

# Secretary of State says Burmese military guilty of genocide

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The U.S. Secretary of State has determined atrocities committed by the Burmese military against the Rohingya people of Myanmar constitute “crimes against humanity and genocide.”

And many of the same military leaders also committed abuses against other ethnic and religious minority groups, he added.

Reports by multiple human rights organizations and the U.S. State Department’s “own rigorous fact-finding” revealed the Burmese military—known as the Tatmadaw—targeted the Rohingya for acts including “the razing of villages, killing, rape, torture and other horrific abuses,” [Secretary of State Antony Blinken said](#) during a March 21 speech at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Blinken cited a report produced in part by the museum’s Simon-Skjodt Center for the Prevention of Genocide after the Burmese military forced about 840,000 Rohingya to seek refuge in Bangladesh in 2016 and 2017.

## ‘Not isolated cases’

The report, based on interviews with 1,000 Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, revealed three-fourths of those interviewed personally witnessed members of the Burmese military kill someone, and more than half witnessed acts of sexual violence.

One in five witnessed a mass-casualty event in which more than 100 people were killed or seriously injured in a single incident.

“These percentages matter. They demonstrate that these abuses were not isolated cases,” Blinken said. “The attack against Rohingya was widespread and systematic, which is crucial for reaching a determination of crimes against humanity.”

Furthermore, the “clear intent” of the attacks was “to destroy Rohingya, in whole or in part,” he added.

“Many of the military leaders who oversaw the genocidal campaign against Rohingya, including the general who led it, were also involved in abuses committed against other ethnic and religious minority groups. They’re the same military leaders who overthrew Burma’s democratically elected government on Feb. 1, 2021, and seized power,” Blinken said.

Since seizing power, the military has killed more than 1,670 men, women and children, and “unjustly detained at least 12,800 more in abysmal conditions,” he added.

## **No one in Myanmar is safe**

“For those who did not realize it before the coup, the brutal violence that has followed has made clear that there is no one the Burmese military won’t come for. No one is safe from atrocities under its rule,” Blinken said.



Pastor Cung Biak Hum was shot dead in the Chin state of Myanmar.

(Facebook Photo / Asia Pacific Baptists)

Last September, the Tatmadaw [shot and killed Cung Biak Hum](#), a Baptist minister in Thantlang who was helping a member of his church extinguish a fire after the man's home was set ablaze during military attacks.

In early December, Salai Ngwe Kyar, a pastor in the village of Thet Kei Taung and a student at the Asho Chin Baptist Seminary in Pyay Township, [died from injuries sustained during a military interrogation](#) in Magway Region.

Much of the killing and burning by military is [directed toward the Chin people](#), a predominantly Christian ethnic group in Myanmar.

Several church buildings in the southern part of Chin State—including the property of Kanpetiet Baptist Church, Emmanuel Baptist Church and Gospel Baptist Church—were [severely damaged by bombs](#) on Dec. 13 and then looted by military. Tatmadaw troops also reportedly planted landmines to deter people who fled from returning.

## Religious freedom advocates applaud declaration

Advocates for international religious freedom applauded the Secretary of State for his statement and for the declaration of genocide.

The [U.S. Commission for International Religious Freedom](#) “has been advocating for this determination” for five years, Commission Chair Nadine Maenza said.

“The Rohingya have been targeted for decades by Burmese authorities—the Tatmadaw in particular. This determination provides recognition to the

Rohingya and acknowledges the severity of the atrocities that occurred, which is an important step towards achieving justice,” Maenza said.

Commissioner Anurima Bhargava noted Blinken pointed to similarities in the atrocities the Tatmadaw committed against the Rohingya and those the Nazis committed against the Jews.

“Now that the U.S. government has acknowledged the gravity of these crimes, it must actively support efforts to hold Burmese officials accountable, including through the international legal system,” Bhargava said.

Benedict Rogers, [Christian Solidarity Worldwide](#) senior analyst for East Asia, commended the Secretary of State for naming the Burmese military’s actions as genocide.

“We hope that this public announcement by the U.S. government will send a message to Myanmar’s military that those who committed these grave crimes against the Rohingya will ultimately be held accountable, and that their actions since the coup are being closely scrutinized,” Rogers said.