

BWA chief concerned about safety of two Myanmar pastors

August 14, 2019

Elijah Brown, general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance, sent a letter Aug. 14 to officials at the United Nations and the United States government to register concern regarding the safety of two pastors from Myanmar who have criticized their government.

Pastors Hkalam Samson and Langjaw Gam Seng participated in the recent International Religious Freedom Ministerial in Washington, D.C. At its conclusion, the U.S. Department of State arranged for the pastors to [meet with President Trump](#) to talk about the persecution they had endured in Myanmar.

“The pastors spoke with open honesty, which is now leading to their direct endangerment,” Brown wrote.

“Pastor Langjaw Gam Seng spoke on his experiences of persecution. He was [arrested](#) and tortured for 16 months for reporting the bombing of St. Francis Xavier Church to journalists. His torture included being shackled and blindfolded, while being given minimal food and no blankets to keep warm in the immense cold.”

Arrest at airport feared

After spending several weeks in the United States, the two pastors were returning to Myanmar, but Brown notified international and national officials the pair could be arrested again.



Elijah Brown

“We are alarmed, as we have heard from sources inside the country that it is planned for both men to be arrested upon their arrival at Yangon International Airport,” he wrote.

Brown sent the letter to U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres and Yanghee Lee, special rapporteur on the human rights situation in Myanmar in the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, asking for their help.

He also sent it to Nicholas J.C. Snyder, special adviser for Asia in the office of the U.S. vice president; Sam Brownback, U.S. ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom; Kelley Curie, U.S. ambassador-at-large for global women’s issues; and to Sen. James E. Risch, chair of the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, and Rep. Eliot L. Engel, chair of the U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs.

“Should either man be arrested or otherwise harassed, I will be reaching out to you to ask for your assistance,” Brown wrote. “I ask that you also please notify United States Ambassador Scot Marciel that these men were invited to speak in the United States and now are under immediate threat

of arrest, and to ask the embassy to watch these developments carefully.”

EDITOR’S NOTE: On Aug. 15, BWA received confirmation the two pastors had arrived safely, and officials were continuing to monitor the situation. Ambassador Kelley Eckels-Currie said: “We’ve been tracking their return and are happy to confirm they have arrived safely and without incident in Yangon. Ambassador Marciel also met with them after they arrived. We’ll continue monitoring their return to Kachin State.”

Georgia Drake, a human rights officer at the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights stated: “We are informed that the two men returned safely to Yangon airport yesterday. They were met by representatives from the UN and US embassy, and they were not arrested. We are concerned and monitoring the situation closely.”