

Peace on Earth elusive for believers in Myanmar

December 20, 2021

As Christians around the world remember the birth of the Prince of Peace, believers in Myanmar continue to suffer from violence perpetrated by their nation's military.

Since the Tatmadaw military seized control of the country in a February coup, 1,348 people have been killed and more than 11,000 arrested, according to the Thailand-based [Assistance Association for Political Prisoners](#). Increasingly, troops have burned churches and homes.

In addition to ongoing attacks on Rohingya Muslims, much—but not all—of the killing and burning by military troops is directed toward the Chin people, a predominantly Christian ethnic group in Myanmar, also known as Burma.

‘Seems to be getting worse and worse’

Many internally displaced people are seeking refuge in the jungles away from population centers. Others have fled into neighboring countries, including Thailand, Laos and India.

Among those who left their homes in Myanmar are the 86-year-old mother and younger sister of Thong Kho Lun, pastor of Greater Houston Burmese Christian Fellowship.

“My mom’s home was near a military camp. She couldn’t sleep. She was so fearful. So, my baby sister and her family moved with her to India nine months ago,” Thong said. In February, he plans to travel to India to visit his

family who relocated there.

While his immediate family is in a safe place where his mother can receive medical care, Thong maintains close contact with churches in Myanmar. None of the reports they provide are encouraging.

“Every day, we hear a lot of bad news—heartbreaking news,” he said. “Instead of protecting the people, the Burmese military is killing people every day, burning villages and arresting people.

“Christians are being targeted. They are burning churches and killing pastors. ... It just seems to be getting worse and worse.”

Escalating violence toward Chin

Salai Ngwe Kyar, a pastor in the village of Thet Kei Taung and a student at the A sho Chin Baptist Seminary in Pyay Township, died Dec. 8 from injuries sustained during a military interrogation in Magway Region, according to [Myanmar Now](#), an independent news service.

The 26-year-old minister was arrested while traveling to Saw Township on Dec. 6 and detained on suspicion of links to the People’s Defense Force. Myanmar Now reported he first was taken to a local police station but then moved to the No. 20 Defense Equipment Industry factory for enhanced interrogation. He died at Magway General Hospital.

[The Chindwin news agency](#) reported Om Kee, a Church of Christ pastor from the Oakphu ward in Kanpetlet in Chin state, was arrested Dec. 11. His body was discovered Dec. 13 with a bullet wound to his head. The [Chin Human Rights Organization](#) said he was arrested and killed by Tatmadaw troops while returning from a visit to his grandmother.

[The Chindwin](#) reported several church buildings in the southern part of Chin state—including the property of Kanpetlet 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.

Earlier in December, Tatmadaw troops torched the United Pentecostal Church in Thantlang and also burned at least 18 other buildings in the town, the [Chin Human Rights Organization](#) reported.

Baptists among casualties



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

The latest escalation in violence comes less than three months after 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.

On Dec. 10, Baptist World Alliance United National Representative Scott Stearman, BWAid Director Marsha Scipio and leaders from the American Baptist Churches USA met with U.N. leaders to talk about ways to pursue peace in Myanmar.

“Our Baptist World Alliance team continues to work hard to support many in Myanmar who face the reality of an ongoing military coup,” BWA General Secretary Elijah Brown wrote in a [Dec. 11 Facebook post](#).

Since February, BWA supported 200 pastors to help them remain in Myanmar to minister to their people, supplied oxygen concentrators to medical clinics in refugee camps along the Thai-Myanmar border, and provided food and emergency tarp shelters to displaced people hiding in the Burmese jungles.

Early on, BWA also supported the launch of the Red Ribbon Charity Clinic to provide medical care for people injured in the Civil Disobedience Movement protests.

Humanitarian aid and prayers for peace

Greater Houston Burmese Christian Fellowship, a mission of Tallowood Baptist Church in Houston, has a history of meeting needs in Myanmar. Six years ago, when monsoons caused widespread flooding, the church worked with ministry partners and humanitarian relief groups to deliver 32 tons of rice to people displaced by floods and mudslides.



Through the work of indigenous

church planters and in partnership with the Karen Baptist Convention and other regional Baptist groups, Greater Houston Burmese Christian Fellowship has continued its ministry to internally displaced people and refugees in Myanmar, even when COVID-19 prohibited international travel. (Photo courtesy of Greater Houston Burmese Christian Fellowship)

Thong and members of his church journeyed to Myanmar several times on mission trips, but between the COVID-19 pandemic and the military coup, they have been unable to be physically present with the people there the last two years. However, the congregation has continued its ministry in Myanmar through indigenous church planters there it helps support.

Earlier this month, the church joined with eight other congregations to sponsor a Burmese cultural fair in Houston. The event raised \$10,000 for humanitarian relief in Myanmar.

“Every Wednesday night, we have a prayer meeting for Myanmar. Sometimes, we organize churches internationally to gather on Zoom for prayer meetings,” Thong said.

In a [Dec. 20 Facebook post](#), the regional Asia Pacific Baptist Federation asked for Christians globally to pray for peace in Myanmar: “As we enter the week of Christmas and prepare for Christmas services [and] celebrations, may we take a moment to remember our brothers and sisters in Myanmar who continue to suffer from the brutalities of Myanmar military. Surely they do not deserve this! Would you say a prayer for God to intervene and rescue them from more pain and tragedy?”