



(Sin Lum Pang Mu church)



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BURMA | Army ransacks church in Bhamo district

On March 13, the Burma Army ransacked Sin Lum Pang Mu Baptist Church in Pang Mu village, located in Bhamo district.

According to Reverend Jangmaw Gam Maw, pastor of Pang Mu Church, soldiers from the 33rd battalion of the Burma Army's 88th Infantry Division burned bibles, destroyed church property, and stole a video player, loudspeakers and villagers' belongings. The soldiers claimed that the property belonged to a Kachin Independence Army outpost. They also took money from the church donation boxes.

The pastor and over 1,000 church members from Pang Mu village had abandoned the village for Mai Ja Yang IDP camp on November 19, 2011.

On 10 March, Burma Army soldiers disrupted a Christian conference and threatened a Member of Parliament (MP) at gunpoint in western Burma's Chin State, according to the Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO).

More than 1,000 delegates from 80 local branches of the Mara (Chin) Evangelical Church at Sabawngte village, in a remote area of Matupi township, southern Chin State, had gathered for the conference, which had official permission. CHRO reports that several Burma Army soldiers disrupted the meeting and rebuked the village headman for not reporting the event to the army camp. When Pu Van Cin, an MP from the Ethnic National Development Party, saw the soldiers confronting the village headman and tried to intervene, he was threatened at gunpoint.

Benedict Rogers, East Asia Team Leader at Christian Solidarity Worldwide, said, "These incidents illustrate that there is still a very long way to go in Burma's reform process, and for that reason, the international community should be cautious about lifting too many sanctions too quickly. We have seen very welcome progress in Burma at some levels in recent months, but the Burma Army continues to perpetrate grave violations of human rights in the ethnic areas, which include religious discrimination and persecution of minorities. Religious freedom is a fundamental value in any democratic society, and so if the Burmese government is serious about reform, it must protect religious freedom. We urge the international community to monitor the situation closely. While it is certainly right to ease some sanctions in recognition of the progress made, we urge the European Union, the United States and others to do so gradually, step by step, in proportion to the developments on the ground, and to retain some measures until further genuine change is secured. In Rangoon and the urban areas there is atmospheric change, but not yet substantial institutional, legislative and constitutional change that will make reform irreversible. In the ethnic areas, crimes against humanity continue. We call upon President Thein Sein and all reform-minded officials in the Burmese government to take action to end the military's abuses, and to protect human rights, including religious freedom, for all."