

PERSECUTION

## Myanmar, repression of Christians and Rohingya intensifies

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According to a [report](#) by *Agenzia Fides* on May 15 this year, aerial assaults conducted by the Myanmar military struck a Catholic Church and a Baptist church in the village of Lungtak based in the town of Tonzang, in the Christian-majority state of Chin. The air

strikes, which happened between May 11 and 12, ravaged five houses, frightening villagers ever since. Based on testimonies from local Fides sources, the bombarded Catholic church is under the Catholic Diocese of Kalay. Fortunately, the local parish priest Titus En Za Khan, together with members of the faithful, managed to flee into the neighboring forests.

“The violence continues to impact the civilian population, especially in the area of Sagaing, part of the diocese of Kalay,” a local Catholic source admitted to Fides.

**Fierce clashes between the Myanmar military and various ethnic rebel groups** such as the Zomi Revolutionary Army (ZRA) and the Chin National Army (CNA) have led to a humanitarian crisis in Chin State, as per [statements](#) by NGO Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO).

Moreover, on April 22, the ruling Myanmar military enforced curbs on religious activities, such as Sunday worship services, in the capital of Chin state after a militia attack on a convoy that included junta ministers on April 12. Per media reports, the Chin Defense Force claimed culpability for the attack.

Strikingly, local authorities implemented the restrictions forbidding the assembly of over five persons for religious service and banning shops from opening in Hakha, a western state bordering India and Bangladesh.

**“In Chin state, every family** has more than five family members. So, gathering and praying can be affected under the new order,” a Church source, who preferred to remain anonymous, acknowledged in [statements](#) to UCA News on April 26. Although Christians pleaded with local authorities on April 24 to lift the ban, their requests were dismissed. The order, scheduled to last until June 22, will impact at least 14 churches of various denominations in Hakha, including Roman Catholic, Baptist, and Anglican. Furthermore, a church source told UCA News that “except for funerals, Church officials need to inform local authorities at least five days before holding prayer meetings and weddings.” “Sadly, church services are restricted,” Augustine, a Church social worker..

**Since February 2, 2023, the Myanmar junta** has imposed martial law on seven townships in the conflict-stricken Chin state, with a curfew and a ban on gatherings of over five persons.

**Chin state is not the only state in the conflict-ridden country** that has seen the effects of violence from the ruling Myanmar junta. On April 12, in the state of Kachin, masked attackers under the same Myanmar junta [shot](#) a Myanmar Catholic priest, [Father Paul Khwi Shane Aung](#), as he was celebrating the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass at St.

Patrick's Church in the town of Mohnyin in the northern region of Myanmar..“They were wearing black clothes and masks and entered the church on a motorcycle to shoot the priest three times,” U Zaw, a local catechist, [told UCA News](#). Zaw said the wounded priest was rushed to a hospital in Mohnyin and was later transferred to a hospital in Myitkyina, the state capital..

The assault on Father Paul came almost a month after 47-year-old Nammye Hkun Jaw Li, a pastor with the Kachin Baptist Convention (KBC), was [shot dead](#) at his computer shop in Mogaung township on March 18.

Notably, the junta has enforced martial law in 61 townships across the country since taking power in a military coup in February 2021. Based on UCA News, the ruling Myanmar military is targeting clergy, pastors and Church-run institutions for supporting local forces against the junta, which seized power from the civilian government in 2021.

**According to a [report](#) by human rights group Myanmar Witness** in January this year, since the February 2021 coup and the conflict that followed, religious buildings throughout Myanmar have been hugely impacted as a result. For one, churches across Chin state have been adversely damaged by ongoing violence, including raids, arson, aerial strikes, artillery assaults between the ruling Myanmar military and local armed groups.

**In February, the aid group Christian Solidarity International (CSI)** [cautioned](#) against an increase in [violence](#) against the persecuted Christian minority in Myanmar, admitting that ethnic-minority Christians there “are subjected to cruel ethnic-cleansing campaigns.” “Violence against Christian communities has increased enormously since the military regime ended the short-lived hybrid government agreement,” Selina Biedermann, CSI project leader said, pointing out the plight of Christian minorities in the war-torn country.

**The U.N.’s chief investigator for Myanmar** has termed the junta’s crackdown on dissenters following the 2021 coup as “[systematic violence](#)”. Apart from repressing Christian minorities, the junta has sought to [crack down](#) on Muslim Rohingyas in Rakhine State. illegal immigrants from Bangladesh and denied citizenship and fundamental rights in Myanmar.

**Violence has plagued Rakhine State** since the Arakan Army (AA) rebels attacked forces of the ruling military government in November, terminating a ceasefire between the AA and the junta that had largely adhered to since the 2021 military coup, according to a [report](#) by Qatar-based Al Jazeera. “Faced with mounting losses in Rakhine, the

regime has resorted to arming members of the Rohingya ethnic minority to counter the Arakan Army's advance," Morgan Michaels of the International Institute for Strategic Studies **declared**. "The AA has reacted with inflammatory rhetoric and violence directed at the Rohingya."

**In wake of the renewed conflict**, Rohingya civilians are "increasingly being caught in the middle", the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) **said** last week. Consequently, these clashes have impacted the Rohingya community, long deemed as outsiders by the majority Buddhist residents in Rakhine. According to a Channel News Asia (CNA) report on May 27, **thousands of Rohingya are estimated** to have escaped to neighboring Bangladesh since mid-May, whereas those remaining in Rakhine are in desperate need of humanitarian aid.

**The community has faced persecution** under the Myanmar military and Rakhine Buddhists for years. Following a 2017 crackdown by the military, almost one million **fled** to Bangladesh, where many now live in crowded refugee camps. However, the same Channel News Asia report quoted Mohammed Taher, a Rohingya refugee in Bangladesh, as saying: "Many want to flee from Rakhine but Bangladesh is not opening its door for Rohingya," Taher said.