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## Father Celso Ba Shwe (Loikaw), "Help us, or Myanmar will soon turn into a burial ground"

"Myanmar has fallen into anarchy. Insecurity is rampant throughout the country. Instead of fulfilling their duty to protect civilians, the military and the police are acting in violation of the law. They do anything they want. They forcefully seize people at night and beat them to death for no reason. Some have been seriously injured", said Father **Celso Ba Shwe**, Apostolic Administrator of the Loikaw Diocese, capital of Kayah State, contacted by SIR to gain an insight into the latest dramatic developments in Myanmar. Two days ago, together with a Protestant pastor, Father Celso Ba Shwe took to the streets in a desperate attempt to mediate between the police and the protestors demonstrating near the Christ the King cathedral. **Father, what is the situation on the ground?** Crimes are being committed even in broad daylight. According to social media reports, 62 civilians, including children, were savagely killed by gunshots on 3 March, chiefly by snipers and many more people killed have not been reported in the media. Several cities in Myanmar are comparable to extermination camps. *They are killing innocent people. No one can stop them. They seem to lack a human heart. They have already committed serious crimes against humanity.* **How are the people coping with all of this?** As far as I know, a family received the dead body of their dear one this morning. This is tragic. People are powerless, helpless, afraid. The country is no longer a safe place to live. Some are afraid of sleeping in their own homes. They are overwrought by worry, anxiety and anger. At night, the military junta sends criminals into towns and villages with orders to torch houses and poison the water. Security forces break into private homes, dragging people out and stealing their belongings. They violently beat people on the streets and aggressively destroy cars, motorbikes, shops and restaurants. They fired tear gas also inside people's homes, injuring children and elderly people. Protesters are tortured and some have died as a result. **Is it true that some national newspapers have been closed down and suspended?**



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MRTV, MWD and the two state newspapers (Myanma Alyn & Mirror) have been placed under the control of the military junta. It is therefore impossible to have a reliable source of information and of the facts. They are lying to the people of Myanmar and to the whole world. International organisations should come and see what is happening in Myanmar for themselves if they really want to know the truth. Security forces stormed several local media outlets in an attempt to silence information against the coup. In Italy we have seen the incredible courage of priests, nuns and bishops on the streets calling for security and peace. What are you asking of the military forces and above all, are you being listened to? My request to the military is: do not harm and do not fire at the protestors. They are demonstrating peacefully and some are praying for peace and justice; listen to the people and protect them; abide by the law and the rule of law; respect the dignity and the value of every human being; do not brutally crack down on protesters with violence: they are your brothers and sisters, not your enemies. Unfortunately, no one has listened to us, except their commander. What motivated nuns, priests, religious, bishops to take to the streets? Who gives you the courage and the strength? We cannot allow rampant injustice, nor can we withdraw into our rooms, chapels and churches while our people are suffering in the streets, fighting for justice and pleading

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for democracy. The sufferings of our people are our sufferings. The cries of our people are our cries. We share their demand for democracy, rule of law, respect for human dignity, peace and justice. Myanmar has seen enough bloodshed for justice and peace in the past. We don't want it to happen again. We don't not want to live under dictatorship, subjected to the darkness of the military regime. Young people are our hope and our future. It is the Holy Spirit who gives us strength. The values of the Gospel and the wealth of wisdom enshrined in the social teachings of the Catholic Church inspire us to defend our people in need. **What are your requests to the international community and to the Church worldwide?** We are most grateful to the international community and the Church worldwide for their prayers, support and concern. Once again we are asking to continue supporting the people of Myanmar until true democracy is restored in the country. Please support the CRPH (Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw), the national legislative body representing democratically elected members in the November elections because it is our hope. Please help us in our fight against injustice and violence, to free us from military dictatorship. The world must not remain silent to the suffering of the people of Myanmar. International intervention is urgently needed. *How many more deaths before the UN decides to intervene? Without international intervention, Myanmar will soon turn into a burial ground. Help us without delay.* Healthcare services are in need of financial support. The Diocese of Loikaw runs three health care centres in three different cities for emergency treatment. These facilities are obviously lacking adequate equipment. However, we strive to offer the best possible medical care. We depend on local donors for the purchase of medicines and the necessary facilities. It will be hard for us to continue this way for much longer.”

M. Chiara Biagioni