
Myanmar. The Bishops of Loikaw and Hakha: “Three years after the coup, our people long for justice and reconciliation”

“We are praying for peace and justice constantly. Our people have been fasting and starving since the military coup in 2021.” Myanmar, which has plunged into one of the darkest pages in its history almost three years ago, will join in the World Day of Prayer for Peace, strongly called for by Pope Francis. The news was confirmed to SIR by the Bishop of the Diocese of Loikaw, **Msgr. Celso Ba Shwe**. From Rome, where he is attending the Synod, **Cardinal Charles Bo** sent a letter to the Catholic and Christian faithful of his country, religious communities, men and women of good will, inviting them to join in the Pope's appeal. The bishops extended the Pope's message to all the local dioceses, and thus Day of Prayer will be observed here too, in a country ravaged by civil war, with a Christian community severely affected by food shortages, forced displacement, military attacks and poverty. The Bishop described the situation in Loikaw. “About 60,000 of the 90,000 Catholic inhabitants have been forced to flee into the jungle and remote villages where there is not enough food, no safe shelter and no health care,” he said. Church life has also been affected by the humanitarian emergency. In the diocese of Loikaw alone, 26 out of 41 parishes have been temporarily closed and abandoned due to the armed conflict, and more than 40 religious buildings have been attacked, burnt, bombed and desecrated, including parish churches, village chapels, monasteries, formation centres, parish halls and church-run clinics. Many priests, nuns and catechists are among the displaced, accompanying their parishioners to ensure the continuity of pastoral care.” **When asked what the population needed most, the bishop replied: “Justice, peace and human rights.”** He then added a list of urgent needs: “food, health care, education for children and life-saving aid. These are the most urgent needs,” he said. Msgr. Ba Shwe looks forward to the Day of Prayer with hope: “We must pray for peace and justice. But more importantly, we need to know that we are all called by God to conversion of heart. While prayer and fasting are certainly to be welcomed, personal conversion is the guarantee for peace to flourish and is the fruit of true prayer and fasting”. Quoting from the Book of Isaiah, he added: “Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loosen the chains of injustice and undo the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry, to give shelter to the poor wanderer, to clothe the naked when you see them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?” (Isaiah 58:6-7). The bishop then thanked Pope Francis and concluded with an appeal: “Please tell the so-called world leaders to respect the lives of innocent people, wherever they are, whoever they are: in Israel, in Palestine, in Ukraine, in Myanmar and in the whole world!” **From the diocese of Hakha, Chin State, Bishop Lucius Hre Kung echoes the same sentiments: “Today Myanmar is suffering from the lack of justice and peace. We are therefore in urgent need of reconciliation.”** Myanmar's Catholic heart goes out to “all those who are experiencing what we are experiencing today, in Palestine, in Ukraine, people are suffering. Just as Moses cried out in the desert, Pope Francis tells us today: “Do not be afraid! Stay strong and the God of peace will come to save us”. “Praying for justice and peace is an integral part of the Church's mission,” said Monsignor Kung, bishop of a diocese in Chin State, where the Burmese junta's military has unfortunately targeted Catholic and Protestant churches. “In these times of great challenges and difficulties,” he said, “we find comfort and strength in the Holy Father's unwavering love and guidance. His compassion and leadership are a source of inspiration and hope for us all. In a world often divided and in turmoil, we are deeply grateful for his tireless efforts to promote peace, compassion and unity. His Holiness' messages of love, tolerance and understanding have touched countless lives and resonated with people from all walks of life, across borders and faiths. His commitment to the marginalised and to promoting harmony between peoples is a beacon of hope in our too often troubled world. May his teaching and his blessing continue to guide us on the road to a better future. Long live the Pope!”

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