INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM ROUNDTABLE

October 19, 2026

The Honorable Marco Rubio
Secretary of State
United States Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Re: Multi-faith Letter urging the Trump Administration to protect persecuted Christians in Burma

Dear Secretary Rubio,

We, the undersigned organizations of diverse faith, advocacy groups, and individuals, urge you to protect persecuted Christians in Burma by pressuring Burma's military regime to release Christian pastors and political prisoners, including State Counselor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. We also urge you to redesignate Burma as a Country of Particular Concern, to determine that the Burmese military's atrocities against Christians constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes, and to take strong diplomatic actions against Burma's military regime, as authorized after such designations.

Since the military coup of February 2021, the Burmese military, also known as the Tatmadaw, has waged a sustained assault on Burma's Christian communities. According to a comprehensive report published by the Burma Research Institute (BRI) in January 2026, the Tatmadaw:[1]

- damaged or destroyed 343 Christian churches and buildings;
- killed 149 Christians and imprisoned 218 Christians for faith-related reasons (Open Doors International data, 2022–2025);
- systematically devastated the Christian town of Thantlang, destroying 21 of 22 churches and displacing its entire civilian population; and
- deliberately timed attacks to coincide with Christian holy days, including Christmas, Palm Sunday, and Easter — a pattern indicative of targeting Christians for their religion rather than incidental military activity.

This is not a pattern of random, collateral military damage. It is a documented, deliberate campaign by the Burmese military against Christians.

[1]Burma Research Institute (BRI). *Severe Violations of Religious Freedom Against Christians in Burma*. February 1, 2026, https://burmari.org/2026/02/01/burma-research-institute-releases-new-report-documenting-severe-violations-of-religious-freedom-against-christians-in-burma/

Among the imprisoned are two Chin pastors formally recognized by the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) as Victims of Religious Persecution:

Pastor Thian Lian Sang (Chin Baptist, Falam Township, Chin State): Arrested in September 2021 for his religious leadership. On December 7, 2022, sentenced to 23 years' imprisonment under the Counter-Terrorism Law Section 49(a) and Penal Code Section 505(a).[2]

Pastor Salai Ayla Lone Wai (Ethnic Chin, Okpho Township, Bago Region): Arrested December 28, 2021, upon returning from a Christmas prayer service. Held incommunicado, sentenced October 21, 2022, to 10 years in prison pursuant to Penal Code Section 505(a) and terrorism charges.[3]

Further, Baptist Press reports, citing the BRI January 2026 report, that 21 pastors have been arrested since the coup, with 13 still detained.[4] Recently, on June 5, 2026, the Union of Catholic Asian News (UCA News) reports that five bishops from Burma's 17 Catholic dioceses have been forced to abandon their cathedral churches and relocate to safer areas away from active conflict zones (they are from the following dioceses: Pekhon, Loikaw, Banmaw, Mindat, and Lashio).[5] Moreover, the Presbyterian Outlook points to U.S. interests beyond religious freedom: "This crisis is fundamentally about religious freedom and human dignity--but it also carries wider implications. Burma's instability fuels regional insecurity, cross-border displacement, and transnational crime."[6]

Following the election of coup leader Min Aung Hlaing as President in April 2026, widely condemned as a sham election,[7] the persecution of Christians has continued unabated:

- May 13, 2026: The Tatmadaw burned an historic Catholic church compound in Karenni (Kayah) State.[8]
- June 8, 2026: A Burmese military airstrike killed **Pastor Hsar Eh Klu**, who was a Karenni Baptist Pastor and Christian youth leader.[9]
- June 4, 2026: The military killed **Pastor Willam**, Senior pastor of the Chuncung Baptist Church, and his fellow Christian Nam Ceu from Chuncung Village, Chin State, Burma.[10]

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[2] USCIRF. Victims Database: Thian Lian Sang. https://www.uscirf.gov/religious-prisoners-conscience/forb-victims-database/thian-lian-sang

[3] USCIRF. Victims Database: Salai Ayla Lone Wai. https://www.uscirf.gov/religious-prisoners-conscience/forb-victims-database/salai-ayla-lone-wai

[4] Faith Pratt. "Religious Freedom Violations Continue in Burma/Myanmar." Baptist Press. February 3, 2026. https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/religious-freedom-violations-continue-in-burma-myanmar/

[5] UCA Reporter. "Five Myanmar Bishops Forced from Dioceses Amid Civil War," UCA News. June 5, 2026. https://www.ucanews.com/news/five-myanmar-bishops-forced-from-dioceses-amid-civil-war/113671

[6] Dr. David Thang Moe, Rev. Dr. Robin Stoops, Zo Tum Hmung. "How the U.S. can protect persecuted Christians in Burma." Presbyterian Outlook. March 23, 2026. https://pres-outlook.org/2026/03/how-the-u-s-can-help-protect-persecuted-christians-in-burma/

[7] Reuters. "Myanmar junta chief Min Aung Hlaing elected president." April 3, 2026. https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/myanmars-junta-chief-set-parliamentary-vote-presidential-bid-2026-04-03/

[8] Burma Research Institute. "Burmese Military Burns Historic Catholic Church Compound in Karenni State." May 19, 2026. https://burmari.org/2026/05/19/burmese-military-burns-historic-catholic-church-compound-in-karenni-state-bri-urges-trump-administration-to-determine-crimes-against-humanity-and-war-crimes/

[9] Burma Research Institute. "Burmese Military Airstrike Kills Karenni Christian Youth Leader." June 8, 2026. https://burmari.org/2026/06/08/burmese-military-airstrike-kills-karenni-christian-youth-leader-bri-urges-trump-to-protect-persecuted-christians-in-burma/

[10] Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. "Myanmar Military Dictators Execute Longtime Christian Pastor." Decision Magazine, September 3, 2026. https://billygraham.org/decision-magazine/articles/myanmar-military-dictators-execute-longtime-

- September 14, 2026: The Burmese military killed **Pastor Dal Thawn Tuang**, pastor of the Lamzang Baptist Church from Lamzang Village, Chin State, Burma.[11]

In its 2026 Annual Report, USCIRF recommended that the State Department formally redesignate Burma as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) for engaging in "systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom."[12] After such a designation, the Administration would be authorized to use a range of U.S. foreign policy tools to pressure Burma's military regime to stop its religious persecution.

On March 23, 2026, a broad coalition of Christian and interfaith leaders wrote to your office urging immediate action.[13] A response was received on May 6, 2026.[14] We are grateful for the Department's acknowledgment of that letter, and its concern about religious persecution. Nevertheless, the ceaseless violence against Christians calls for strong diplomatic action without further delay.

Thus, we, the organizations of diverse faith, advocacy groups, and individuals listed below, respectfully urge the Trump Administration to take the following steps:

1. Demand the immediate, unconditional release of Pastor Thian Lian Sang, Pastor Salai Ayla Lone Wai, and all Christians imprisoned for their faith or ethnoreligious identity.
2. Call for the release of State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and all political prisoners immediately and unconditionally.
3. Redesignate Burma as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) pursuant to the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, in accordance with USCIRF's 2026 Annual Report recommendation.

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christian-pastor; Burma Research Institute (BRI), Chin Christian Pastor Killed by Burmese Military; BRI Urges Trump Administration to Protect Persecuted Christians in Burma. BRI, August 27, 2026. https://burmari.org/2026/08/27/chin-christian-pastor-killed-by-burmese-military-bri-urges-trump-administration-to-protect-persecuted-christians-in-burma/; International Christian Concern. "Baptist Pastor Martyred in Myanmar by Military Dictatorship." International Christian Concern, August 28, 2026. https://persecution.org/2026/08/28/baptist-pastor-martyred-in-myanmar-bymilitary-dictatorship/; Kyaw Lin Htoon, "US Intervention Sought over Killing of Baptist Pastor by Myanmar Junta." Union of Catholic Asian News (UCA News), August 28, 2026. UCA News. "US Intervention Sought over Killing of Baptist Pastor by Myanmar Junta." UCA News, August 28, 2026. https://www.ucanews.com/news/us-interventionsought-over-killing-of-baptist-pastor-by-myanmar-junta/115037.

[11] Burma Research Institute (BRI), BRI Urges Immediate White House Action After Burmese Military Kills Christian Pastor Dal Thawn Tuang, September 17, 2026. https://burmari.org/2026/09/17/burma-research-institute-urges-immediate-white-house-action-after-burmese-military-kills-christian-pastor-dal-thawn-tuang-in-burma/; Anugrah Kumar, "Another Baptist pastor shot dead in Myanmar; US gov't urged to take action," Christian Post, September 20, 2026, https://www.christianpost.com/news/baptist-pastor-killed-in-myanmar-us-urged-to-take-action.html?mobile=true&utm_source=chatgpt.com; Hanah Mitchell, "Baptist pastor shot dead in Myanmar's Chin State, responsibility disputed," Christianity Today, September 22, 2026, https://www.christiantoday.co.in/news/baptist-pastor-shot-dead-in-myanmars-chin-state-responsibility-disputed.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com

[12] USCIRF Releases 2026 Annual Report: Exposes Egregious Religious Freedom Abuses From Key Nations. Mar 4, 2026. https://www.uscirf.gov/news-room/releases-statements/uscirf-releases-2026-annual-report-exposes-egregious-religious

[13] Coalition Letter to Secretary Rubio. March 23, 2026. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/Letter-to-Secretary-Rubio-March-23-2026.pdf

[14] State Department Letter Responding to Coalition Letter of March 23, 2026. May 6, 2026. https://burmari.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/State-Department-Response-–-March-23-2026-Letter.pdf

4. Determine that the Burmese military's atrocities against Christians in Burma constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes.
5. Impose targeted sanctions, travel restrictions to the United States, and other available diplomatic measures against the Burmese military regime.

Thank you for your consideration. We respectfully urge you to take these actions immediately.

Sincerely,

Zo Tum Hmung
President & CEO
Burma Research Institute

Greg Mitchell
Managing Co-Chair
International Religious Freedom (IRF) Roundtable

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25 BRIDGES

ADVOCATES FOR FAITH AND JUSTICE IN VIETNAM

AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES OF MAINE

AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES OF NEBRASKA

AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES OF THE CENTRAL REGION

AMERICAN MUSLIM & MULTIFAITH WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT COUNCIL

BIBLES FOR THE WORLD

BURMA ADVOCACY GROUP

BURMA CAMPAIGN UK

BURMESE AMERICAN CATHOLICS FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE

BURMESE ROHINGYA ORGANISATION UK

CAMPAIGN FOR A NEW MYANMAR

CENTRAL BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

CENTRAL EUROPE FORUM FOR FORB

CHIN BAPTIST ASSOCIATION OF NORTH AMERICA

CHIN BAPTIST CHURCHES USA

CHIN EVANGELICAL CHURCHES USA

CHRISTIAN FREEDOM INTERNATIONAL

CHURCH OF SCIENTOLOGY NATIONAL AFFAIRS OFFICE

COORDINATION DES ASSOCIATIONS ET DES PARTICULIERS POUR LA LIBERTÉ DE CONSCIENCE

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, BURLINGTON, VERMONT

FOREF EUROPE

FRIENDS OF THIEN AM ZEN MONASTERY

GENOCIDE WATCH

IN DEFENSE OF CHRISTIANS

INDIANA CHIN BAPTIST CHURCH

INTERBELIEF RELIEF

INTERFAITH LEAGUE AGAINST POVERTY

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM US

INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR THE ROHINGYA

INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN CONCERN

INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN RESCUE MISSION

JESUIT REFUGEE SERVICE/USA

JUBILEE CAMPAIGN USA

KACHIN AMERICAN BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

KACHIN BAPTIST CHURCHES USA

LAW AND LIBERTY TRUST

LUTUV CHIN BAPTIST CHURCH

MATU CHRISTIAN CHURCHES USA

MISSION DRIVEN CHURCHES (ABC-MI)

MYANMAR BAPTIST CHURCHES USA (MBCUSA)

NEW WINESKINS MISSIONS NETWORK

NO BUSINESS WITH GENOCIDE

PATH OF YAHRA

PRAYER PIONEERS

PROTESTANT CHURCH OF ALGERIA (EPA)

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM COALITION

ROHINGYA CONSULTATIVE COUNCIL

SENTHANG CHURCHES USA

SET MY PEOPLE FREE

THE WASHINGTON TIMES FOUNDATION

THE WILLIAM WILBERFORCE CENTER

U.S. CAMPAIGN FOR BURMA

UPF NORTH AMERICA

WEST PAPUA HUMAN RIGHTS CENTER

WIDOWSANDORPHANS

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