News

Demonstrators protest the military coup and demand the release of elected leader Aung San

Demonstrators protest the military coup and demand the release of elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi in Yangon, Myanmar, Feb. 6, 2021. (CNS photo/Reuters)



by Catholic News Service

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YANGON, MYANMAR — The papal foundation Aid to the Church in Need has called for prayers Feb. 1, to show solidarity with the people of Myanmar on the first anniversary of the military coup.

"It has been a year of terror and suffering, which has disrupted the course of this Asian country. The response of the military leadership to the massive demonstrations against its abuse of power has been ruthless and brutal," said a statement by the agency, which has been assisting persecuted Christians.

Aid to the Church in Need said the day of prayer would remember the dead and intercede for the innocent civilian population, especially internally displaced people.

"Let us pray for all these thousands on the move, many of them at risk of starving," it said.

"As fighting intensifies, the church is faced with a task with which it is sadly familiar because of the conflicts that have plagued Myanmar in the past: to attend to the increasingly large number of (internally displaced people) on church grounds, in the

jungle or in camps."

Nearly 1,500 people have been killed, including at least 50 children, and over 11,000 people have been arrested since the coup.

Ucanews.com reported Catholic bishops in Myanmar have appealed for "humanitarian assistance for the thousands of displaced people" in the country and said they would continue seeking "the fellowship of the universal church and donor community to seek support to all our Myanmar people, without any discrimination."

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"Human dignity and the right to life can never be compromised," said the bishops, adding that "we strongly demand respect for life, respect for the sanctity of sanctuary in places of worship, hospitals, and schools."

Fighting has intensified between junta forces and ethnic armed groups along with recently emerged people's defense forces.

The junta has unleashed airstrikes and artillery shelling, forcing thousands of people to flee their homes to seek refuge in nearby jungles or churches in neighboring villages and towns.

Churches and other community institutions are being deliberately targeted by junta forces in predominantly Christian Kayah, Chin and Karen states. The latest incident was an airstrike on a church in Loikaw Diocese.

At least 15 parishes in Loikaw Diocese, which covers Kayah state, have been severely affected by the escalating fighting. More than 100,000 people have been displaced, while at least seven Catholic churches in the diocese have been hit by shelling or airstrikes.