
Myanmar: Catholics fleeing. Catholic seminary volunteer killed in Loikaw

State of anarchy, raids and extrajudicial killings, people fleeing into the jungle. Abandoned farms. Deserted monasteries and churches. The worst fears have become reality: civil war has broken out between the army of the military junta (known as "Tatmadaw") and resistance fighters in Myanmar. The States of Kachin, Kayah and Karen, where the coup d'état of 1 February reignited conflicts and unhealed wounds, recorded the most serious incidents. "Since the armed conflict extended into the city of Kayah State on May 21, no place is safe, especially in conflict zones," Father Francis Soe Naing, from the diocese of Loikaw, wrote in a note to SIR. "People are fleeing every day, leaving their homes and personal belongings behind."



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["As a result, everyone has fled in seven parishes in the diocese of Loikaw \(Deemoso, Dongankha, Tananukwe, Donganrao, Domyalay, Kayantharya and Loilemly\). Except for the military and members of the Karenni People's Defence Force \(KPDF\), there is no one left. Even priests and nuns have left. Churches and houses are empty. The seven parishes had a Catholic population of 24,753 \(over 5,000 families\). There were 15 priests, 2 religious brothers, 24 nuns. There are 11 churches, 19 chapels, 7 clergy houses and 7 convents. "Now there is no one left there anymore." **The Myanmar Jesuits released a dramatic statement on their Facebook page.** "For no apparent reason, the soldiers shot dead a volunteer at the pre-major seminary in Loikaw, Myanmar, and searched through every room of the seminary." People didn't feel secure at home and so came to the convents and seminary for refuge "but the soldiers have just murdered an innocent person and the priests there couldn't do anything to stop the terrorists from doing so." In breaking the news, the Jesuits added a chilling postscript: "The murderous soldiers \(without permission\) also ate the food that the slain man cooked for the IDPs."](#)



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writes Father Francis from Loikaw. Over 800 innocent civilians have been killed in various ways since the military coup on February 1st. "How many deaths are needed for the UN to intervene?" a teenage protester called out in front of the UN headquarters in Yangon. "No more bloodshed but justice and peace," the Loikaw priest added. "Without international intervention, Myanmar will soon become a vast graveyard". **The Catholic Church in Loikaw is helping Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).** "We are afraid that the Burmese army may use the 'Four Cuts' policy: cutting access to food, funds, information and recruitment. Access has already been blocked to roads in southern Kayah State as well as mobile and internet connections in some areas. Impending hunger is also a cause for concern. Now is the time for cropping. Most of our people's livelihood depend on agricultural activities. Should the fighting continue, people will also die of hunger." On May 30, marking the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity, a special prayer for the suffering people of Myanmar and, in particular, for the Church in Myanmar was held in cathedrals and parishes throughout the country. The initiative was taken by Cardinal Charles Bo, President of the Burmese Bishops, who launched yet another cry of sadness from Yangon Cathedral: "This nation has suffered enormously in the last four months. Even now, the people of Mindat (Chin State, ed.'s note) and Loikaw (Kayah State, ed.'s note) are huddled in the jungle after having been forcibly displaced by violence. Thousands are displaced, injured and hungry. In the face of the suffering and tears of our people, what could be the message of the Holy Trinity? The Trinity offers a great message: Love is the only true power. Not dominion." The Archbishop, also sent a message of hope. "These are dark times," he said. "In the dark moments in history, the Holy Trinity has directly intervened for humanity. The God of Israel called Moses to deliver his people from oppressive slavery in Egypt. God is the Deliverer of the victims of oppression. God works through us. The Pope reminds us that even when evil seems to have the upper hand, we must be steadfast in the faith, keep unity, and respond to the victims of evil.. Indeed, when we are threatened by evil, silence, retreat into our salvation is not the answer. Jesus says to his disciples: go into the world. We must go to the places where violence has ripped apart families and spilled blood, forcing thousands to flee into the jungle." Christians are called to "remove the chains of unjustly chained prisoners", also today, the Cardinal said, to share their "food with all those who are hungry" and their homes "with the poor and the homeless." "This will ultimately heal the nation." On May 30, prayers for Myanmar were recited also in the Philippines. Father Bruno Cosme, Apostolic Administrator of the prefecture of Kompong Cham, Cambodia, offered closeness and solidarity in a video message, echoing the words of Cardinal Bo: "peace is

possible, peace is the only way".

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ZrS42whGwk&feature=youtu.be>

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