

Why 4 Million Christians in This Southeast Asian Nation Are In Danger

As the southeast Asian nation of Myanmar faces continued fallout from a military coup five years ago, members of the country's Christian minority bear much of the consequences.

Christian Daily issued a report on June 22 noting that more than four million believers in Myanmar face substantial risks.

The governing regime, Buddhist militants such as the Arakan Army, and Muslims like the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army all persecute Christians.

"Christianity accounts for only around six percent of Myanmar's population, but it is concentrated among ethnic minorities inhabiting the country's contested borderlands," Christian Daily reported.

"Christians therefore suffer a disproportionate amount of both collateral and deliberate damage."

The past five years have witnessed the devastation of numerous churches.

Chin State, where Christians account for 85 percent of the population, has seen 70 churches firebombed.



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The village of Thantlang in Chin State had 21 of their 22 churches destroyed, while houses were shelled until the population left.

Individual believers have faced unjust persecution from the

military.

"Pastor Cung Biak Hum was shot while trying to organize residents to extinguish fires started by soldiers," Christian Daily reported.

"His wedding ring was taken from his hand, mutilated by the junta's troops."

Even before the military coup, believers were "subjected to forced labor, torture, arbitrary detention and extrajudicial killing."

The military has also tried to forcibly assimilate Christians into the Buddhist majority.

"Soldiers were reportedly encouraged to marry Chin Christian women and induce or compel them to convert to Buddhism, using marriage as an instrument of state religious and demographic control," Christian Daily said.

Many Christians from Myanmar have now fled their home nation, entering India, Thailand, and Malaysia as refugees.

Myanmar ranks 14th on Open Doors' World Watch List of persecution against Christians.

"The vulnerability of Christians in Myanmar goes back years, rooted in the belief that to be Burmese is to be Buddhist – and that means other faiths are often seen as foreign and a threat to national unity," the ministry described.

Such a mindset leads to Christians seeing difficulties with obtaining ID cards, being turned away from water and other basic services, and facing forced participation in Buddhist practices.

"There is even a state-supported plan to convert Christians and other religious minorities to Buddhism, particularly in remote areas," Open Doors added.

“Churches, meanwhile, have difficulty registering with the authorities and evangelistic activities are strongly opposed. Converts can face additional hostility from their families and communities, who may view their faith as a betrayal of their heritage.”

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