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Congressional Briefing: Escalating Atrocities Against Christians in Burma

Russell Senate Office Building, September 18, 2023

Remarks by Zo Tum Hmung, Executive Director of CAM

Good afternoon, and thank you for attending this briefing.

Last year, the Biden administration determined that the Burmese military's atrocities against the Rohingya are genocide and crimes against humanity.

We welcomed this action. We seek a determination that their attacks on Christians also constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity. This would help put more pressure on the military, also known as Tatmadaw, to end its violence against minority religions.

Since the first 1962 military coup, Christians have been persecuted systematically. But since the 2021 coup, the Tatmadaw has escalated its attacks on Christians.

Burma is a majority Buddhist country of approximately 57 million people. Only 6% of the population is Christian. However, many ethnic minority groups in the country, such as Chin, Kachin, and Karenni, are largely Christian. Chin State is the only majority Christian state, at 85%. This means that religious and ethnic persecution by the military go together.

According to the International Commission of Jurists, the Tatmadaw has destroyed or damaged at least 87 Christian places of worship since 2021. Even though the Tatmadaw claims to respect Buddhism, their brutal war against their own people has led them to destroy and occupy many Buddhist pagodas and monasteries. The military has also destroyed other minority religious buildings.

We have produced four reports since the 2021 coup. In February, I had the opportunity to testify before the USCIRF Hearing on Burma. In March of this year, I traveled to India and met with Chin pastors in the India-Burma border area who fled to Mizoram State, India.

I would like to talk about the town of Thantlang, Chin State. Thantlang is 21 miles away from my native village. The military destroyed 21 of 22 churches and nearly 1,300 residences, displacing the entire population of 10,000. These churches include a Methodist church, Presbyterian Church, Catholic Church, Pentecostal Church, Baptist Church, etc. These atrocities against Chin Christians constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity.

In Chin State, we have seen a large increase in airstrikes against the civilian population. The Chinland Information Center records dozens of airstrikes this year alone. From January through

April, the military dropped 236 bombs in Chin State. CAM documented and issued statements condemning these atrocities.

On March 30, an airstrike on Kluafo Village killed 8 and destroyed 2 churches.

On April 10, the military bombed Webula Village, killing 9, including a retired pastor.

On April 27, an airstrike on Tlanglo Village killed 2 civilians and destroyed 3 churches.

On May 5, an airstrike on Malsawm Village destroyed the Malsawm Baptist Church.

On August 12, an airstrike on Ramthlo Village destroyed the Ramthlo Baptist Church.

On August 14, the military fired on the historic Hakha Baptist Church compound, built by American missionaries, damaging the senior pastor's home.

This is why the United States should join the EU in sanctioning Myanma Oil and Gas Enterprises (MOGE). MOGE has over \$1 billion in annual revenue, which funds the Tatmadaw and its air force.

The atrocities against Christians happen in other states and regions as well. In November 2022, in Sagaing Region, the military burned down hundreds of homes, a church, and a school in the historic village of Mon Hla. This was the hometown of Cardinal Charles Maung Bo of Yangon and Archbishop Marco Tin Way of Mandalay. In January 2023, the Tatmadaw burned down the 129-year-old Catholic Assumption Church in the village of Chan Thar.

Now, we will play a video by the Chin Post on the Tlanglo attack. *Video*

Next, I would like to invite Pastor Van Thakam Thang to speak. The Pastor is a native of Tlanglo Village.

Now, I would like to invite Mah Khin. She is a native of Kluafo Village. Her mother and sister were killed in a Tatmadaw airstrike.

As we heard from the testimony of Pastor Thang and Mah Khin, the military has escalated the atrocities against Christians with airstrikes on civilians.

We need help from the U.S. We need accountability. We call for the Biden administration to determine these atrocities against Christians are war crimes and crimes against humanity. We call for the United States to join the EU in sanctioning MOGE. Thank you.