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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.

[6 February 2023]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.

REQUESTING THAT THE U.N. RECOGNIZE THE CONTINUING VIOLENCE AGAINST CHRISTIANS IN THE REPUBLIC OF THE UNION OF MYANMAR AND TAKE IMMEDIATE ACTION TO PROTECT THE CITIZENS OF MYANMAR

1. INTRODUCTION

The ECLJ has previously submitted at least six reports to this Council detailing the atrocities being committed against Christians and innocent civilians in the Republic of the Union of Myanmar (Myanmar). Open Doors, an organization working to help persecuted Christians around the world, ranked Myanmar as the 14th most dangerous place for Christians.(1) This ranking stems from the fact that since the country's military took control in February 2021, Christians have endured the brunt of the violent attacks as a result of the ongoing civil war between the army and the ethnic armed groups in Myanmar.(2) This ongoing conflict "is disproportionately affecting Christian communities in majority Christian states such as Chin, Kachin, Karen and Kayah states. In Kachin State and Northern Shan State, where fighting is escalating, Christians are being killed, detained and forced to flee."(3)

2. BACKGROUND

Myanmar is a predominantly Buddhist country which makes up approximately 88% of the population, whereas Christians only account for approximately 6% of the population.(4) Since the military took control in February 2021, Christians and civilians have been forced to endure raids, bombings, and the destruction of homes, churches, and schools.(5) Further, "between May 2021 and November 2022, the military in Myanmar has burned or damaged 38,383 houses across 12 states and regions. Sagaing remains the worst affected, with 27,000 houses destroyed, followed by Magwe, where 7,800 buildings were torched."(6) In addition to the destruction of property, the conflict has resulted in the displacement of more than 1.4 million people(7) and the deaths of 2,894.(8)

3. VIOLATIONS

On January 15, 2023, Myanmar forces burned down a 129-year-old Catholic church in a predominately Christian village in the northwestern Sagaing region.(9) In addition, many homes were burned down.(10) A villager said that:

the army arrived in the village in the conflict-torn Sagaing region on the evening of Jan.14 and set many houses on fire and stayed in the church overnight before setting it ablaze early on Jan. 15, when local Catholics were expected to arrive for worship.

More than 500 houses in the village were also destroyed. [sic] in what was the fourth raid on the village in eight months.(11)

On January 12, 2023, the army conducted an airstrike destroying a church, school, and other budlings in northern Karen State.(12) One "mother and her baby were instantly killed, as was another villager, the pastor of the Baptist church, and a Catholic deacon. Two women, one the wife of the deacon, were wounded."(13)

Between November and December 2022, more than 8,315 civilians from more than nine villages in western Karen State were displaced from their homes.(14) In fact, "[o]ver the past two months, November in particular, more than 8,000 people have fled their homes to escape bombings, mortars, drones, beatings, abductions and death by attacking Burma Army jets, artillery and ground troops."(15)

On November 22, 2022, 100 troops raided a village.⁽¹⁶⁾ The raid resulted in the deaths of a ninety-four-year-old and a seventy-eight-year-old woman.⁽¹⁷⁾ The son of one of the victims stated that, “I believe junta forces intentionally burned my mom alive as they stole an electronic device near her before burning the house. They could definitely see my mom on her bed when they stole the device near her.”⁽¹⁸⁾ In addition, the army burned to the ground 180 of the homes in the village.⁽¹⁹⁾

On November 9, 2022, the army dropped two bombs on a village in Luthaw Township.⁽²⁰⁾ Fortunately, no one was killed in the attack, but a church and a school were destroyed.⁽²¹⁾

On October 22, 2022, the army shot and killed a 48-year-old woman while she was working at her farm.⁽²²⁾ The soldiers then proceeded to loot and burn down some structures on the farm.⁽²³⁾

On September 16, 2022, the army killed eleven people and injured thirty more in two separate attacks.⁽²⁴⁾ Nine of those killed and fourteen of those injured in the attacks were children.⁽²⁵⁾ One of the attacks involved an airstrike on a monastic school that resulted in the deaths of seven children.⁽²⁶⁾

On June 15, 2022, the army raided St. Matthews Church and burned it down.⁽²⁷⁾ A group on the ground working to provide aid and assistance to the people of Myanmar gave their account of the attack: “[t]he army was shooting at us, it was hard to see anything. I heard several ‘booms’ and then the church caught fire. Before they left, they [the military] left several anti-personnel mines around the church. A 16-year-old Burmese boy stepped on them, luckily we were able to save him.”⁽²⁸⁾ Churches have been a common target of the military and, since February 2021, more than fifty churches have been attacked in Chin State. The Deputy Executive Director of the Chin State Human Rights Organization (CHRO) stated that:

In churches, the army destroys everything and takes away valuables, including offerings and collection money. This destruction of churches usually occurs when the army moves in convoy through villages.

I was born and raised in Thantlang and the whole town has been attacked more than 30 times, since September 2021. The church I went to as a child was destroyed. The army maintains a presence there and it is dangerous to go back.⁽²⁹⁾

4. REQUEST

As demonstrated above, Myanmar’s military has committed mass atrocities against the minority Christian population as well as other innocent civilians. This ongoing conflict has resulted in the loss of life and property and has further displaced thousands of innocent civilians. 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.

1. Myanmar, OPEN DOORS, World watch list N°14.

2. Id.

3. Id.

4. Burma, THE WORLD FACTBOOK (Jan. 20, 2023).

5. Christians Bear Brunt of Junta Violence in Myanmar, UCA NEWS (Apr. 20, 2022).

6. Hundreds are Complaining of Forcible Eviction by Junta Forces in Myanmar, PEOPLES DISPATCH (Dec. 28, 2022).

7. Myanmar, UNICEF (2023).

8. Burma, ASSISTANCE FOR POLITICAL PRISONERS (January 27, 2023).

9. Myanmar Junta Torches Century-Old Catholic Church, UCA NEWS (Jan. 17, 2023).
10. Id.
11. Id.
12. FREE BURMA RANGERS (Jan. 12, 2023).
13. Id.
14. Civilians Killed by Burma Army Jets and Mortars: Over 8,000 Displaced by Fighting in Ler Doh and Hsa Hti Townships, Western Karen State, Burma, FREE BURMA RANGERS (Dec. 14, 2022).
15. Id.
16. Nayt Thit, Elderly, Sick Villagers Killed in Latest Regime Atrocities, THE IRRRAWADDY (Dec. 5, 2022).
17. Id.
18. Id.
19. Id.
20. Airplanes Dropped Two Bombs on Hta Baw Kar Der Village, FREE BURMA RANGERS (Nov. 9, 2022).
21. Id.
22. Civilians Killed by Burma Army Jets and Mortars: Over 8,000 Displaced by Fighting in Ler Doh and Has Hti Townships, Western Karen State, Burma, *supra* note 14.
23. Id.
24. Chiara Torelli, 9 Children Among 11 Civilians Killed in Myanmar Military Attacks in Shan State and Sagaing, AOA V (Sep. 20, 2022).
25. Id.
26. Id.
27. Burned Churches: Myanmar's Junta Accused of Abuses Against the Christian Minority, THE OBSERVERS (Jun. 22, 2022).
28. Id.
29. Id.