

Action urged to stop religious freedom violations in Myanmar

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More than 100 individuals and organizations—including 21 Wilberforce and the American Baptist Churches, USA—have urged United Nations leaders to mobilize an international coalition to stop violations of religious liberty in Myanmar, where a Baptist pastor was shot and killed last month.

The [letter](#), initiated by the Burma Human Rights Network, calls on U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres to “lead high-level efforts to increase diplomatic pressure” on the junta that gained control of the Myanmar government in early February.

It also urges Guterres to “mobilize countries in the region to deploy their influence to end the military’s violence and repression and seek the release of political prisoners and the establishment of genuine federal democracy and respect for human rights for all.”

The open letter calls for a global arms embargo, economic sanctions and increased humanitarian aid to Myanmar.

“It is time to cut the economic lifeline of the illegal military regime while providing humanitarian lifelines to the people of Burma/Myanmar,” the letter states.

Some Baptists endorse statement

In addition to the American Baptist Churches, USA, being listed as an endorsing organization, two American Baptist officials also signed on as individuals—Interim General Secretary C. Jeff Woods and James Scott

Coats, identified as a global worker in international ministries.

Scott Stearman, pastor of Metro Baptist Church in New York and U.N. representative for the Baptist World Alliance and Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, also signed the open letter.

The other endorsing group with a Baptist connection is [21 Wilberforce](#), a Christian human rights organization founded by Randel Everett, former executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

The open letter points to increased “hate speech” and the “targeting” of religious groups since the coup in Myanmar—also known as Burma—eight months ago.

“In recent months, hate speech against Christians has increased, and Christian figures have been murdered and arbitrarily detained by the military,” it states. “Religious oppression is a longstanding issue in Burma, and the coup has emboldened the military to further persecute Christians and Muslims living in the country.”

Mentions Baptist pastor who was killed



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

(Facebook Photo / Asia Pacific Baptists)

The open letter specifically cites the example of Baptist Pastor Cung Biak Hum, who was [shot dead by Burmese military](#) last month while trying to help a neighbor extinguish his home after it was set ablaze. Nineteen homes in Thantlang, Chin State, were destroyed.

It also mentions Pastor Thian Lian Sang, who has been held in custody more than a month, as well as raids on the Mohnhyin mosque and Butaryone Street Mosque in Mohnhyin city, Kachin State, in June.

The Baptist World Alliance issued a statement Sept. 20 calling for “the immediate release” of Thian Lian Sang and for those involved in the killing of Cung Biak Hum to be held responsible.

After the military seized control of Myanmar in early February and declared a state of emergency, the [BWA](#) urged member bodies worldwide to “stand together with the global Baptist family in supporting the people of Myanmar” through prayer and advocacy.



Myanmar doctors, supporters of the Civil Disobedience Movement, attend an anti-coup march in Yangon, Myanmar, on Feb. 25, 2021. (AP Photo)

The Burma Human Rights Network letter also notes three women and a man were killed in May when authorities opened fire on a Catholic church in Kantharyar Loikaw City, Kayah State. About the same time, a Karen church was destroyed by the military and the police. Its pastor and a disabled individual were beaten and detained.

“The attacks on the protesters and the religious minorities have been widespread and systematically carried out by the order of the same general who also ordered for the mass killings of Rohingya people in 2017, which was described as a genocide by the UN Fact Finding Mission,” the open letter asserts.

The letter calls on the Burmese military to “end all hostilities against religious minorities, release all religious and political prisoners, step down from power, and allow the democratically elected government to resume.”

It urges the National Unity Government to ensure “all rights for religious minorities and present a detailed plan for doing so when they regain power.”

Call for global arms embargo

“The international community must increase pressure on the military to comply with these demands to ensure the safety and well-being of everyone in and from Burma/Myanmar,” the letter states.

“A global arms embargo and targeted sanctions on the military’s sources of revenue are vital to support the promotion of human rights and democracy in Burma/Myanmar. Countries should impose their own unilateral arms embargo in the absence of a U.N.-mandated arms embargo.”

At the same time, the open letter urges the international community to “increase humanitarian assistance, especially for ethnic and religious

minorities and particularly for those internally displaced, taking care to use civil society channels that do not result in aid being blocked or misappropriated by the military.”

“Repeated warnings regarding the impending genocide of the Rohingya were ignored for years, until it was too late,” the letter states. “We sound the warning bell now that there is a real danger of the military again using nationalism and attacks on non-Buddhists for its nefarious political agenda, with devastating consequences for religious minorities in the country.”

Benedict Rogers, senior analyst on East Asia with [Christian Solidarity Worldwide](#), affirmed the call for a global arms embargo.

“So far, the human rights community’s repeated calls for action regarding the ongoing crisis in Myanmar have met with disappointingly insufficient action,” Rogers said. “Verbal condemnations and the sanctions imposed on the Tatmadaw thus far are welcome, but there remains a need to take this further, including through the establishment of a global arms embargo as a matter of urgency.”