



## COUNTRY PROFILE

# BURMA (MYANMAR)



The last two years have seen spiralling violence, following the February 2021 military junta coup. The Burmese military stands accused of having destroyed more than 200 places of worship belonging to all faith traditions.<sup>42</sup> The most concentrated destruction of religious buildings was in western Chin state, where the Burmese army razed 85 churches.<sup>43</sup> Historic religious buildings were also destroyed, including the 129-year-old Assumption Church in Chan Thar village, Sagaing Region in January 2023.<sup>44</sup>

Christianity is the predominant religion of the Chin, Kachin and Naga peoples as well as being widespread among the Karen and Karenni. Following the 1947 assassination of General Aung San, the tribal regions lost the autonomy

promised by the Panglong Agreement. Subsequently these Christian-majority groups have faced discrimination, violence, restrictions on religious practices and, even before the 2021 uprising, had churches destroyed. The current crisis has led to significant upheaval in these communities, e.g. 282,615 Karenni were displaced of which 95 percent were Christians.<sup>45</sup>

By the end of 2023, the junta had detained 20 Christian ministers as part of a broader crackdown on religious leaders criticising the regime: military tribunals had already sentenced seven of them, and nine others were awaiting trial. Four Chin Presbyterian leaders were reportedly tortured.<sup>46</sup>

## SELECTED INCIDENTS

**JANUARY 2023** Five people, including a Baptist pastor, Catholic deacon and a two-year-old child, were killed and several others were injured by junta airstrikes on churches in two predominantly ethnic Karen villages in Mutraw, Karen State on Thursday 12<sup>th</sup>.<sup>47</sup>

**AUGUST 2023** Baptist churches in Chin State were hit by the junta: on Saturday 12<sup>th</sup>, a church was destroyed and seven people were injured during a junta artillery attack on Ramthlo village; on Monday 14<sup>th</sup> two artillery shells were fired into the courtyard of the church in Hakha city, destroying the pastor's house. A bishop of Hakha Baptist Church said: "It would be a different story if some armed groups were present but this is just an innocent church. It is purely a religious compound. They should have never done damage to such holy places."<sup>48</sup>

**NOVEMBER 2023** Bishop Celso Ba Shwe and 80 refugees sheltering in Christ the King Catholic Cathedral, Loikaw fled after Burmese military attacked the complex on Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> before occupying its pastoral centre the following day. Bishop Shwe said this was the third attempt by the junta to seize the Cathedral compound.<sup>49</sup>

**JANUARY 2024** Junta air strikes killed 17 people – including nine children – most of whom were gathering for worship at St Peter's Baptist Church, Kanan village, Sagaing Region on Sunday 7<sup>th</sup>. Amnesty International called on the UN to designate the attack as a war crime.<sup>50</sup>

**APRIL 2024** Father Paul Khwi Shane Aung was hospitalised after being gunned down while celebrating the 6.30am Mass at St Patrick's Church, Mohnyin, Kachin State on Friday 12<sup>th</sup>. Two men wearing black clothes and masks entered the church on a motorcycle and shot the 40-year-old parish priest. Their motive is still unknown.<sup>51</sup>