRI Congressional briefings, UNHCR, the State Department, and IRF Summits. We support Chin pastors to advocate with Congress for religious freedom in Burma and for humanitarian assistance for people from Burma. BRI conducts Congressional Briefings and organizes community events such as Chin New Year and Youth Soccer. (Photos below are all provided by BRI.)

Research

BRI/CAM in Mizoram, India

BRI/CAM meets with Honorable M. Laikaw Chief Executive Member of Mara Autonomous District Counsel, and Council, Saiha, Mizoram State, India

BRI/CAM meets with Honorable Lalduhoma, Chief Minister of Mizoram, India

Advocacy

BRI/CAM & Chin pastors from Iowa meet with Sen. Charles Grassley (R-IA)

BRI/CAM & Chin pastors from Texas meet with Sen. John Cornyn (R-TX)

BRI/CAM & Interfaith group meet with Sen. Chris Van Hollen (D-MD)

BRI/CAM & Chin pastors from Georgia meet with Sen. Rafeal Warnock (D-GA)

BRI/CAM & Chin pastors from Missouri meet with Sen. Josh Hawley (R-MO)

BRI/CAM & Chin pastor from Nebraska meet with Sen. Pete Ricketts (R-NE)

BRI Chin Youth Researchers at BRI Congressional briefing with Rep. Chris Smith (R-NJ) who hosted & gave remarks

Rep. Young Kim (R-CA), who provided a room for BRI/CAM Congressional briefing and gave remarks

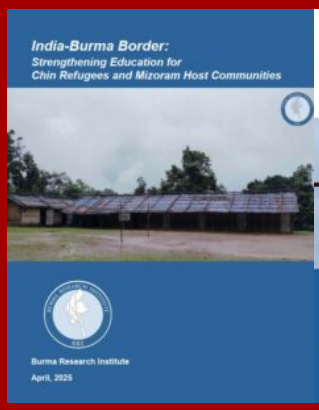
Rep. Jefferson Shreve (R-IN) gave remarks at BRI/CAM Congressional briefing

Zo Tum Hmung, BRI meets with Rep. Gregory Meeks (D-NY)

BRI/CAM & a Chin pastor meet with Rashad Hussain, then U.S. Ambassador for International Religious Freedom

BRI/CAM, Central Young Mizo Association and Central Young Lai Association of Mizoram State, India, meet with U.S. State Department.

BRI, formerly known as CAM:
Research, Advocacy, and Education



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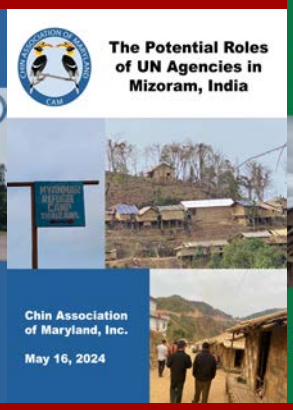

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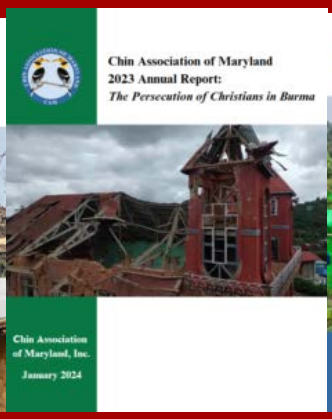

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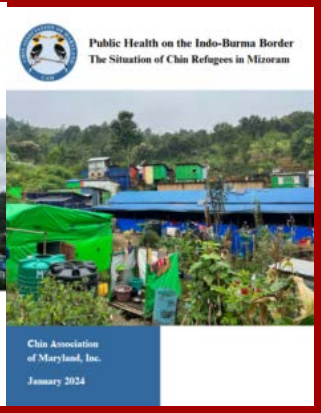

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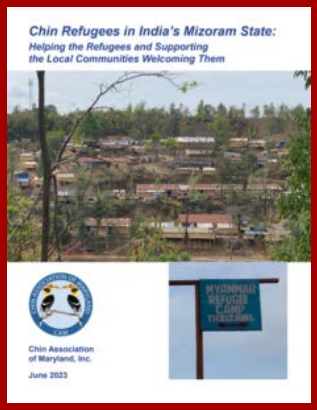

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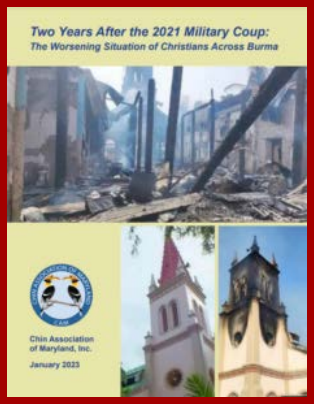

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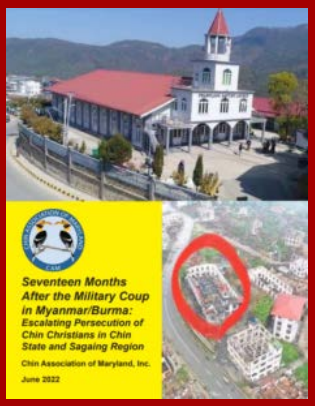

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