

Conditions worsen in Myanmar one year after coup

February 2, 2022

One year after a military coup in Myanmar, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom joined human rights advocates and religious leaders in condemning the violence that has claimed 1,300 lives.

In the year since the Feb. 1 overthrow of the civilian government by the military, known as the Tatmadaw, the army has targeted religious minorities and destroyed houses of worship in Myanmar, also known as Burma, the commission noted.

“USCIRF continues to stand with the people of Burma in condemning the military junta, which has only increased religious freedom violations since it took over the institutions of the state one year ago,” Commission Chair Nadine Maenza said.

“We urge the U.S. government to support the continued pursuit for accountability for the many human rights abuses perpetrated by the Tatmadaw, especially those committed against the predominantly Muslim Rohingya and various Christian communities.”

Religious minorities targeted

The commission specifically noted the military has targeted Christian Chin, Kachin and Karen communities, along with Rohingya Muslims.

“In 2017, the Tatmadaw targeted Rohingya Muslims, who were systematically killed, raped, tortured and pushed out of their own homelands within Burma—and their villages and places of worship

burned.” Commissioner Anurima Bhargava said.

“Last February, the Tatmadaw unleashed violence and persecuted anyone perceived to stand in its way, including many religious minority communities. USCIRF once again urges the U.S. government to determine that the atrocities committed against the Rohingya constitute genocide and crimes against humanity.”

In its [2021 annual report](#) and a November 2021 [Burma update](#), the commission urged the U.S. government to hold Burmese officials accountable by using the international legal system, implementing targeted sanctions, and designating Burma as a Country of Particular Concern for engaging in “systematic, ongoing and egregious violations of religious freedom.”

Pray for peace and justice

In a [video posted on social media](#), Baptist World Alliance General Secretary Elijah Brown called on Christians—and Baptists in particular—to pray for the people of Myanmar and “press for freedom for all.”



Elijah Brown, general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance, calls for prayer for Myanmar. (Screen grab)

“We remember our Baptist brothers and sisters [in Myanmar] who—the

year before the coup—were the second-fastest-growing Baptist convention in the world, and yet over the last 12 months, have had their lives upended by violence as they have sought to avoid military aerial bombardment on civilians, the crack of sniper rifles, the intentional targeting of pastors and religious leaders and their families, the occupation of churches, the intentional stoking of ethnic violence, and the suffering of a country that is in collapse,” Brown said.

He also urged prayer for persecuted Rohingya Muslims and for the well-being of all who seek to live in peace.

“We pray for the restoration of democracy, for transformative peace and justice, and for the flourishing of all of Myanmar,” Brown said.

A year of violence and persecution



Pastor Cung Biak Hum was shot dead in the Chin state of Myanmar. (Facebook Photo / Asia Pacific Baptists)

In September, Burmese military [shot and killed Cung Biak Hum](#), a Baptist pastor who was trying to help a member of his church extinguish a fire after the man’s home was set ablaze during a bombing attack.

[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.

A few days later, the body of a Church of Christ pastor was discovered with a bullet wound to his head after being arrested and subjected to enhanced interrogation.

On Dec. 13, several church buildings—including at least three Baptist houses of worship—were damaged severely by bombs and then looted by the military.

Dangerous place to be a health care worker

A few days prior to the one-year anniversary of the coup, Physicians for Human Rights, Insecurity Insight and the Johns Hopkins University Center for Public Health and Human Rights released [a study](#) reporting 415 attacks on medical workers in Myanmar and on the country's fragile health care infrastructure.

“Attacks on health care workers and health care itself has become a prominent feature of the coup d'état. Today, Myanmar is one of the most dangerous places in the world to be a health care worker,” the report states.

The study revealed 286 health care workers in Myanmar have been arrested or detained, 30 have been killed, and 128 medical facilities have been attacked.



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

The military junta in Myanmar targeted health care workers because many of them played a prominent role in the Civil Disobedience Movement and peaceful protests in the weeks immediately following the coup.

Last March, [a Baptist doctor in Myanmar](#)—who asked to be identified only as Octavia—wrote in an email, “Doctors, nurses and first responders have become the No. 1 enemy of the military for our role in saving lives and also for the countrywide Civil Disobedience Movement we initiated.”



BWA supported the launch of the Red Ribbon Charity Clinic to provide medical care for individuals injured in the Civil Disobedience Movement protests, in addition to supplying oxygen concentrators to clinics in refugee camps along the Thai-Myanmar border.

The global Baptist group also provided food and emergency tarp shelters to

displaced people hiding in the Burmese jungles and supported 200 Burmese pastors, enabling them to stay in Myanmar and minister to their people.