



BURMA RESEARCH INSTITUTE

USCIRF's Hearing on Persistent FoRB Violations Against Christians Worldwide

Tuesday, January 13, 2026

10:00 AM-12:00 PM ET

In Person, Capitol Hill, Washington D.C.

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Submitted for the Record by the Burma Research Institute ([BRI](#))

The Burma Research Institute (BRI), formerly known as the Chin Association of Maryland, commends the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) for convening this important hearing on Persistent FoRB Violations Against Christians Worldwide on January 13, 2026. We greatly appreciate the opportunity to submit written testimony for this hearing. On February 8, 2023, Zo Tum Hmung, President and CEO of BRI, [testified](#) at the USCIRF hearing titled "Two Years after the Coup: Religious Freedom in a Contested Burma." We remain grateful to USCIRF for that opportunity.

BRI's research and advocacy work focuses on freedom of religion or belief in Burma, with particular emphasis on Christians since the 2021 military coup. We have documented the persecution of Christians with support from contacts on the ground and published reports and statements. For example, we published the "[2023 Annual Report: The Persecution of Christians in Burma](#)" in January 2024, covering events from February 2021 through December 2023. We are currently writing a new report, "Violations of Religious Freedom in Burma: Atrocities Against Christians," which summarizes incidents since the 2021 military coup with a focus on events from 2024-2025. We plan to release this report later this month.

We would like to highlight our key advocacy activities.

Our advocacy activities include Congressional briefings on Capitol Hill in both the Senate and House. We are grateful that USCIRF Commissioners have accepted our invitations and spoken at our briefings on Burma, most recently at the Rayburn House Office Building (Room 2200), where Commissioner [Stephen Schneck](#) discussed egregious violations of religious freedom in Burma. Since 2021, we have actively participated in the IRF Summit and will join the 2026 IRF Summit.

On March 7, 2025, BRI and other Christian and community organizations wrote a [letter](#) to Secretary of State Marco Rubio urging him to determine that the human rights abuses and systematic violations of religious freedom by the Burmese military regime against Christians constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes. Such a determination would be an important step toward accountability for the Burmese military regime, ending violence against civilians, and protecting ethnic and religious minority groups, including Christians. On behalf of Secretary Rubio, a senior State Department official [responded](#) to our letter, acknowledging that the military

committed atrocities against Christians. The response was encouraging and reflects the U.S. government's consistent commitment to opposing religious persecution in Burma.

The United States has designated Burma a [Country of Particular Concern](#) (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 for severe violations of religious freedom since 1999. However, the U.S. has not updated its designation since 2023, which is long overdue.

On March 31, 2025, BRI wrote a [letter](#) to USCIRF urging the Commission to recommend that Secretary of State Marco Rubio determine that the Burmese military's atrocities against Christians and other minorities constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes. The letter stated that such a determination by the State Department could help decrease or deter Tatmadaw violence against civilians through airstrikes. In addition to the determination, the Trump administration could impose stricter and coordinated sanctions on aviation fuel, arms and banking, and provide nonlethal assistance such as early warning systems, bunkers, and communication tools to pro-democracy groups to protect civilians and places of worship from airstrikes.

At the recommendation of [USCIRF](#), Secretary of State Antony Blinken determined that atrocities against the Rohingya constitute genocide and crimes against humanity in March 2022. Following the 2021 military coup, the military escalated attacks on Christian leaders, churches, and related buildings. On December 5, 2025, Senator Chris Van Hollen (D-Maryland) and other Senators sent a [letter](#) to Secretary Rubio urging him to follow up on the State Department's 2022 Rohingya genocide determination by initiating a new process to assess whether the Tatmadaw has committed genocide, war crimes, or crimes against humanity against Burma's other ethnic and religious minority groups. USCIRF has not yet advocated for such a determination regarding Christians. BRI urges USCIRF to recommend that the Secretary initiate such a review and take decisive action against the Burmese military regime.

The situation in Burma has been worsening.

Despite widespread opposition, escalating human rights abuses and attacks on Christians, the [Burmese military regime held the first phase of its three-phase sham elections on December 28, 2025](#). The second phase will take place on January 11, and the third on January 25. Due to ongoing conflicts, voting will be held in less than half of the country's territory. The National League for Democracy, led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and 39 other political parties, including the popular Shan National League for Democracy, were barred from participating. With Daw Aung San Suu Kyi imprisoned and all legitimate political parties barred from competing, the election outcome is pre-determined, and junta leader Min Aung Hlaing is likely to become president.

On December 10, 2025, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) [reported](#) that an estimated 16 million people in Myanmar—including 5 million children—will require life-saving humanitarian assistance and protection in 2026, and 3.6 million people have been displaced since the 2021 military coup. According to the [Assistance Association for Political Prisoners \(Burma\)](#), 22,682 people have been detained and 7,640 killed as of December 30, 2025. The Burmese military continues attacking civilians and places of

worship, including monasteries, with airstrikes. For example, on International Human Rights Day (December 10, 2025), the Burmese military's fighter jets attacked the [Mrauk-U General Hospital in Arakan State](#), killing 33 civilians and injuring 88 people.

Against this backdrop of nationwide conflict and systematic attacks on civilians, persecution of Christians in Burma has sharply escalated. The Burmese military has increasingly targeted churches, clergy, and Christian communities, particularly in ethnic minority areas. In Kachin State, the military [burned the Catholic Cathedral of Banmaw](#) on March 16, 2025. In Karenni State (Kayah State), Burmese military fighter jets [bombed and destroyed Saint Theresa's Catholic Church](#) in Tananukwe Village, Demoso Township, on September 17, 2025.

Nowhere is this pattern of religious persecution more evident than in Thantlang town, Chin State. The Burmese military's attacks on Christians in Thantlang since the coup constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes. Of the town's 22 churches, [21 have been burned down or destroyed](#). The entire population has been displaced with some remaining in India–Burma border areas, while others have been forced to flee across the border into India's Mizoram State. The destroyed churches in Thantlang, which are listed below, include Catholic, Protestant, and Evangelical congregations.

1. Thantlang Baptist Church
2. Johnson Memorial Baptist Church
3. Thantlang Centenary Baptist Church
4. Believer Church of Myanmar
5. Assembly of God Myanmar
6. United Pentecostal Church
7. Mara Evangelical Church
8. Roman Catholic Church
9. Evangelical Holiness Church
10. Gospel Baptist Church
11. Methodist Church
12. Presbyterian Church of Myanmar
13. Church on the Rock
14. Seventh Day Adventist
15. Evangelical Free Methodist Church of Myanmar
16. Church of Jesus Christ*

17. Church of Jesus Christ (local)*
18. The Church*
19. Sabbath*
20. Mara Baptist Church*
21. Shalom Baptist Church

The Burmese military's attacks have also deliberately targeted major Christian religious observances. As outlined in a statement by [BRI](#), on Christmas Day (December 25, 2025), Burmese military fighter jets bombed Mindat town, Chin State, destroying seven houses as people gathered to celebrate Christmas. On Palm Sunday (April 13, 2025), Burmese fighter jets bombed and destroyed Mindat Baptist Church in Mindat, Chin State. On April 8, 2025, a week before Easter Sunday, airstrikes destroyed Christ the King Catholic Church in Falam town, Chin State. Church members had no place to celebrate Easter Sunday, and some were forced to hide in the jungle near Falam town to protect themselves from subsequent attacks.

The Burmese military regime, also known as the State Security and Peace Commission (SSPC), has burned down places of worship belonging to multiple religious groups, including Christians, Buddhists, and Rohingya, and committed egregious violations of religious freedom and other human rights across Burma. However, Christians have faced targeted attacks by the Burmese military regime as part of its effort to assert Bamar-Buddhist nationalism and Burmanization against ethnic and religious minority groups. The Burmese military frames Christian communities and clergy as being influenced by the West and incompatible with their narrow sense that Burma is a Buddhist country. This ideology has been used by the Burmese military for decades to justify extreme forms of religious persecution of Christians. The military has also targeted Chin, Kachin, Karenni, and Karen ethnic groups for having resisted Burmese Buddhist domination for more than half a century.

As humanitarian needs have grown in the post-coup period, pastors, priests, and religious workers have assisted displaced communities by providing food, shelter, healthcare, and education to all communities. In some areas, the military controls access to humanitarian assistance, and the international community has been reluctant to work around the military regime, making efforts to support IDPs difficult. Additionally, the military has specifically targeted religious leaders, including those providing humanitarian assistance. [USCIRF's Prisoner of Conscience List](#) includes two Christian pastors from Burma: Salai Ayla Lone Wai, a Chin pastor sentenced to 10 years in prison for his religious activity and leadership, and Thian Lian Sang, a Chin Baptist pastor sentenced to 23 years on similar grounds. Both were accused of terrorism.

According to BRI's forthcoming report, "Violations of Religious Freedom in Burma: Atrocities Against Christians," to be released in late January, approximately 350 churches and related buildings have been burned down or destroyed between February 2021 and December 2025.

U.S. Government support for Burma, including embattled Christian communities, has been bipartisan for decades. Congressional representatives from the Senate and the House have called on the Trump Administration to condemn the junta regime and its sham elections. Unfortunately, Department of Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem [terminated Temporary Protected Status](#) for Burma nationals in November 2025, threatening the well-being of Christians and other religious minorities from Burma. On December 11, 2024, BRI published an [analysis](#) titled "Why the Trump Administration Should Reinstate Temporary Protected Status for Myanmar (Burma) Nationals," urging reconsideration. BRI is in touch with Catholic priests and Protestant and Evangelical pastors from Burma who have TPS status and would be unsafe if forced to return to Burma. They have attended BRI's congressional briefings on Burma, including the [recent briefing](#) at Rayburn 2200 on December 16, 2024. During recent interviews with BRI, a Catholic priest and a Baptist pastor said they would face torture, imprisonment, or even death due to their Christian beliefs if they were forced to Burma after TPS expires on January 26, 2026.

Therefore, BRI recommends the following:

The Trump Administration

1. Determine that human rights abuses and systematic violations of religious freedom targeting Christians in Burma constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes.
2. Impose visa restrictions on nationals from Burma who have violated religious freedom by targeting Christians [as done with Nigeria](#).
3. Reconsider Temporary Protected Status for nationals from Burma currently in the United States.
4. Unfreeze the [\\$1 billion](#) in Burma's funds held at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York and release them to resistance groups. These funds would provide humanitarian assistance in resistance-controlled areas and help defeat the military regime.

Congress

1. Hold a hearing on the persecution of Christians in Burma.
2. Call on the Trump Administration to determine that atrocities against Christians constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes.

USCIRF

1. Recommend that the Trump Administration determine that atrocities against Christians committed by the Burmese military constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes.

Additional Resources:

- Letter to Dr. Stephen Schneck, Chair of U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, March 31, 2025 – [LINK](#)

- State Department’s Response to the Letter to Secretary Rubio, March 27, 2025 – [LINK](#)
- Letter to Secretary of State Marco Rubio by Christian and community organizations in the U.S., March 7, 2025 – [LINK](#)
- Letter to President Biden, September 13, 2024 – [LINK](#)
- Zo Tum Hmung’s Testimony: USCIRF Hearing: Two Years after the Coup: Religious Freedom in a Contested Burma, February 8, 2023 – [LINK](#)

The Burma Research Institute (BRI) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization based in Ellicott City, Maryland, United States that conducts research and advocacy. BRI primarily focuses on freedom of religion or belief, human rights, and protection and assistance of refugees and internally displaced people in Burma. Formerly known as the Chin Association of Maryland, BRI also empowers the local Chin community in Maryland and across the United States to successfully integrate into American society. (www.burmari.org).