



Media Release 07.04.2021

ACN International calls for prayers for Myanmar

In the face of escalating violence in Myanmar, the pontifical foundation ACN International is calling upon Christians all over the world to pray. ACN Executive President Thomas Heine-Geldern explained, “Christians all over the world can only look towards Myanmar with the deepest concern. For this reason, we are expressly backing the appeal made by Pope Francis: End the violence! Let us pray for this, particularly during the feast days of Easter.”

In mid-March, in response to the violence used by the military junta against the pro-democracy movement in the Asian country, Pope Francis called for the renunciation of violence and the initiation of a dialogue. This past weekend saw the bloodiest clashes yet since the coup began on 1 February. According to press reports, security forces have killed more than 100 people. It is estimated that well over 500 people have lost their lives since the beginning of the coup.

“I am shaken by the news that has reached us from Myanmar. The degree of brutality with which the security forces acted this weekend appears to be greater than at any time since the initial days of the coup. Armed with military equipment, the security forces were apparently prepared to shoot anyone who they saw on the streets,” Heine-Geldern explained.

According to Heine-Geldern, there is no hope for a quick end to the confrontation. “The experts state that neither side – the military nor the pro-democracy movement – are prepared to pull back. The military believes that it has the right to terrorise people in pursuit of ‘stability and security;’ however, the movement on the streets, led by young people, is resolved to free the country from the military dictatorship. Things may get worse.”

For this reason, Heine-Geldern is urgently calling for spiritual compassion. “Our sources tell us of a profound inner and external distress. We need more prayer. We need peace and reconciliation. Please include the people of Myanmar in your daily prayers.” However, the witness of the Catholic Church of Myanmar fills Heine-Geldern with hope. “The pictures of the religious sister kneeling to block the path of the troops, imploring for an end to the violence, are moving. The Catholic priest who, together with a Protestant priest, succeeded in negotiating the withdrawal of police and demonstrators is another powerful example. Hopefully, their actions will soften the hearts of those who are in charge.”

Only about eight per cent of the inhabitants of Myanmar are Christians. Most of the population belong to the Buddhist faith. ACN supports the local Catholic Church by funding the training and further education of religious, the further education of priests as well as catechesis for the faithful. Other

projects are focused on the building and renovation of churches, chapels, parish houses and convents as well as community and training centres.

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