

# Kachin Baptist leader sentenced to six years in prison

April 7, 2023

On Good Friday, the international community learned a Burmese court sentenced the former president of the Kachin Baptist Convention to six years in prison.

A court in Myitkyina sentenced Pastor Hkalam Samson—an outspoken proponent of religious freedom for ethnic minorities in Myanmar—on charges of unlawful association, defaming the state and terrorism.

Samson, chairman of the Kachin National Consultative Assembly and critic of human rights abuses by the ruling Burmese military, was [arrested on Dec. 5, 2022, at the Mandalay International Airport](#). At the time he was attempting to travel to Bangkok, reportedly for a medical procedure. He has been held in prison since his arrest.

## ‘A grave injustice’

“Pastor Samson’s sentencing is a grave injustice, amplified on the very weekend Christians around the world gather to declare our faith in Jesus. Yet in this dark moment, let every church pray for Pastor Samson on this Sunday, and let each one of us lift our voice in Easter hope that Jesus still transforms unjust imprisonment into new life,” said Elijah Brown, general secretary and CEO of the Baptist World Alliance.

Samson was president of the Kachin Baptist Convention from 2018 to 2022, and he previously served two terms as the convention’s general secretary, from 2010 to 2018.

In April 2021, two months after the military coup in Myanmar, Samson joined in issuing a [call for global prayer](#) and advocacy on behalf of the nation.

“What a tragic development to learn on Good Friday that Dr. Samson has been sentenced to six years in prison. Dr. Samson is a key leader of Baptists in Myanmar and throughout the Baptist World Alliance,” said Randel Everett, founding president of 21Wilberforce, a human rights organization focused on international religious freedom.

“He is a courageous man of peace who has spoken out against Myanmar’s illegal regime. Global Christians should encourage their nations to ask for the immediate release of Dr. Samson.”

Samson has traveled internationally to advocate for peace and religious freedom in Myanmar, including a meeting at the White House in conjunction with the 2019 International Religious Freedom Ministerial.

He also met senior members of the British Parliament and other governmental officials during a November 2018 trip to London.

## **‘An outrageous travesty of justice’**

“This sentence is an outrageous travesty of justice,” said Benedict Rogers, Christian Solidarity International’s senior analyst for East Asia.

Rogers characterized Samson as “a completely nonviolent Christian pastor and a brave and tireless advocate for justice, human rights and peace.”

“He has been jailed simply for courageously speaking out against the Myanmar military’s barbaric atrocities perpetrated against the people of Myanmar,” Rogers said.

“The international community must speak out strongly to demand his

immediate release from prison and intensify efforts to apply targeted sanctions against Myanmar's illegal military regime until all political prisoners are freed, the military ceases all attacks in the ethnic states and Myanmar is placed on a path of genuine federal democracy."