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## No official youth delegation from Myanmar at WYD: "They are fighting for their future and freedom"

Too expensive a trip for family coffers, and all too dangerous due to political instability. For these reasons, Myanmar youth will not be able to participate in World Youth Day in Lisbon this year. "Yes, it's true, there will be no official youth delegation from Myanmar at WYD this year.", officials from the office of the National Catholic Youth Commission (Burmese Bishops' Conference) who preferred to remain anonymous for security reasons, confirmed to SIR. The presence of Burmese youth in Lisbon is tiny: it was only recently announced that four youth and one seminarian from the Myanmar Jesuit community would be able to attend. But no one from the dioceses will go. They explain from Yangon that the average monthly salary is about \$80 to \$130, and no one can afford to make such a trip. Adding to the economic hardship is the situation created by the coup and the military takeover. For young people in Myanmar, "it is not safe to live, it is difficult to survive, it is difficult to find work. Many go abroad. Many are joining the ranks of the People's Defense Army. "Being young or even gathering in groups of more than 5 people is always viewed with suspicion by the military. You can be arrested anywhere for no reason if you are young. Young people are targeted by the military as the most suspicious for political reasons." "In short, the main reason is political instability and the financial crisis. When young people are accused or arrested by the military for political reasons, no one can help or intercede for them, not even the bishops." **How are you handling your absence at WYD?**

It is an injustice for Myanmar's young sons and daughters.

We have to say that because of the military coup and the local armed conflict and civil war, there has been injustice not only to the youth but to all the people of Myanmar. **What do you want to let young people from around the world gathered in Lisbon know?** We want to make it known that in Myanmar, children, youth and political activists are being killed or imprisoned. Even some of our Catholic priests are being arrested and imprisoned for unclear reasons, and some have been placed on wanted lists (505/A or B). Houses are burned almost daily by the military. The world knows it, the Church leaders know it. But I am not sure that the crying voices of our suffering people are being heard. But of one thing we are sure: our young people are fighting for their freedom, for the good of the country. They are sacrificing their lives. They live miserably in the forests like the displaced people. As Mother Teresa once said, "Helping hands are better than praying lips," we also say today that the people of Myanmar need helping hands. So we would like to take this opportunity to express our deep gratitude to all the people, countries, NGOs and humanitarian organizations who are helping our people in one way or another. A million thanks to all the supporters. **What is the situation like in Myanmar today?** It is getting more and more complicated. Some may think it is getting better, but our suffering continues; in fact, it is getting worse. It is hard to explain the situation clearly. In some big cities in Myanmar (such as Yangon, Patheingyi, Naypyidaw) it seems quiet and life goes on normally. But in Sagaing region; Mandalay, Kalay, Hakha, Myittha, Banmaw, Lashio; in Karen and Karenni State; Bago, Taungtha, Loileik, Phele, Pha-An, Mawlamyine; Shan; Taunggyi, there are civil wars. In other words, in 3 or 4 dioceses the situation is peaceful, but in the other 12 or 13 dioceses it is not. The people are suffering a lot. From February 1, 2021 until now, churches are also being burned in some dioceses, and the main cause of all these events is the "military coup". **What message do you want to get across to the young people at WYD and to Pope Francis?** As the youth of Myanmar are fighting for their future and freedom, we appeal to the youth of the world and ask for your prayers that our youth will be protected from harm and have more strength to resist and fight courageously for the freedom that is a gift from God. In solidarity with the Ukrainian people, we also ask for your prayers and support for the Ukrainian people. May young people around the world have a meaningful and fruitful experience of God's love in the celebration of WYD.

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