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## Human Rights Council

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**Human rights situations that require the Council's attention**

### **Written statement\* submitted by European Centre for Law and Justice, The / Centre Européen pour le droit, les Justice et les droits de l'homme, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[20 August 2020]

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\* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

# **REQUESTING THAT THE U.N. RECOGNISE THE GROWING GENOCIDAL PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS AND OTHER RELIGIOUS AND ETHNIC MINORITIES IN THE REPUBLIC OF THE UNION OF MYANMAR AND TAKE IMMEDIATE ACTION TO CONDEMN THAT PERSECUTION**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Republic of the Union of Myanmar faces the need for significant political and economic reform, which is quite challenging, as Myanmar has a long history of turmoil within the government itself. Myanmar is home to more than 56.1 million people, and is a majority Buddhist country, with nearly 88% of the population practicing Buddhism<sup>1</sup>. In contrast, only 6.2% of the population practice Christianity<sup>2</sup>. In Myanmar today, Christians and other religious minorities face hostile and deadly violence, as well as discrimination. One of its greatest issues Myanmar faces is correcting the continuing violation of human rights that is occurring at the hands of the Myanmar army.

In its 2020 World Watch List Report on religious freedom issues around the world, a human rights group ranked Myanmar as the 19<sup>th</sup> worst place to live for Christians<sup>3</sup>. This ranking primarily stems from increasing pressure faced by religious converts as well as pressure from Buddhist extremists who desire for Myanmar to be a Buddhist nation. Furthermore, the Myanmar army restricts, minimizes, and even violates the rights of Christians<sup>4</sup>.

## **2. TARGETING OF CHRISTIANS IN THE WA STATE**

Within northern Myanmar, along the Chinese border, there is an autonomous region known as the Wa State<sup>5</sup>. Neighboring China's influence over this so-called autonomous region is quite obvious, as many within Wa State speak Chinese, and use the Chinese yuan as their primary currency<sup>6</sup>. In addition, "mobile telephones are connected to Chinese networks"<sup>7</sup>.

In 2018, the Chinese supported United Wa State Army (UWSA) began to target Christians within the region under the pretense of stopping "religious extremism"<sup>8</sup> – a tactic widely used by the Chinese government against its own people. As a result, UWSA soldiers detained almost 100 Christian pastors, ordered others to leave the region, shut down religious schools and churches, destroyed unauthorized churches, and even prevented the construction of new churches<sup>9</sup>. Later that

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1 *Burma USCIRF – Recommended for Countries of Particular Concern*, USCIRF, available at [https://www.uscirtf.gov/sites/default/files/Burma\\_0.pdf](https://www.uscirtf.gov/sites/default/files/Burma_0.pdf).

2 *Id.*

3 World Watch List: Myanmar, OPEN DOORS, <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/myanmar/>.

4 *Id.*

5 Ming Wai Sit & Tin Yau Cheung, *China's Enduring Influence Over Wa State in Myanmar*, GEOPOLITICAL MONITOR, (18 Nov. 2019), <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/chinas-enduring-influence-over-wa-state-in-myanmar/>.

6 *Id.*

7 *Id.*

8 *Burma USCIRF – Recommended for Countries of Particular Concern*, USCIRF, available at [https://www.uscirtf.gov/sites/default/files/Burma\\_0.pdf](https://www.uscirtf.gov/sites/default/files/Burma_0.pdf).

9 *Id.*

year, the UWSA released those pastors they had detained only after they signed a pledge to only pray at home<sup>10</sup>, another tactic commonly used by the Chinese government.

### 3. VIOLENCE AND THREATS TO RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Within Myanmar, some Christians are able to peacefully practice their faith while others persecuted. Since August of 2019 there has been an increase in violent clashes in the Kachin and Northern Shan States between the Myanmar army and Ethnic Armed Organizations (“EAO”s)<sup>11</sup>. As a result of these clashes, thousands of people, many of whom are Christians, have been displaced and forced to leave their homes<sup>12</sup>. While the military clashes are not necessarily religious in nature, the Myanmar army is notorious for attacking Christians and denying them basic rights.

For example, during these clashes, the Myanmar army reportedly destroyed or damaged more than 300 churches and even used military blockades to block access to humanitarian assistance<sup>13</sup>.

According to our on the ground sources, “[t]he [Myanmar] Army’s attacks continue in western [Myanmar] and civilians living there”<sup>14</sup>. “The [Myanmar] Army uses rape as a weapon of war. Sexual violence has become a hallmark of the prolonged civil conflict and an indisputable tactic of the [Myanmar] Army against ethnic women. After several failed domestic and international agreements, the [Myanmar] Army continues to rape with impunity ...”<sup>15</sup>.

Daw Nu San, a 65-year-old in Far Pro village, described the horror of the attacks being perpetrated by the Myanmar army:

About 40 [Myanmar] Army troops burnt my home first. I couldn’t say anything because I was afraid, they would beat me if I requested them not to [burn down my house]. After they burned my home, they prepared to burn U Aung Thein Tan’s home. [At the same time], about 10 Burma Army troops targeted U Aung Thein Tun with their guns. They allowed U Aung Thein Tan to leave when many houses were burning. I also ran away. . . Moreover, [the Myanmar Army soldiers] cruelly killed one villager called U Aung Tun Thar [through] head injuries before putting him into the fire<sup>16</sup>.

On 16 July 2020, two soldiers of the Myanmar army murdered a 40-year-old woman<sup>17</sup>. The two soldiers approached the woman around noon and were asking about an empty rice sack<sup>18</sup>. When she

10 *Id.*

11 Burma USCIRF – Recommended for Countries of Particular Concern, USCIRF, available at [https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Burma\\_0.pdf](https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/Burma_0.pdf).

12 *Id.*

13 *Id.*

14 *Burma Army Attacks, Kidnaps, and Tortures Villagers in Western Burma*, FREE BURMA RANGERS (16 July 2020) <https://www.freeburmarangers.org/2020/07/16/burma-army-attacks-kidnaps-tortures-villagers-western-burma/>.

15 RAPE AS A WEAPON OF WAR AND THE WOMEN WHO ARE RESISTING: A SPECIAL REPORT BY THE FREE BURMA RANGERS 3 (2019), available at <https://www.freeburmarangers.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Rape-as-a-Weapon-of-War.pdf>.

16 *Burma Army Attacks, Kidnaps, and Tortures Villagers in Western Burma*, FREE BURMA RANGERS (16 July 2020) <https://www.freeburmarangers.org/2020/07/16/burma-army-attacks-kidnaps-tortures-villagers-western-burma/>.

17 *Burma Army Soldiers Murder 40-Year-Old Karen Woman in Her Home*, FREE BURMA RANGERS (25 July 2020), <https://www.freeburmarangers.org/2020/07/25/burma-army-soldiers-murder-40-year-old-karen-woman-home/>.

18 *Id.*

told them that the sack was full and not available, one of the soldiers proceeded to shoot her three times<sup>19</sup>.

Recent military clashes between the Myanmar army and EAOs in western Myanmar have forced more than 10,000 Chins (predominately Christian), Arakans (primarily Buddhists), and Khumis (predominately Christian) to flee from their homes<sup>20</sup>. Even everyday activities can be risky for civilians, as the Myanmar army has been known to detain citizens at will for questioning and without impunity arrest or even torture them because they are suspected of being part of the Arakan army, an EAO<sup>21</sup>. In one case, the Myanmar army detained a 75-year-old villager while he was herding buffalo to ask if he was part of the Arakan Army<sup>22</sup>. He told them that he was not, but the soldiers proceeded to beat him anyway, when he still refused affiliation he was taken away and tortured. After being held captive for four days he was finally able to escape while the guards were sleeping<sup>23</sup>.

The ongoing conflict has created a massive humanitarian crisis, wherein thousands of IDPs in the Chin and other states have been forced into refugee camps where disease and corruption run rampant<sup>24</sup>. Our on the ground sources report that many in these camps suffer ailments such as anemia, kidney problems, gastritis, and dysentery<sup>25</sup>. Our sources also report that there is a massive shortage in medicine and food, and that these shortages have led to extortion by the Myanmar army through raising the prices on bags of rice<sup>26</sup>. The refugee camps are extremely hard to access, as the Myanmar army has blocked the camp entrances<sup>27</sup>.

#### 4. REQUEST

The continued conflict and increasing persecution of Christians and other religious and ethnic minorities in Myanmar is deeply concerning. Internal conflict has caused loss of life, and created a massive humanitarian crisis. It is critical that Myanmar fulfil its basic obligations to protect its citizens from violence and the abuse of the military, which is perpetrating violence against its own citizens. We respectfully request that this Council call upon Myanmar to fulfil its obligations, and provide the humanitarian support that the Myanmar people require. Their plight is real, and must be acknowledged and addressed.

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19 *Id.*

20 *Burma Army Attacks, Kidnaps, and Tortures Villagers in Western Burma*, FREE BURMA RANGERS (16 July 2020), <https://www.freeburmarangers.org/2020/07/16/burma-army-attacks-kidnaps-tortures-villagers-western-burma/>.

21 *Id.*

22 *Id.*

23 *Id.*

24 *Chin State Civilians Face Shortages of Food, Medicine, and Educational Supplies*, FREE BURMA RANGERS (14 Aug. 2020), <https://www.freeburmarangers.org/2020/08/14/chin-state-civilians-face-shortages-food-medicine-educational-supplies/>.

25 *Id.*

26 *Id.*

27 *Id.*