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**The “cry” of the bishop of Loikaw, a city under siege. People are still sheltering in the damaged cathedral.**



[has decided to remain with 12 priests and 10 nuns. The bishop spoke to SIR about the situation, as Pope Francis mentioned Myanmar during the Angelus prayer on Sunday 19 November. The Pope recalled that the population "unfortunately continues to suffer violence and abuse." The country's plight has worsened since the military junta seized power in a coup in 2021. Fighting between the military and armed resistance groups has been intense ever since. \*\*Bishop Ba Shwe, the Pope recalled the situation in Myanmar. What's happening?\*\* Fierce fighting broke out in Loikaw, the capital of Kayah State, on 11 November. Local resistance forces launched an offensive to seize the junta-controlled city. In response to the opposition attacks, junta forces launched indiscriminate shelling and air strikes, killing dozens of residents. The city of Loikaw has been subjected to continuous shelling, artillery and gunfire throughout the day and night. The armed conflict in Loikaw town is now in its tenth day. \*\*What about the population?\*\* About 90 percent of the population of Loikaw has fled to safety in western Kayah State and other towns and cities in south Shan and other states. Since 11 November, 1,300 people have taken refuge in the compound of Christ the King Cathedral. We tried to evacuate each group over the course of a week with the help of other civil society organisations. We were able to relocate the last group of 170 people to the nearest safe parish in Pekhon diocese, Shan State. They include elderly people, families with young children and babies, people with disabilities and people with chronic illnesses.](#)



**How are you coping?** I have remained in the pastoral centre with 12 priests, 10 nuns and 37 residents who don't want to leave the city after having been displaced several times (some more than 10 times). Two days ago, the building of the Pastoral Centre was hit by mortar shells, which damaged parts of the roof and ceiling. Fortunately, no one was hurt. **And your priests?** All the elderly priests and nuns have been evacuated to safer places. All churches and convents in the city have been abandoned. **What do you need?** Evacuees are in urgent need of food, shelter, blankets and medicines, especially those evacuated to Dimoso, the largest IDP site. More than 150,000 IDPs have been living there since 2021. **Only Pope Francis remembers Myanmar. Do you feel that you have been forgotten by world leaders and humanitarian organisations?** Most definitely! The cry of the suffering people in my diocese and in Myanmar goes unheard and unnoticed. World leaders are well aware of what is happening, but they consider it to be an internal matter or a minor case. This makes me very sad. **What are your requests?** Please let the world and the international community know that we too are human beings with dignity that deserves to be protected, and that we need justice, peace, love and concrete humanitarian support. I have repeatedly tried to meet with the two warring parties and encourage talks. But both camps mistrust me and do not want to talk. **The Pope has also said that war is always a defeat and that peace is always possible. Do you believe this to be true?** It is absolutely true. Peace can only come from a change of heart and from merciful justice. God demands global conversion! Without it there can be no peace.

M. Chiara Biagioni