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### **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.

[31 May 2021]

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

# **REQUESTING THAT THE U.N. RECOGNISE THE CONTINUING VIOLENCE AGAINST CHRISTIANS AND OTHER RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN THE REPUBLIC OF THE UNION OF MYANMAR AND TAKE IMMEDIATE ACTION TO PROTECT THE CITIZENS OF MYANMAR FROM ITS OWN GOVERNMENT**

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

The ECLJ has previously submitted four reports to this Council detailing that innocent civilians within the Republic of the Union of Myanmar (Burma) are under threat from the Burma Army, which is the main hindrance in Myanmar's transition into a democratic state. The military insists on retaining political power and a dominating presence in Myanmar, despite accusations "of genocide and other atrocities against religious minority groups"[1]. The Burma Army's desperation to maintain its control came to a head on 1 February 2021, when the Burma Army alleged electoral fraud occurred in Myanmar's 2020 election and staged a military coup. The Burma Army are staunch Buddhists as Buddhism is the dominant religion in Myanmar with 87.9% of the population practicing Buddhism in comparison to only 6.2% of the population practicing Christianity[2]. In addition to violent atrocities being perpetrated indiscriminately on Myanmar citizens, Christians and other religious minorities are targeted for violence by the Burma Army for failing to subscribe to Buddhism[3].

## **2. BACKGROUND**

Since 2011, the government in Myanmar has taken the form of a military-civilian hybrid government. Under the 2008 constitution, the military controls one-quarter of the parliamentary seats, in addition to controlling three ministries: defense, home affairs, and border affairs. Thus, the Burma Army has a very powerful and tangible presence in Myanmar's government.

In November 2020, Myanmar held its national elections, and the National League for Democracy (NLD) won the election. However, the opposition party, which is backed by the Burma Army, refused to accept the results of the election, leading to the military coup which occurred on 1 February 2021.

The Burma Army declared a state of emergency in support of the coup to justify the replacement of government officials with military personnel[4]. In justifying its actions, the Burma Army referred to the alleged electoral fraud stating:

the state of emergency is declared in accordance with article 417 of the 2008 constitution. In order to perform scrutiny of the voter lists and to take action, the authority of the nation's law making, governance and jurisdiction is handed over to the Commander in Chief in accordance with the 2008 constitution article 418, sub article (a)[5].

As a result of the coup, the Burma Army has instituted government mandates that restrict citizens' access to outside communications and restrain the rights of those who wish to protest the coup[6]. In addition to implementing mandates, the Burma Army uses violence as a response to those who are opposed to the coup[7].

## **3. VIOLATIONS**

Since the coup began in February 2021, as of 21 May 2021, the Burma Army has murdered at least 812 people and currently has 4,258 citizens under detention with 1782 warrants outstanding[8]. The violence continues as the Burma Army raids citizens' homes, rob citizens of their belongings, and instill fear that makes the people of Myanmar afraid to leave their homes[9]. Simultaneously, the Burma Army's violent attacks on the people of

Myanmar has led to mass displacement within the country. For example, the Burma Army threw grenades at coup protestors killing 82 people in the city of Bago, along with preventing medical aid to those who sustained injuries due to the grenades[10]. The deprivation of human rights, religious liberties, and violent attacks have led to 336,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Myanmar[11]. The Burma Army severely controls IDPs through closing borders and regulating where IDPs are allowed to travel[12].

Since the ECLJ's last submission to this Council, the Burma Army has continued to attack villages in Karen state through airstrikes that displace villagers in Karen[13]. According to our on the ground sources, in 27 March 2021, Naw Mu Wah Paw, a Karen villager, lost her husband during one of the airstrikes as a bomb fell onto their home[14]. She stated, "My husband was covered in blood and staggered down the stairs holding our son. He handed our son to me and then fell down and died"[15].

Similarly, on 7 April 2021, the military deployed mortars into a village wounding four civilians and destroying homes[16]. On 8 April 2021, the military mortared Mae Pweh Hta Village, killing a 60-year-old man[17]. Another village reported that "they are unable to burn and prepare their rice crops because the Burma Army will mortar any times they go into the fields. They are afraid that they will have no rice harvest next fall"[18]. On 12 April 2021, the Burma Army killed two men from different villages in the Karen state[19]. One of the men killed, Saw Pah Mae Pa was carrying roughly \$800 in funds to send to his father-in-law. In addition to taking his life, Burma Army soldiers stole his money and his motorcycle[20].

Our on the ground sources interviewed some of the IDPs in Karen State. One of them, a 100-year old grandmother fled her home after a military attack. She stated, "[i]t is not so easy to run away from the Burma Army when you can only walk"[21]. This 100-year old woman is just one of 272 people from the village of Tha Kaw Tho Baw who were forced to flee their homes and hide in the jungle after they were repeatedly attacked by the military[22].

Unfortunately, the violence against displaced religious minorities has continued even outside of Myanmar, as there have been multiple fires in refugee camps in Bangladesh[23]. Bangladesh is the home to the Rohingya people, a majority of whom are practicing Muslims that fled from the religious persecution in Myanmar[24]. On 22 March 2021, a large fire killed five people, and injured 570 people in addition to destroying 10,000 shelters which displaced 75,000 people[25]. According to our on the ground sources, "[t]he police have arrested and charged several Bangladeshi youth for starting the fire"[26]. The motivation behind starting the fires is unknown, but it is believed that the fires were started with the intention to drive out the religious minority refugees[27].

#### 4. REQUEST

Due to the recent coup, the Burma Army has assumed the role of a dictator, furthering the violence the people of Myanmar face. The current political state of Myanmar renders the government incapable of enacting or upholding laws that guarantee basic human rights, including the right to life and freedom of religion. The continuing conflict within Myanmar has not only displaced thousands of people within the country itself, but has led to the murder of thousands of citizens at the hands of the Burma Army. We respectfully request the United Nations to aid and protect the people of Myanmar from the continued atrocities that they are facing at the hands of the dictatorial military.

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