

Christians Now Need Permission to Read the Bible as Burma Persecution Intensifies

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The Burmese government recently imposed new regulations restricting the ability of Christians in the country to worship, hold Bible studies and pray, according to reports.

The latest move by officials in Burma requires Christians in the Phakant Township, Kachin State to submit a written request at least 15 days in advance to read the Bible, conduct a Bible study, host Sunday school and other prayer-related activities, according to Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW).

The requests, mandated by the General Township Administration Department, also must be accompanied by recommendations from other departments.

“For many years, successive Burmese regimes have suppressed freedom of religion and imposed serious restrictions on Christians and other religious minorities,” CSW’s East Asia Team Leader Benedict Rogers said. “To impose a requirement on churches and individuals to seek permission to read the Bible, pray, fast and hold a Sunday school is an extreme restriction and an extraordinary further violation of freedom of religion.”

The new restrictions come as Burma has seen an increase in violence against the nation’s Christian minority, mostly located in northern Kachin State.

Earlier this month, Burmese military officials beat and arrested five men, including Pastor Jan Ma Aung Li of the Catholic Association, according to Mizzima, a news organization run by Burmese journalists in Delhi, India. The men were later released.

Christians have also been forbidden to build new churches, and have had religious symbols – such as crosses – removed by the military. Followers of Christ have also had food and homes confiscated by officials, according to a Human Rights Watch report.

More than 30,000 people from Kachin State have been displaced since renewed fighting began in June between the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) and the Burmese military. The KIO is made up of residents of the mostly-Christian autonomous region in Burma.

The continued violence and addition of new restrictions against the nation’s Christian minority continues to grab the attention of watchdog groups as well as governments around the world.

“It appears that despite changes in rhetoric, there has been no change of attitude, particularly at a local level, on the part of Burmese authorities to religious minorities,” Rogers said. “Burma is already regarded as one of the world’s worst violators of religious freedom,

and is one of the U.S. State Department's Countries of Particular Concern.”

Burma, well-known for religious intolerance and other abuses, shares a place on the State Department's list of worst offenders of religious freedoms, along with China, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Uzbekistan.

“The right to believe or not to believe, without fear of government interference or restriction, is essential to human dignity,” the State Department said on its website in reference to Burma.

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