News

Villagers displaced by fighting in eastern Myanmar cross a river in Kayah state June 12, 2021.

Villagers displaced by fighting in eastern Myanmar cross a river in Kayah state June 12, 2021. (CNS photo/Reuters)



by Catholic News Service

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Yangon, Myanmar — October 20, 2021

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Myanmar's military has arrested seven workers from the Catholic Church's social arm who were on a mission to provide aid for internally displaced persons in conflict-stricken Kayah state.

A senior official from Loikaw Diocese, which covers Kayah state, said the soldiers made the arrests of workers from Caritas (Karuna) in Loikaw, the state's capital, as the social workers carried food and medicine Oct. 18.

"We have been providing humanitarian assistance for the IDPs who are in dire need of food, shelter and medicines amid tight restrictions on providing aid," the source told UCA news.

He said church officials have been following up on the arrest of the charity workers and trying to gain their release.

It's not uncommon in the region for the military to burn civilians' homes, kill civilians and make arbitrary arrests in the predominantly Christian region, according to church sources.

The church has played a major role in providing humanitarian assistance to those displaced within the country who have taken refuge in churches, convents and makeshift camps since fighting flared up in May.

Advertisement

At least 10 parishes in Loikaw Diocese have been affected by the recent conflict, which has displaced more than 100,000 people, including Catholics. The diocese is responding to the needs of around 70,000 displaced people, ucanews.com reported.

Providing aid remains difficult due to tight restrictions, road blockages and checkpoints by the military, according to aid workers.

The number of internally displaced persons has increased recently following intense fighting between the military and the combined forces of the Karenni Army and local defense forces in Kayah and neighboring Shan state.

The arrests of the social workers came just seven days after Immaculate Conception Church in Phruso township was hit by military artillery fire. Five Catholic churches have been damaged by artillery shelling in Loikaw Diocese, while a church and Marian shrine were damaged in Pekhon Diocese during a five-month period.

Kayah, a remote and mountainous state, is regarded as a stronghold of Catholicism in the Buddhist-majority country. About 90,000 Catholics live in the state with a population of 355,000.

The conflict sparked by the Feb. 1 coup has forced more than 240,000 people out of their homes, triggering a humanitarian crisis.