

Myanmar. Appeal before the shutdown: “We will survive, but please continue to pray and speak out on our behalf”

“Should there be no Internet connection, rest assured that everything will be fine. Do not worry. We will survive. But please continue praying for us.” A step away from yet another national telecommunications shutdown, Father Francis S.N. sent out a desperate appeal through SIR from Myanmar, now under the grip of increasingly violent and brutal crackdowns. Countless people are being killed, injured and imprisoned. “The situation is deteriorating by the day. You may already have learned that several activists, politicians, actors and actresses, writers, singers and even some monks have been imprisoned. People are dying every day. Just yesterday, in the city I live in, two people were wounded by gunshots. One of them is in critical condition. A total of 46 civilians were shot and killed in Bago. The same is happening in other towns. The priest - who for security reasons is kept anonymous - sent footage to SIR of a person being hunted down by police officers who fired at him several times, fortunately without hitting him. The death toll in Myanmar has grown to 614 civilians killed in protests and clashes following the military coup on February 1. The figures were released on the website of the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAP), reporting that 2,857 people were arrested and 52 convicted. In order to obstruct public protests, the military junta cut off Internet services and started confiscating satellite dishes to cause a telecommunications blackout. “Fortunately,” the priest said, “our fibre optic Internet is running again. However, with the exception of the fibre connectivity, all Internet access is disrupted. *“Should they shut down all communication networks as they say, we will need to find other ways and means to inform the outside world about what is happening in the country. Please continue to speak out on our behalf.”* 

Unfortunately, Myanmar's Catholic churches are also being targeted. Following a report by Vatican news agency Fides, also SIR sources have confirmed the situation. “The Catholic churches in the diocese of Patheingyi - the priest said - were invaded yesterday. They behave like thugs. I have no idea when they will come here. We are not afraid. We are only concerned about our healthcare facilities. Many of our patients need treatment and care.” Security forces are raiding many places. “The military enter clinics and private hospitals. They arrest doctors and nurses, seize their medicines and equipment and destroy whatever they please. We pray it does not happen to us. Healthcare centres run and supported by men and women religious are providing an essential service for the population. “Following the military coup, the national health system is on the brink of collapse. Our health care facilities now provide the services of general hospitals. But I don't know how long we will be able to hold out. We are facing countless difficulties and our financial situation is also deteriorating. Services have been provided free of charge until now, but we don't know to what extent we can continue under the present circumstances. Moreover, we can hardly charge for treatment at the moment because people have no money to spare. We are asking them for a donation, at least for the purchase of medicines.” *“The ruling junta has declared martial law for the people, but not for the military,” the Burmese priest concluded. They can do whatever they want. No rules. No law!”* **Meanwhile, the situation in Karen State is escalating.** More than 20,000 people have been forced to flee their homes and seek shelter in the jungle in fear after the military launched air and ground attacks, according to Catholic news agency Ucanews. According to Free Burma Rangers, a humanitarian organisation providing health care to Karen villagers for many years, 14 Karen people had been killed and more than 40 injured as of April 5. The displaced persons are in desperate need of food and are living only on emergency food supplies they kept hidden.