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## Human Rights Council

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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development**

### **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.

[11 February 2019]

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

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

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Republic of the Union of Myanmar faces the need for significant political and economic reform, which are challenges as Myanmar is also working to transition from authoritarian rule to democracy. One of its greatest challenges is correct the continuing violation of human rights. In Myanmar today, Christians and other religious minorities face discrimination, persecution, and even ethnic cleansing. Civilians, who are not targeted because of their faith, also face violence and trauma because of the ongoing conflicts in Myanmar. Wa State is targeting Christians, in large part due to the influence of the Chinese government, which has encouraged the Wa government to shut down any kind of traceably foreign religious activity. In September 2018, Wa State issued a statewide policy that ordered the shutdown and/or destruction of any churches that were started or built after 1993. Christians in Chin State, in Western Myanmar, face persecution and discrimination at the hands of the Myanmar Army. For example, in August 2018, a Christian funeral party of forbidden by the local authorities from crossing a bridge to reach the burial grounds. These are but a few examples of the violation of human rights that are occurring in Myanmar.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

Since Myanmar gained its independence in 1947 from Japanese occupation, it has faced a long and complicated political history involving military control and political unrest. In 2010, new election laws were passed, and President Thein Sein became the first president of Myanmar to be elected through democratic process. President Thein Sein's government entered into, or reaffirmed, ceasefires with most of the largest Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs), in order to promote political dialogue and constitutional reform. However, due to the complex political situation, ceasefires have been broken, and civilians are frequently caught in the conflict between the Myanmar army and EAOs. The ECLJ has received information from sources on the ground in Myanmar who are reporting on continued violence and violations of human rights.

In Chin State, not only are Christians facing persecution and discrimination at the hands of local authorities, but landmines are causing hazardous conditions for civilians. For example, in September 2018, a 28-year-old-woman died after stepping on a landmine while she was out picking vegetables.

Despite the political changes occurring in Myanmar, an estimated 92,000 Karen citizens have fled because of ongoing conflict and are currently residing in refugee camps in Thailand. According to on the ground reports from January 2019, the Myanmar Army has doubled troop size at its camps in Karen State, further indicating that it would be unsafe for refugees to return home.

As stated above, Christians in Wa State are experiencing persecution and are being targeted for their faith. One Wa woman, a mother of two who is passionate about serving children at risk and sharing her faith with them has a warrant out for her arrest. Many churches are being destroyed. One Chinese citizen, and legal permanent U.S. resident, Pastor Cao, who served as a humanitarian worker in the impoverished Wa State is another example of the targeted persecution that is being encouraged by China. Pastor Cao was wrongfully detained and convicted by the Chinese government on charges of organizing illegal border crossings—a charge generally reserved to convict human traffickers—despite a dismal lack of evidence against him. Pastor Cao used a local ferry service, utilized by local citizens for 100s of years, to cross the border between China and Myanmar. He used this service openly and without problem from either government for years while conducting humanitarian work in Wa state by providing basic necessities and establishing schools to provide education to over 2000 students. He also spoke frequently with the Chinese local National Security Police to talk about his charity work and travel to Myanmar. Notably, there were approximately 12 people arriving on different ferries at the same time as Pastor Cao and a Christian teacher on the day of his arrest. While the others received a rare administrative fine for using the ferries, Pastor Cao and the other Christian present were the only ones detained, arrested, and charged with illegal border crossings. Pastor Cao's targeted arrest seems to be directly related to

his religious work, and is an example of how Chinese officials are cracking down on religious humanitarian workers in conjunction with officials in Wa State. Since Pastor Cao's arrest, the 16 schools that he helped build and established in Wa State have been torn down.

In May 2018, Myanmar Army soldiers in Kachin state fired rifles and rifle grenades at a Roman Catholic church and a nearby house. One shell landed next to the home and exploded, causing damage and also injuring an infant girl.

### **3. 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. The ECLJ respectfully calls on this Council to address Myanmar's continuous violations of the freedom of religion by respectfully and firmly remind Myanmar of its obligations as a signatory ICCPR. This Council should also urge Myanmar to continue to reform its laws and policies. The purpose of this Council and the ICCPR is to protect the human rights of individuals living around the world. Myanmar has an obligation to ensure that the rights of all of its citizens are protected, including the rights to freedom of religion and belief, and the right to life.

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