

# UN reports Burmese military committing war crimes

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A United Nations report presents evidence the Burmese military and associated militia groups increasingly are committing war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The [Aug. 8 report from the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar](#) to the U.N. Human Rights Council cites “strong evidence indicating that serious international crimes are being inflicted upon the people of Myanmar,” including mass executions, torture and the deliberate bombing of civilian targets, including houses of worship.

The report, which covers the period from the beginning of July 2022 to the end of June 2023, states, “The military continues to carry out widespread and systematic attacks on the civilian population, and the armed conflict substantially intensified during the reporting period.”

It notes “strong evidence” the military forces have committed “with increasing frequency and brazenness” three types of combat-related war crimes:

- Indiscriminate or disproportionate targeting of civilians using bombs.
- Killing of civilians or combatants detained during operations.
- Large-scale and intentional burning of civilian dwellings and other civilian buildings.



Burmese military shelled Thantland township in Myanmar's Chin State. (Facebook Photo / Asia Pacific Baptists)

“Every loss of life in Myanmar is tragic, but the devastation caused to whole communities through aerial bombardments and village burnings is particularly shocking,” said Nicholas Koumjian, head of the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar.

“Our evidence points to a dramatic increase in war crimes and crimes against humanity in the country, with widespread and systematic attacks against civilians, and we are building case files that can be used by courts to hold individual perpetrators responsible.”

## **Broadened focus of inquiry**

While the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar is focused particularly on crimes against the Rohingya people, it also gives special attention to crimes against children and sexual or gender-based crimes committed since the February 2021 military coup.

The report also points to “more and more evidence concerning torture, sexual violence and other forms of severe mistreatment at numerous detention facilities.”

Trent Martin, advocacy coordinator for 21Wilberforce, noted the Burmese military has targeted other ethnic and religious minorities, in addition to the Rohingya.

“While the crimes committed against the Muslim Rohingya have rightly been a focus of human rights investigations, the story of a brutal dictatorship trying to force others to adopt what it views as a superior ethnic and religious system is not only happening to the Rohingya,” Martin said.

“The atrocities of the military are being repeated towards many other ethnic groups in the country, such as the Chin, Karen, or Kachin. These groups’ resistance to assimilation by the Burmese majority and their large Christian populations put them at odds with the regime’s goal of repressive control.

“This full perspective is often lacking in the overall human rights narrative about Burma, and I am glad to see that this report is starting to take some initial steps to encourage a fuller investigation of the atrocities taken against these ethnic groups.”

## **Religious freedom violations reported**



Hkalam Samson, past president and

former general secretary of the Kachin Baptist Convention in Myanmar was detained by the Burmese military junta in December. On Good Friday, he was sentenced to six years in prison. (CSW Photo)

A [report by the International Commission of Jurists](#), released in June, focused on violations of the right to freedom of religion and belief since the 2021 coup, including raids or attacks on houses of worship and the arrest of religious leaders.

[Hkalam Samson](#), past president and former general secretary of the Kachin Baptist Convention is among the religious leaders who remain imprisoned in Myanmar. He was taken into custody last December before he could board a flight to Bangkok, Thailand, for medical treatment.

Between February 2021 and April 2023, the commission noted news sources reported 190 religious or sacred sites were ransacked, destroyed or damaged as a result of arson, artillery fire and airstrikes. These included 95 Buddhist sites and 87 Christian religious buildings, including 35 churches in Chin State, 16 in Karenni State and 12 in Karen State.

The commission concluded “the military has violated the human rights of religious minorities and destroyed minority religious sites and places of worship in violation of international law and standards.”



Participants at the 2022 Baptist World Alliance annual gathering in Birmingham, Ala., lay hands on Vernette Mint Mint San of Myanmar and Igor Bandura of Ukraine to pray for their homelands. (Photo / Ken Camp)

At its 2022 general council meeting in Birmingham, Ala., the Baptist World Alliance adopted a [resolution condemning the coup](#) in Myanmar and the Burmese military for waging “a campaign of terror and violence, particularly against minority religions.”

Mervyn Thomas, founder of Christian Solidarity Worldwide, condemned “the brutal actions of Myanmar’s junta in the strongest terms.”

“There is overwhelming evidence coming in from reports on the ground that grave crimes are being perpetrated by the military against civilians. We call for the immediate cessation of violence and an end to the deliberate targeting of civilians and infrastructure, including hospitals and places of worship,” he said.

“We urge states to do more to stop the supply of arms and resources to the military, and for further targeted sanctions to prevent influential military personnel from continuing their brutal campaigns.”