

Executive Summary

“Threats to Our Existence”:

Persecution of Ethnic Chin Christians in Burma





September, 2012

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Front cover: Chin Christians praying over a cross they were ordered to destroy by the Chin State authorities, Mindat township, July 2010.

Back cover: Chin Christian revival group in Kanpetlet township, May 2010.

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Foreword

By Benedict Rogers

As signs of hope in Burma at last appear, there is a danger of premature euphoria. There is, certainly, cause for cautious optimism – the release of hundreds of political prisoners, including many very prominent dissidents, the relaxation of media censorship, increasing space for civil society, ceasefire agreements with many ethnic nationalities and the participation of Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy (NLD) are all positive steps forward. Since Aung San Suu Kyi met President Thein Sein in August 2011, there has been, at least in some respects, a change of atmosphere and perhaps a change of attitude among some in the regime.

Nevertheless, there is still a very long way to go. The change of atmosphere has not yet resulted in a change of system. Several hundred political prisoners remain in jail, at the time of writing, and the Burma Army continues its brutal offensives against civilians in Kachin State. Sectarian violence, stirred up by elements in the security forces, between Buddhist Rakhine and Muslim Rohingyas in Arakan State, and state-sponsored persecution of the Rohingyas, denied citizenship despite living in Burma for generations, all indicate the many challenges still to be resolved. Repressive laws remain on the statute books, and serious constitutional reform, required if Burma is to become a genuine democracy, has not yet begun.

One of the most under-reported aspects of Burma's human rights record has been the regime's discrimination and persecution of religious minorities and violations of religious freedom. Although Burma has been categorised as a 'Country of Particular Concern' by the US State Department for many years, this issue has

seldom received the attention it deserves.

For this reason, the Chin Human Rights Organisation (CHRO)'s new report is a vital and very welcome resource. The persecution of Chin Christians, alongside the persecution faced by Christians among the Kachin, Naga, Karenni and Karen, and the suffering of the Muslim Rohingyas, Buddhists among the Shan, Rakhine and Mon, and the imprisonment of Buddhist monks, all indicate that Burma's government is in serious violation of the right to freedom of religion or belief enshrined in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

This report follows CHRO's previous excellent report, published in 2004, and Christian Solidarity Worldwide's report *Carrying the Cross: The military regime's campaign of restriction, discrimination and persecution against Christians in Burma*, published in 2007, in putting the spotlight on this important issue. If Burma is to become a genuine democracy, respectful of human rights, then violations of religious freedom must stop and freedom of religion or belief must be upheld. I hope that policy makers, political actors, religious leaders and other people of influence, within Burma and in the international community, will study this report closely, engage with ethnic, religious, political and civil society representatives and promote religious freedom and inter-faith harmony in the years to come.

Benedict Rogers

East Asia Team Leader, Christian Solidarity Worldwide, and author of several books on Burma, including *Burma: A Nation At The Crossroads* published in 2012.



Executive summary and key recommendations

“Religious intolerance or discrimination is non-existent in Myanmar [Burma]. The majority of the population are Buddhists. Nonetheless, other religions such as Christianity, Islam and Hinduism coexist and flourish in Myanmar. Religious tolerance and freedom of worship is guaranteed by law and practised throughout the country.”

[Government of Burma, May 2011]¹

Rationale and methodology

In 2004, CHRO published *Religious Persecution: A Campaign of Ethnocide Against Chin Christians in Burma*. In 2010, Chin communities both in Burma and in exile around the world asked CHRO to produce a follow-up report. As such, this report serves two purposes. Firstly, as a historical record of the numerous problems facing the Chin people of Burma, forcing them to flee their homeland; and secondly, to contribute to the growing body of evidence of serious human rights violations perpetrated against the Chin. This report draws on over 100 in-depth qualitative interviews, primarily covering events that took place between March 2004 and June 2012. It includes fifteen in-depth case studies, based on testimony collected by CHRO. The report also draws on information collected by CHRO fieldworkers since 2004, published in CHRO’s bi-monthly publication *Rhododendron News*. In publishing this report, CHRO hopes to deepen understanding of religious freedom violations in Burma, and their far-reaching impact. CHRO also aims to highlight the urgent need to place minority and indigenous rights at the heart of the democratic transition process in the country.

Background

The Chin are ethnically one of the most diverse groups in Burma. The six main Chin tribes of Asho, Cho (Sho), Khumi (M’ro), Laimi, Mizo (Lushai), and Zomi (Kuki) can be further distinguished by at least 60 different sub-tribal categories. The missions of the American Baptist Church starting in the late 1800s served to unify very diverse peoples, despite language differences and geographical

barriers. With conversion to Christianity, a new consciousness and political awareness of Chin cultural homogeneity developed, which provided a framework for Chin nationalism. Today the Chin are approximately 90 percent Christian, in a country that is predominantly Buddhist, and Christianity is largely viewed as an integral part of the Chin identity. This intersection between ethnicity (Chin) and religion (Christianity) is important in terms of understanding Chin identity.

After the assassination of Burma’s independence hero Aung San in 1947, his federal, secular vision for the Union of Burma was overshadowed by a return to Burman ‘traditional nationalism’, rooted in the importance of Buddhism, during Prime Minister U Nu’s era after Burma gained independence from British colonial rule. U Nu’s government abandoned Aung San’s secular, “unity in diversity” approach, preferring to adopt “unity in culture” – meaning religious and cultural assimilation into Burmese Buddhism - as a form of national integration, and by 1961 Buddhism was promulgated as the state religion. For the predominantly Christian Kachin and Chin in particular, this was wholly unacceptable and thousands of people protested. Buddhism as state religion gave rise to Chin and Kachin armed rebellion in the 1960s to defend their people from forced assimilation.

Following the military coup in 1962, successive military regimes viewed Christianity as a foreign religion, and therefore a threat to creating a homogenous national identity for citizens of the Union of Burma. Chin political identification with Christianity has arguably been at the root of extreme Burman nationalist resentment towards the Chin. The denial of religious freedom in Burma today, particularly for minority groups like Chin Christians, is rooted in discrimination on the dual basis of ethnicity and religion. This endemic discrimination is arguably a product of extreme Burman nationalism based on a distorted version of Buddhism characterized by the State Law and Order Restoration Council / State Peace and Development Council (SLORC/SPDC) regime.

Widespread restrictions on freedom of religion were a central pillar of SLORC/SPDC’s drive to ethnically, culturally, linguistically, and religiously homogenize the

¹ Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, Myanmar – Addendum: Views on Conclusion and / or recommendations, voluntary commitments and replies presented by the State under review, doc. A/HRC/17/9/Add.1, 27 May 2011 para. 11, published in UPR Reports 2011, Human Rights Education Institute of Burma, 2011, pp.97.



Elderly woman and church

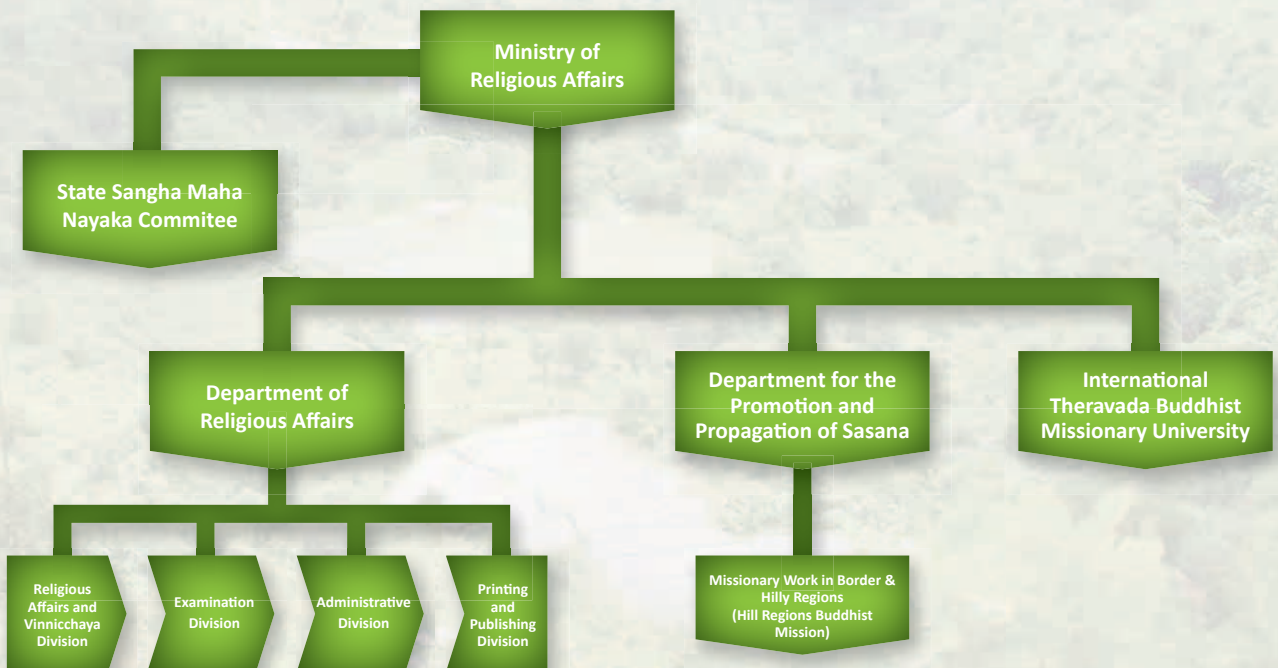
ethnic minority areas of the Union of Burma as part of an unwritten forced assimilation policy known as “Burmanization”. As part of this drive, monks loyal to military rule were dispatched to Chin State by SLORC in the 1990s under the Hill Regions Buddhist Mission, and many cooperated closely with the military. Burma Army soldiers exacted forced labour from Chin Christians to build pagodas, and monasteries for the monks.

CHRO’s documentation indicates that the policy of Burmanization continues to be implemented under the current nominally-civilian government.



Cross, Paletwa township

Overview of the Ministry of Religious Affairs



Current context

Since the nominally-civilian government was formed in Burma in March 2012, President Thein Sein has initiated positive changes, most notably the release of political prisoners and ceasefire talks with ethnic armed resistance groups. At the time of writing, 15 Points of Agreement between Chin armed resistance group the Chin National Front and the government’s Union-level peace delegation have been set down, specifying terms of reference for further talks, with the aim of “realizing eternal peace, justice, equality and socio-economic development through peaceful cooperation.” Point 13 of the agreement is on basic human rights, and makes specific mention of religious freedom. CHRO was the first independent group among Burmese exile organizations permitted to attend the May 2012 talks as an international observer. CHRO also attended public consultations organized by the Chin National Front, where the key concern raised by the Chin people was the continuing lack of religious freedom.

Summary of findings

For decades, the Chin have suffered deep-rooted, institutionalized discrimination on the dual basis of their ethnicity and religion. Since the SLORC / SPDC era, this has manifested as a pattern of widespread and systematic violations of their fundamental human rights, particularly religious freedom, perpetrated by State actors. CHRO’s documentation shows that over a period of many years, religious freedom violations have often intersected with other serious human rights violations, such as forced labour, torture, and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. For example, worship services and religious gatherings have often been disrupted by Burma Army soldiers, who have taken worshippers for portering and subjected them to torture and other ill-treatment.

“If you want to construct a church building, permission must be obtained from the Ministry of Religious Affairs. You will never get it even if you ask....there is no change in the religious policy in terms of constructing church buildings.”

[Pastor, March 2012]

“The Facts to Attack Christians” Missionaries, Honorable Monks, Cleansing Organization

1. To attack Christian families and the progress of Christians.
2. To criticize against the sermons which are broadcast from Manila, Philippines.
3. To criticize God as narrow-minded and egotistical who himself claimed that “There is no god except eternal God.”
4. To be against corrupted youth and inappropriate fashion.
5. To criticize the preaching of Christians wherever it has penetrated.
6. To criticize Christianity by means of pointing out its delicacy and weakness.
7. To stop the spread of the Christian movement in rural areas.
8. To criticize by means of pointing out “it is not salvation but purchased by blood.”
9. To counterattack by means of pointing out Christianity’s weakness and overcome this with Buddhism.
10. To counter the Bible after thorough study.
11. To criticize that “God loves only Israel but not all the races.”
12. To point out ambiguity between the two testaments.
13. To criticize on the point that Christianity is partisan.
14. To criticize Christianity’s concept of the Creator and compare it with the scientific concept.
15. To study and access the amount given in offerings.
16. To criticize the Holy Spirit after thorough study.
17. To attack Christians by means of both non-violence and violence.

Recopy, Myo Chit, Wah Mah Tah, 2639 True Copy (Sa Win).²

This document first appeared in Chin State in 1992, and is still in circulation today.

² This was first published in CHRO’s 2004 report Religious Persecution: A Campaign of Ethnocide Against Chin Christians in Burma.

Ongoing violations of religious freedom include: widespread restrictions on constructing and renovating Christian infrastructure; destruction of Christian crosses; violations of freedom of religious assembly; and threats, intimidation, and harassment of pastors and missionaries.

In preparing this report, CHRO documented:

- The destruction of 13 Christian crosses, many of them large structures over 20 feet tall.
- 15 Buddhist pagodas or monasteries built with forced labour exacted from Chin Christians.
- More than 40 separate incidents of torture or ill-treatment, targeted at Chin on the dual basis of their ethnicity and religion.
- 24 official complaints of violations of religious freedom and other human rights abuses (including rape and extra-judicial killing) lodged by Chin Christians at various levels of government, where no action was taken against the alleged perpetrators.

“Christianity is not the state religion therefore one day your Christianity may be persecuted to the point of it being wiped-out by the government. We are authorised to persecute you and all the Christian missionaries.”

[Local authorities’ representative, Arakan State, September 2010]

A distorted version of Buddhism continues to be imposed by the authorities on the predominantly Christian Chin as a tool of oppression, and arguably as part of an unwritten policy of forced assimilation. This has included forced relocation and land confiscation to build Buddhist infrastructure; forced labour exacted from Chin Christians to build pagodas and monasteries; and most recently, extortion to pay for Buddhist religious festivals.

“I had to do the forced labour for building the pagoda at least 15 times... I missed school so many times because of it.”

[Villager, 2009]

As well as violations of the right to manifest their religion, proselytize, and assemble for religious gatherings, the Chin have also been subjected to induced

and coerced conversion by State actors. With more than 70 percent of Chin people living below the poverty line, abject poverty and the ongoing food security crisis in southern Chin State have left the Chin particularly vulnerable to induced and coerced conversion.

Of paramount concern to the Chin people today are the government’s Border Areas National Races Youth Development Training Schools (known locally as Na Ta La schools, as Na Ta La is the Burmese acronym for Progress of the Border Areas and National Races Development Affairs Programme), run under the Education and Training Department within the Ministry for Border Affairs, dominated by the military. Little research has been conducted into the Na Ta La schools until now.

“We are going to teach you what the real culture and religion of Myanmar [Burma] are. Christianity was brought in by the British colonialists. Since[...] we got independence[...]we should practise our own religion.”

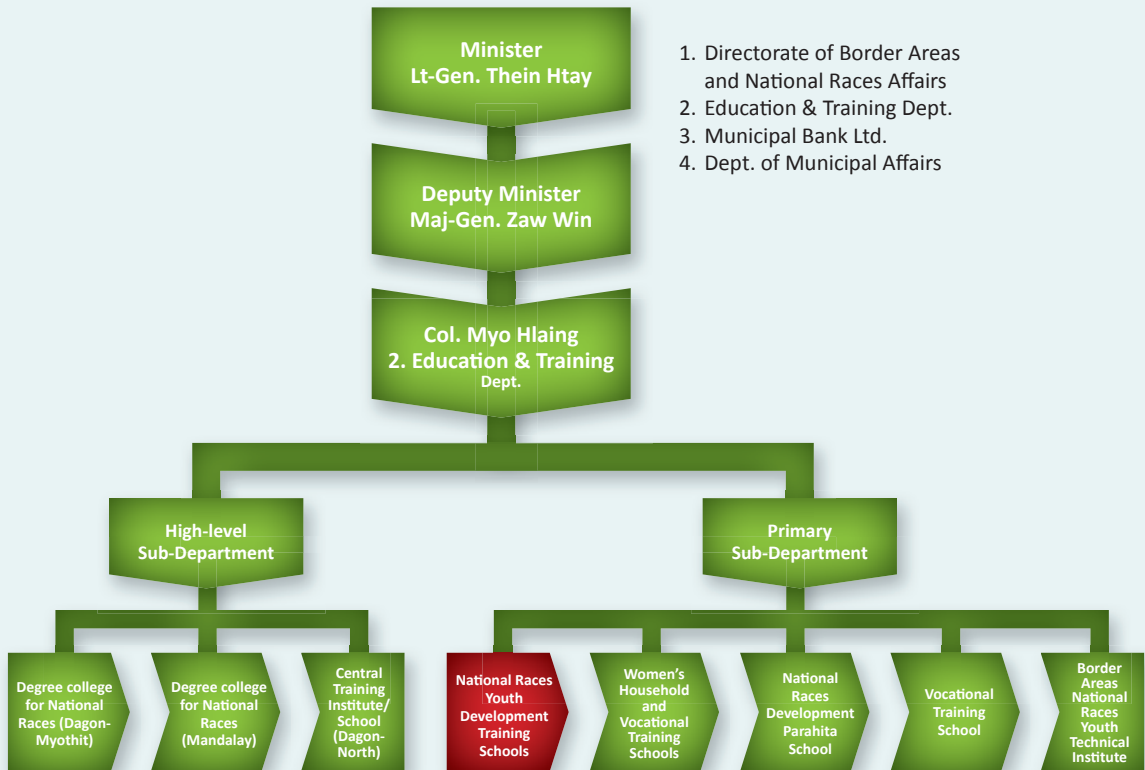
[Headmaster of Na Ta La school, 2008]

The schools first opened in around 1994, mandated by a 1993 SLORC decree which provided for the promotion and propagation of Buddhism, and ‘vocational training’. They function as a separate education system, primarily targeted at ethnic and religious minorities like the Chin. Chronic underfunding of the mainstream State education system means that families must typically pay costs such as annual fees, school materials, and supplementary income for teachers. These constitute significant economic barriers to accessing education for the Chin. Entry to the Na Ta La schools is free or much cheaper within this alternative system, but CHRO’s documentation shows that the Chin are prevented from practising Christianity and face coercion to convert to Buddhism at the schools, despite claims by the government that trainees are free to follow their chosen religion.

“By inculcating Union Spirit into them [Na Ta La students], youth forces [are] equipped with strong Union Spirit that could safeguard Our Three Main National Causes at the risk of their lives.... trainees [...] have the rights to follow their preferred religion freely in accordance with the provisions of Article 362, 363 of Chapter (8)- Fundamental rights and Duties of Citizens of the constitution.”

[Union Border Affairs Minister, September 2011]

Overview of the Ministry for Border Affairs



CHRO's research reveals that the Ministries for Border Affairs and Religious Affairs work in close cooperation in the implementation of the schools programme. One-third of Na Ta La trainees in 29 such schools across Burma are Chin, indicating that the Chin are specifically targeted for recruitment to the schools. CHRO's documentation illustrates that monks and Buddhist laymen from the Hill Regions Buddhist Mission under the Ministry of Religious Affairs are involved in recruitment to the Na Ta La schools.

"If you don't want to be a monk, you must join the military."

[Headmaster of Na Ta La school, 2010]

Chin Christian attendees told CHRO that they faced forced coercion to Buddhism at the Na Ta La schools via the threat of military conscription and other coercive methods. Their testimony shows that monks, Buddhist laymen and Burma Army soldiers have worked together to track down Na Ta La attendees who fled from the schools. Today, the Na Ta La schools arguably function as a cornerstone of the unwritten policy of forced assimilation.

"I realized that as long as I am in the country, the soldiers have good connections and they can trace me wherever I am. So I had no choice but to flee the country."

[Woman who fled Na Ta La school in May 2011]

Analysis

The consequences of such human rights violations perpetrated against the Chin are far-reaching. There are an estimated 50,000 Chin refugees and asylum-seekers in Malaysia, 12,000 in New Delhi, and as many as 100,000 Chin living in Mizoram, Northeast India, which borders Chin State.

A prima facie analysis of the documentation presented in this report indicates that it would meet the widely-accepted definition of persecution under customary international law; namely the severe deprivation of fundamental rights on discriminatory grounds.

CHRO's report follows the important 2011 report by Physicians for Human Rights, *Life Under the Junta: Evidence of Crimes Against Humanity in Burma's Chin State*, and adds to a growing body of evidence that the

authorities in Burma may have carried out crimes against humanity against the Chin, particularly persecution on religious and ethnic grounds.

The crime against humanity of persecution under article 7(1)(h) of the 2002 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) is defined as, “*Persecution against any identifiable group or collectivity on political, racial national, ethnic, cultural, religious, gender ... or other grounds that are universally recognised as impermissible under international law, in connection with any act referred to in this paragraph or any crime within the jurisdiction of the Court ... [emphasis added]*”. The ICC’s Elements of Crimes describe the crime against humanity of persecution as requiring proof of six elements; firstly the perpetrator(s) severely deprived persons of fundamental human rights. Secondly, the perpetrator(s) targeted such persons by reason of the identity of a group. And thirdly, such targeting was based on a range of grounds, including ethnicity and religion.

The article 7(1)(h) definition of persecution specifically requires that the persecution is connected to another enumerated act in Article 7 (1) of the Rome Statute (the fourth element). This requirement is not, according to the jurisprudence of the *ad hoc* international criminal tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, consonant with customary international law. In other words, for persecution to rise to the level of a crime against humanity, it must be connected to acts of murder, extermination, enslavement (including forced labour), deportation or forcible transfer of population, imprisonment, torture, rape, enforced disappearance, apartheid, or other inhumane acts. This report documents serious human rights violations, including multiple enumerated acts under the Rome Statute - arbitrary arrest and detention, torture and other ill-treatment, rape and sexual violence, and forced labour - all targeted at Chin Christian civilians, on the dual basis of their ethnicity and religion.

For persecution to constitute a crime against humanity, two contextual elements must also be proven: firstly, that the conduct was committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against a civilian population, and secondly, that the perpetrator(s) knew that the conduct was part of such an attack. Given that these violations illustrate a pattern of abuses perpetrated by State actors over a number of years across all nine main

townships of Chin State, a geographical area of some 14,000 square miles, they may constitute a widespread and systematic “attack” against Chin civilians in pursuance of an unwritten State policy of forced assimilation. Although it is difficult to prove perpetrators’ knowledge of such an attack, it is implicit from the pattern of State actors perpetrating the enumerated acts on a systematic basis.

Although President Thein Sein’s government has initiated some positive changes in Burma, this report illustrates that the right to religious freedom is still routinely violated; the policy of forced assimilation of the SLORC / SPDC era continues to be implemented; and the culture of impunity for human rights violations remains deeply entrenched.

“Since the election and the new government, people are cautiously hopeful that things will get better... but we dare not believe real change will come for certain. Based on their own personal experiences, people are very wary of anything involving the army. And the key persons in the new government are still from the army.”

[Pastor, March 2012]

There is a long road ahead to ensure that the rights of the country’s ethnic and religious minorities are at the heart of democratic transition. Firstly, the right to freedom of religion must be respected, requiring far-reaching reform of government ministries. Secondly, concrete measures need to be taken at all levels of government and within State institutions like the Burma Army to tackle deep-rooted discrimination, and protect and promote human rights. Thirdly, the government must fully address fundamental, long-standing issues of self-determination for the country’s ethnic minorities at a deep systemic level, within a revised federal constitutional framework. Finally, the serious human rights violations documented by CHRO and other human rights groups warrant an international investigation. This would act as a significant deterrent for further human rights violations, and would be a major step forward in terms of tackling the deeply-entrenched culture of impunity in Burma.

Key recommendations

More detailed recommendations are contained in the full-length report.

To the Government of the Union of Burma:

1. Immediately and unconditionally lift all restrictive and discriminatory measures placed on the activities of Christian churches, pastors and missionaries, and end the policy of forced assimilation and other practices which amount to persecution of Chin Christians on the dual basis of their ethnicity and religion.
2. Support an independent and impartial international mechanism to investigate serious human rights violations in Burma, which would deter further violations and help to end the culture of impunity.
3. Invite the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief to visit Burma to investigate reports of religious freedom violations, and cooperate fully with his mandate.
4. Abolish the Ministry of Religious Affairs, implicated in human rights violations not only against religious minorities like Chin Christians, but also against monks and nuns for their perceived political activism.

5. Abolish the Education and Training Department under the Ministry for Border Affairs and reallocate the funding to the teaching of ethnic minority languages within the national curriculum, under a properly-financed, restructured and decentralized Ministry of Education.
6. Initiate substantive measures to tackle discrimination and protect and promote human rights at all levels of Government and within State institutions, including (but not limited to) reforming the domestic legislative framework to comply with international human rights standards, and revising the National Registration Card so that it no longer identifies the bearer’s religion or ethnicity.

To the International Community:

1. Support an independent and impartial international mechanism to investigate serious human rights violations in Burma, which would deter further violations and help to end the culture of impunity.
2. Do not further ease sanctions, unless and until the government of the Union of Burma demonstrates a robust commitment to human rights, as evidenced by:
 - > Thorough investigations leading to successful prosecutions of State perpetrators of human rights violations;



Clock tower with Christian cross, destroyed in Tedim township April 2012

- > Effective civilian control over the military;
 - > An end to human rights violations targeted at the country’s ethnic and religious minorities, perpetrated by State actors.
3. Strongly urge the government to lift all restrictive and discriminatory measures placed on the activities of Christian churches, pastors and missionaries, and end the policy of forced assimilation and other practices which amount to persecution of Chin Christians on the dual basis of their ethnicity and religion.
 4. Urge the government to abolish the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Education and Training Department under the Ministry for Border Affairs.
 5. Publicly and privately call on the government to properly finance and restructure the Ministry of Education, and revise the national curriculum to include the teaching of ethnic minority languages.
 6. Publicly and privately call on the government to initiate substantive measures to tackle discrimination and protect and promote human rights at all levels of Government and within State institutions, including (but not limited to) reforming the domestic legislative framework to comply with international human rights standards, and revising the National Registration Card so that it no longer identifies the bearer’s religion or ethnicity.



Kanpetlet Yan Aung Yadana pagoda built in 2000 with forced labour

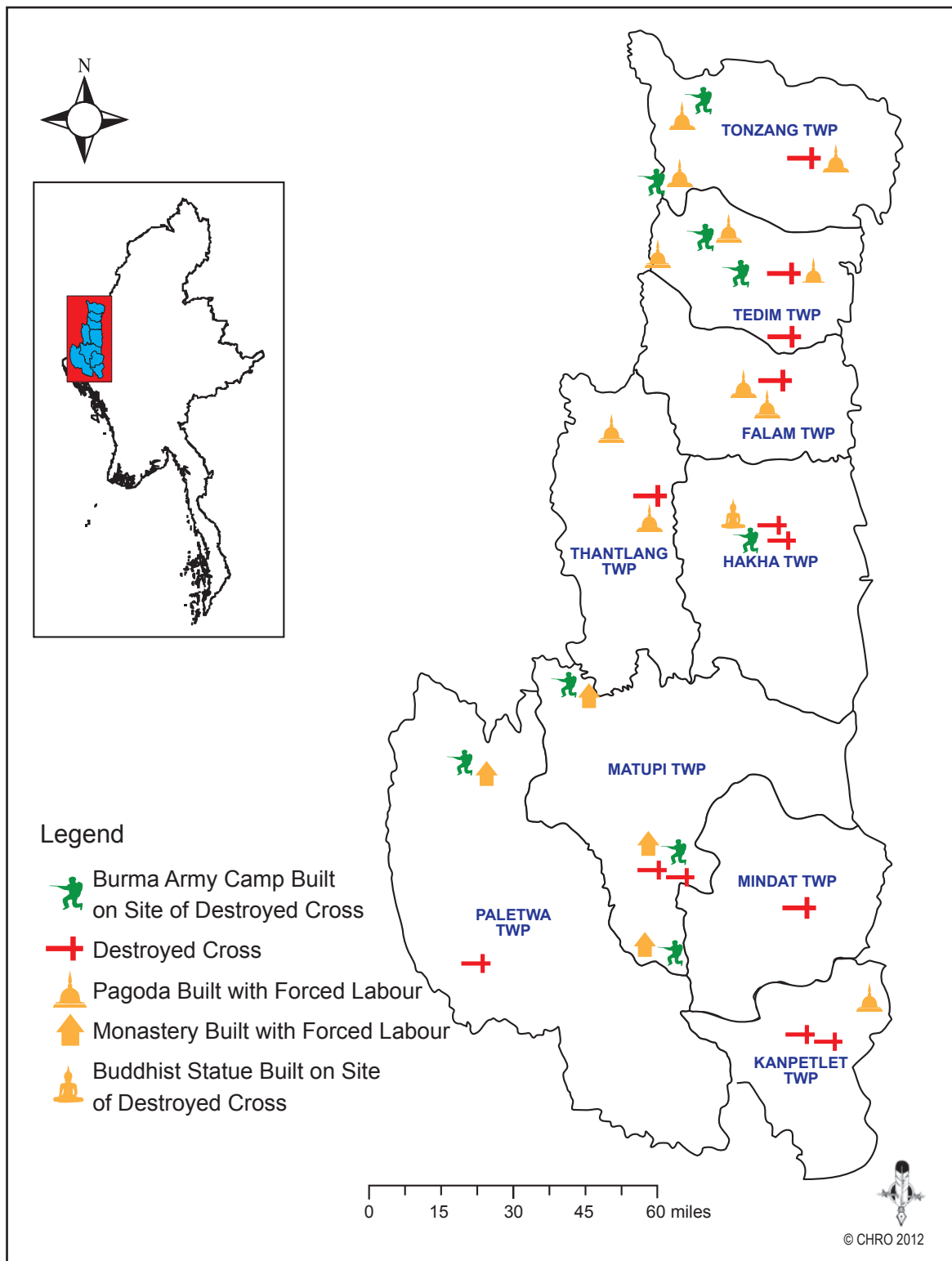


Na Ta La School built on land confiscated from local Christians



Kanpetlet Na Ta La school

Map of destroyed crosses, and pagodas and monasteries built with forced labour in Chin State, 1992 – 2012



CASE STUDY TWO: Cross destruction, Chin State

July 2011 to date: *This case illustrates that Buddhism continues to be imposed as the de-facto State religion at all levels of government, despite provisions in the 2008 Constitution safeguarding freedom of religion.³ The Chin State government, under the leadership of Chief Minister Hung Ngai, issued an order for the destruction of two Christian crosses.⁴*

On 16 July 2011, two wooden crosses were planted by local Chin Christians at either end of a new bridge they had paid for and constructed in _____ village, a predominantly Buddhist village in Kanpetlet township. According to interviews conducted by CHRO, no prior permission was sought to plant the crosses on the basis that Buddhists are not required to seek permission to build pagodas or other Buddhist infrastructure, and Christians are rarely granted permission from the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Naypyitaw to build religious infrastructure.

Less than two weeks later, the village police station and Village Tract General Administrative Office,⁵ citing an order from the Chin State government, instructed the three men who had planted the crosses to destroy them (see Appendix A). This appears to have been a unilateral executive order, not sanctioned by the Chin State parliament, issued by the Chin State government under the leadership of Chief Minister Hung Ngai.

The three men refused to comply with the order and a few days later a group of local Chin Buddhist youths destroyed the crosses, following further instructions from a Buddhist monk, U Win Tin, the Police Officer in charge of the village Police Force, two village headmen U Mya Phyu and U Aung Kyaw, U Chit Sein aka Thang Bu (a school teacher and graduate from the University for the Development of National Races), and a local villager, Maung Maung aka Kyin Htwe.

On 9 October 2011, local Chin Christians wrote a petition letter signed by more than 1,000 people from Kanpetlet and Mindat townships, submitted to President Thein Sein's office, demanding that action be taken in accordance with the law. This was followed a month later by an official complaint written by the Chin National Party and signed by 9 MPs from the Chin State parliament (including one Chin Christian MP from the USDP).

In response to the complaints, Dr. Ba Maung, a Chin Buddhist native of the village and Chin Minister of Social Affairs, made several trips to the area accompanied by Chief Minister Hung Ngai the first time. They warned local people that they had not followed the correct 'procedures' by submitting their petition directly to President Thein Sein's office. Dissatisfied with the response, local Chin Christians decided to organise a demonstration, prompting a second visit from Dr. Ba Maung. During that visit, Dr. Ba Maung asked the local Chin Christians to submit a letter stating their demands to the Chin State government. They did as asked, and made three demands. Firstly, they asked for the incident to be investigated and for two new crosses to be planted in the same place. Secondly, they requested permission to construct churches in the village, and for the right to freedom of religion and religious assembly to be respected throughout Chin State. Thirdly, they asked for financial support from the Ministry of Religious Affairs for all religions in Chin State, allocated in proportion with religious demography. Dr. Ba Maung made a third appointment with the local people, which was understood as an opportunity to discuss the demands they had made.

However, when Dr. Ba Maung returned to the village he stated that he was there in a personal capacity, and not as a representative of the Chin State government. Without any kind of meeting to discuss the local Chin Christians' demands, he unilaterally arranged a reconciliation ceremony in accordance with Chin tradition. During the ceremony he apologised for what had happened, but when pressed on the matter he claimed he was not authorised to agree to the demands set out in the letter to the Chin State government.

At the time of writing, no investigation has been undertaken into the destruction of the crosses. The demands submitted to the Chin State government have not been addressed, and there has been no response to the petition by President Thein Sein's office. The reconciliation ceremony prepared by Dr. Ba Maung is largely viewed as an effort to whitewash the issue of religious freedom in Chin State.

³ Article 34 of the 2008 Constitution provides for freedom of religion, although it is somewhat limited by the wording, "Every citizen is equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess and practise religion subject to public order, morality or health and to the other provisions of this Constitution."

⁴ See *Two Christian Crosses Demolished, Burnt Down in Chin State*, Rhododendron News, September – October 2011, and Appendix D. Interview TH20, 20 June 2012, Chiang Mai, Thailand. Petition letter on file with CHRO. Additional information was also collected by CHRO from various sources during the corroboration process.

⁵ This is the new equivalent of Village Peace and Development Council.



Christian cross destroyed in July 2010, Mindat township

CASE STUDY FOUR: Christian conference disrupted, Chin State

March 2012: *This case shows that there is a lack of respect for the right to freedom of religious assembly in Chin State, even when prior permission has been sought in accordance with tight controls in place over Christian gatherings. It also illustrates that Burma Army soldiers do not consider themselves under any kind of civilian control, and believe they can act with complete impunity.*⁶

On 10 March 2012, more than 1,000 delegates from 80 local branches of a particular church gathered at _____ village in a remote area of Matupi township, southern Chin State, close to Burma’s border with India. Organizers of the event had obtained prior permission for the event from the Matupi Township General Administrative Office.

Several Burma Army soldiers, including Captain Aung Zaw Hteik and Captain Myo Min Hteik from Matupi-based Light Infantry Battalion 140 who are stationed at an army camp in the village, disrupted the gathering and publicly rebuked the village headman for not reporting the event to the army camp.

Pu Van Cin, a Member of Parliament from the Ethnic National Development Party elected to the Chin State

parliament in the November 2010 elections, saw the soldiers confronting the village headman. He tried to intervene and introduced himself as an MP to the officers. According to witnesses, Captain Aung Zaw Hteik was in uniform but Captain Myo Min Hteik, who is in charge of the army camp next to the village, was only wearing civilian clothes. Captain Myo Min Hteik pointed a gun at Pu Van Cin’s stomach and said, “Who do you think you are? What are you talking about? I will kill you. I don’t give a [expletive] about you being a Member of Parliament. We are not under the control of the Chin State authorities. We take orders from the North Western Regional Command.”

The soldiers continued to disrupt the conference for the next 24 hours by patrolling in the village, disrupting worship service, and spending the night in the village, although their army camp is just a short distance away. Pu Van Cin apparently reported the incident to Colonel Zaw Min Oo, Minister for Border and Security Affairs in Chin State, but it is unclear whether or not the Minister intervened to allow the conference to continue. At the time of writing, CHRO understands that no disciplinary action has been taken against the soldiers from LIB140.

⁶ See CHRO press release, *Burma Army Soldiers Disrupt Christian Conference; Threaten Chin MP at Gunpoint*, 20 March 2012, available at <http://www.chro.ca/media/press-releases/79-2011.html> and VOA Burmese language interview with Pu Van Cin available at http://www.voanews.com/burmese/news/chin_christian_meeting-143487306.html accessed 31 May 2012.

CASE STUDIES

CASE STUDY SEVEN: Torture and rape, Chin State

March 2010: *This case highlights how aggravated discrimination on the dual basis of ethnicity (Chin) and religion (Christianity) has led to a pattern of serious human rights violations perpetrated by State actors.⁷*

35 year-old farmer Q is a lay preacher from a village in the northern township of Tonzang. Farmer Q told CHRO that in 1996 his father R, a Christian pastor, refused to follow orders from Burma Army soldiers to destroy a cross the villagers had built on a nearby prayer mountain. As a result, his father was badly tortured and later passed away from his injuries. Efforts by CHRO to independently corroborate his testimony revealed that his father was also detained in Tonzang and Hkamti prisons and died in prison. While no further information could be obtained from the prison authorities about the cause of death, it is widely believed that he died as a result of torture.

“After my father passed away, I served as an evangelist in my village; I tried to follow in my father’s footsteps. In Cikha town nearby my village there is an army camp.

On 28 March 2010 the soldiers raided my village. It wasn’t the first time. The soldiers had already told me to stop my preaching many times. When I came back from my farm at around 6pm that day, there were four Burma Army soldiers at my home. They had raped my wife. I believe they did that to bring shame on my family, and to disrupt my work as a lay preacher by causing scandal. After I found them at my home, one of them tortured me; he beat me really hard with the butt of his gun.

They took me to the village headman’s house and held me there. The village council members killed a pig for the soldiers and provided alcohol for them. After they were all drunk and passed out, many of the villagers took the opportunity and fled to Mizoram. In our village, there were 40 households but almost everyone fled to Mizoram, only two families are left. Those two families converted to Buddhism in 1999, they receive help and assistance from the Burmese soldiers themselves.”

⁷ Interview TO1, 12 June 2010, New Delhi, India.

CASE STUDIES

CASE STUDY THIRTEEN: Coerced conversion, Chin State

May 2011: *This case illustrates how monks and soldiers cooperated to use the threat of military conscription in an attempt to coerce a young Chin woman to convert to Buddhism, and complete her ‘training’ at the Border Area National Races Youth Development Training a.k.a. Na Ta La school in Mindat.*⁸



20 year-old A.G.A. attended Na Ta La school in Mindat from 2010-2011. She described her experiences at the school:

“If I wanted to finish my high school education, I had to attend Na Ta La school in Mindat town; if I didn’t go to the Na Ta La school, I wouldn’t be able to continue my education. There was an order issued for that. We were also promised positions as government servants at Na Ta La school. As I wanted to finish my high school education, and I believed that attending Na Ta La school was the only way to do it, I had to join the school even though I had heard from others that I would have to practise Buddhism. [Note: during the corroboration process, CHRO confirmed that an announcement rather than an order was issued].⁹

The man in charge of the school is U Kee Ling Maung, another Mindat Chin. He is not a monk, but he is trusted

by the monks. He is part of the Hill Regions Buddhist Mission, which is the same as Na Ta La. We had to wear robes for nuns; the boys had to wear monks’ robes. There are two schools, West and East. In total we were 932 students, from pre-school – even some three-year old kids – up to 10th standard. The younger students were mostly Buddhist, but those in 9th and 10th standard were mainly Christian. We were 21 girls and 19 boys who were Christians.

We Christian students received worse treatment than the Buddhists. We were accused of not following the rules and regulations properly.¹⁰ Besides the usual subjects, we had to recite Pali and other Buddhist scriptures. If we couldn’t get it exactly we were beaten by the monks. They slapped me about the face, or beat me with sticks on my legs and back.

As a Christian girl it was not appropriate for me to carry on living at that Na Ta La school, so I ran away. I took off my nuns’ robes and left them there. I ran to _____ village, 20 miles from Mindat town. The monks from the Na Ta La school came there with soldiers from LIB274, looking for me. They told me, ‘You have to come back to the school in Mindat, or else you will be forced to join the army.’ They told me there is an order for that; even women aged 18-35 have to perform military service, and men aged 18-45. They said there is no choice, everyone has to be a soldier. [Note: in January 2011 the People’s Military Service Law SPDC Law No. 27/2010, signed and dated 4 November 2010, was published in the Union of Myanmar Gazette. The law therefore was promulgated but is not being enforced at the time of writing.] At the time I was sick, so I pretended to promise them that I would definitely come back in three days, when I was better. I realized that as long as I am in the country, the soldiers have good connections and so they can trace me wherever I am. So I had no choice but to flee the country.”

⁸ Interview M18, 1 July 2011, Cameron Highlands, Malaysia.

⁹ An announcement was made that high school students could secure a government job easily if they went to Na Ta La school. There were also some conditions for Christian students whereas Buddhist students could easily join the school. Conditions for Christian students included for example, obey all orders; commit to the rules, regulations and procedures of Na Ta La schools even after matriculation; and rules must be obeyed without complaint. It is likely A.G.A. and her family understood this as an order, especially if they had no way to support her education beyond 10th Standard.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Appendices

Appendix A: Translation of official instructions to destroy cross, Case Study Three

Village Tract – General Administrative Office

_____ Village Tract – _____ Village

Letter No. : 01/2-4/Oo 6

Date: 24 July 2011

TO _____

Subject: Letter of Notice to Demolish Crosses Already Erected

1. With regards to the above-mentioned subject about the crosses constructed by you, respected leaders, we have been informed by the Chin State government through a telegraph message;
 - a) That an official permission be obtained in conformity with procedures
 - b) That the leaders involved in constructing the crosses themselves destroy the current crosses.

This order has already been made known to you.

2. Therefore, this is to inform that those crosses must be demolished without fail by 10am in the morning on 25 July 2011 and that failing to do so will make you responsible for the consequences.

Signature

General Administrative Officer of Village Tract

_____ Village Tract

Kanpetlet Township

Copy:

- Township General Administrative Officer, Department of Township General Administrative Office, Kanpetlet Township
- Police Officer in Charge, Myanmar Police Force, _____ [sent so that action can be taken as necessary]

_____ Police Station
Kanpetlet Township
Letter No 01 (1) 232/U 11
Dated 24 July 2011

To _____

Subject: Matter regarding the construction of crosses on east and west ends of a bridge over _____

References

1. Letter of General Administrative Officer of Kanpetlet Township 221336 1 U 6 Yah/Tah Nah
2. Letter of General Administrative Officer of Kanpetlet Township 221600 Ching 2 U 6 (1) Tah Nah

With regards to the construction of crosses on the east and west ends of _____, we have received instruction from the Chin State Government containing the following points:

- a) If you wish to carry out [the construction] you must follow proper procedures
- b) The Police Chief should summon those leaders involved in the construction of the crosses to inform them that they themselves should destroy the crosses

Therefore, you are hereby informed to come to the _____ Township Administration Office as soon as you received this letter so that the police chief can explain to you about the above matters.

Lah – 156743/Police Chief Win Tint

Station Chief

_____ Police Station

Kanpetlet Township

Copies to:

Kanpetlet General Administrative Office, Kanpetlet

Office copy

* * * * *



“Our people are still faced with threats to our existence... forced assimilation attempts, attempts to coerce us to convert our religion, the various restrictive measures, and finally the attempts to force us into submission under the tight control of one centralized government.... The situation in our homeland has pushed many of our people out of the country. What matters most now is our attitudes towards our homeland and the future survival of our people.”

**The late Rev. Dr. Sang Awr,
former President of the Zomi (Chin) Baptist Convention**