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Buddhist Mob in Rakhine State Attacked Christians Celebrating Christmas

London, UK -- A mob of 50 people, including three Monks, in Setsi village in Ann Township, Rakhine State attacked a group of Christian worshippers on December 24th in a temporary shelter set up to celebrate Christmas. One Christian priest was injured in the attack and was admitted to the hospital. The leader of the Tidim Baptist Convention, Salai Aung Lai, said the group would lodge a complaint against the attackers with the police and will also write a letter to the President to inform him of the attack. He said the event was organised with permission from the local authorities.

“Non-Buddhists in Burma have been under persecution for decades and these recent events further demonstrate the dangers of religious nationalism inside of the country. The Burmese Authorities must ensure the human rights of minorities and prosecute those responsible for these horrendous attacks,” said Burma Human Rights Network’s Executive Director, Kyaw Win.

A Monk named U Ottama from the monastery in Maeletmaung village took the lead in the attack and later told a news agency that he and his followers “took action to teach a lesson to the Christians.” He added that such events celebrating Christmas were never held in the area before.

While the vast majority of the 100 households in Setsi Village are Buddhist, 14 households of Animists recently converted to Christianity after being visited by missionaries.

This incident follows a rising trend of anti-Christian persecution in Burma. In June, two Christian nuns were attacked by locals in Pataekyaw Village, in Ann Township. Shortly after a Priest who reported the incident was beaten by a Buddhist mob. On December 17th, the home of a Christian family in Gangaw Township in Magwe Region came under attack by a mob throwing stones while hosting a gathering for group prayers. Similarly, last year authorities imposed a ban against a prayer gathering for Christians at a home in Insein Township in Yangon after local Buddhists lodged a complaint against such gatherings.

Burma must address the rising trend of violence against Christians and other non-Buddhist minorities in the country by holding those responsible accountable. The country must also ensure that all religions in the country are able to practice freely and should reverse any laws limiting the rights of minority religions to do so. The international community must address these issues as well through diplomatic channels as well as the use of sanctions, particularly targeting the Military and its economic interests, for their role in agitating violence and the legislation of discriminatory laws. If these issues are not addressed and Burmese Buddhist Nationalism continues to spread, it is inevitable that violence will similarly increase against minority communities.

Background on the Burma Human Rights Network (BHRN)

Burma Human Rights Network (BHRN) is based in London and operates across Burma/Myanmar works for human rights, minority rights and religious freedom in Burma. BHRN has played a crucial role advocating for human rights and religious freedom with politicians and world leaders.

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