
Myanmar. Msgr. Kung (Hakha): "No decorations and no Christmas carols. This Christmas will be celebrated in silence"

No decorations in homes and towns. No Christmas carols. "Owing to the present situation, Christians will be unable to celebrate the coming Christmas joyfully as they did in the past. It will be a silent celebration of Christmas. But no one can take away our heartfelt joy for the birth of Jesus, even today, even here." Contacted by phone, the Bishop of Hakha, Msgr. **Lucius Hre Kung**, described to SIR the prevailing atmosphere surrounding Christians' upcoming Christmas Day in Myanmar. The country has been in the grip of a regime of violence, arrests and killings since February 1, when the military seized power in a coup d'état, causing forced migrations and assassinations, especially in ethnically diverse regions. Hakha is located in Chin State, a region where the Burmese army has repeatedly targeted the local population, including Christian churches. It's the tragic culmination of a string of clashes between the military and civil resistance groups (Chinland Defence Force, CDF) that are forcing people to flee their homes. The military entered St John's Catholic Church in the village of Chat at the beginning of September, opening the tabernacle, seizing the consecrated hosts and tossing them to the ground. In June, in Kanpetlet, the army raided the residence of the parish priest and arrested him, releasing him after interrogation. But violence in Myanmar is widespread nationwide. It is said to be a civil war with many calling for UN intervention. A few days ago, the BBC reported mass killings in Kani Township, an opposition stronghold in the district of Sagaing, in the heart of the country. Yin village was the worst affected, with over 14 men tortured and beaten to death, and their bodies thrown into a wooded ditch. **Bishop Kung describes a desperate situation:** "People are experiencing great hardship, especially in my diocese of Hakha in Chin State. *The local population, especially internally displaced persons and poor households, are in dire need of humanitarian aid including food, medicine and warm clothing as the winter season sets in.* Now some of my main concerns include the education of students who have stopped going to school for 2 years because of the pandemic and the civil war, the physical and mental health of the people; daily access to food, spiritual support." **This Christmas will be celebrated in the midst of poverty and violence.** "The current situation in the country prevents us from celebrating Christmas this year as we normally do", reports Msgr. Kung from Hakha. "There will be no decorations in homes and in towns, no Christmas carols. The joy of celebrations has been silenced. Families are divided, their members dispersed. However, the spiritual dimension of Christmas grows even stronger in our hearts in the very absence of all its most exterior aspects. *Baby Jesus was born in the small town of Bethlehem, and Baby Jesus wants to be born again here and now, in the Bethlehem that is the diocese of Hakha and Myanmar as a whole. It is an even more meaningful Christmas for us all.*" **It will be very hard to celebrate Christmas, especially in some parts of the country.** Bishop Kung appealed directly to the military junta. *"I urge them to work for peace and reconciliation in the country and to avoid all forms of violence"*. At the Angelus prayer on Sunday, October 3, Pope Francis made an appeal: "I wish once again to implore from God the gift of peace for the beloved land of Myanmar: may the hands of those who live there no longer wipe away tears of pain and death, but instead join together to overcome difficulties and work together to bring peace." Bishop Kung addresses that same plea to the international community today, to the United Nations, to ASEAN - the Association of Southeast Asian Nations - and to the European Union: "We ask you to pray and work for peace in the world, especially for Myanmar, so that Justice, Peace and the inner joy of Christmas may prevail."