

Letter to Prime Minister

17 February 2021

The Hon Scott Morrison MP Prime Minister
Parliament House CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Prime Minister Morrison,

I am writing to you regarding the very distressing situation that continues to develop in Myanmar. I write also on behalf of the 47 churches and faith communities within our Baptist Union of Victoria who have Chin, Karen or Pwo Karen congregations and represent over 10,000 congregation members. Together, we write to implore you to do anything you can to assist with finding a path to peace for Myanmar.

As Baptists, we are personally concerned for the 1.7 million Baptists throughout Myanmar, however, our concern is not just for the Baptists alone, but for all of the citizens of Myanmar who long for peace. We stand in lament with them and their family and friends who are in Australia who cannot contact loved ones.

We join together with our Asian Pacific Baptist counterparts <https://www.baptist.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/APBF-Myanmar-statement.pdf> in calling for the international community to act with urgency, seeking dialogue to bring reconciliation among the parties concerned and restore democracy and stability to Myanmar once again. We unite in raising our voice in appeal and in prayer; praying for peace and reconciliation in Myanmar, for democracy to be upheld and restored and for the safety and protection of all citizens of Myanmar of all ethnicities from violence and brutality.

As Baptists, we also stand in agreement with multiple resolutions that have been passed by the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) since 1989 calling for the establishment of peace, human rights, and the rule of law. For example, in a 2006 resolution, the BWA “call[ed] upon the Myanmar authorities to lift the house arrest of Aung San Suu Kyi, the legally elected president.” A 2013 resolution, “Laments that large numbers of innocent civilians have been killed and many women have been raped as part of a strategy of violence. More than 200 Kachin Baptist villages have been lost.” This resolution further called for “solutions to this conflict and to all situations of ethnic cleansing through the power of prayer and nonviolent peacemaking.” A 2014 resolution called for elections that would be “free and fair.” In 2019, a BWA resolution also raised our support on behalf of Rohingya Muslims.

In addition to the arrest of political leaders, social and media blackouts, international news channel blackouts, we understand that healthcare workers participating in peaceful protests are to be immediately arrested. We are also deeply concerned about ongoing reports related to the violation of the 2015 Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement in some parts of Myanmar, including in areas among the Karen that in recent months have led to the destruction of 23 Karen villages.

We have heard just this morning that the staff at Myanmar Institute of Theology (the seminary where one of our Baptist pastors has previously taught), were providing water bottles to protesters and tomorrow they will provide lunch boxes to 300 railway workers who camped and were involved in Civil Disobedience Movements (CDM). Every night, arsonists and robbers who have been released from jail, are being dropped off in places in Yangon. Military trucks are in Yangon suburbs and have been threatening and intimidating civil people, making it very difficult for the people of Yangon to sleep. CDM participants have left their jobs and are risking their lives and the lives of their families to protest the military coup. Western Chin churches and organizations are collecting funds to support CDM protesters.

We believe, as I am sure you do, in a flourishing Myanmar where all citizens experience freedom and peace and echo the UN Security Council’s statement encouraging “the pursuance of dialogue and reconciliation

with the will and interests of the people of Myanmar." I am therefore writing to ask you to encourage the Myanmar military officials and all government leaders to pursue resolution through constructive dialogue as the only path to sustained peace.

We will continue to pray for the wellbeing of Myanmar, and I am calling upon those in our churches to do the same. We have set aside next **Sunday 28th February 2021 as a day of prayer - *Standing Together for Myanmar***. We ask you to join with us in standing together for the people of Myanmar and praying for:

- The release of President Win Myit and State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and other officials currently detained
- The release of hundreds arrested whilst protesting the military coup
- That internet and phone communications would not be blocked
- The safety of all people
- Myanmar Baptist Conventions who are leading the resettlement of Internally Displaced Persons
- That peace, justice, reconciliation, non-violence, dignity and respect for human rights might prevail
- That fairness, justice, peace, and a free future would be available to all in Myanmar
- The resilience of the people
- The situation that is complicated by the global pandemic
- A reinstatement of a democratically elected government
- The leaders of Myanmar Baptist Churches in Victoria
- The people from Myanmar in our Victorian Baptist Churches who worry about family and friends in Myanmar (and all people from Myanmar residing in Australia)

Thank you for taking the time to read and consider this request.

Yours sincerely,

Rev. Daniel Bullock
Director of Mission & Ministries Baptist Union of Victoria

[For further information/enquiries, please contact Melissa Rule (Head of Communications, Baptist Union of Victoria): melissa.rule@buv.com.au]