



# Chin Human Rights Organization

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## CHRO CONDEMNS DESTRUCTION OF CHRISTIAN CROSS IN CHIN STATE

**Chiang Mai, Thailand:** The Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO) strongly condemns the destruction of another Christian cross in Chin State on the orders of Burma's military regime. CHRO has learned that the 23-foot high concrete Christian cross in the Mindat Township area, southern Chin State, was forcibly destroyed on 24 July by direct order of the authorities, including the District and Township level Peace and Development Council, the District Religious Affairs Department, and a Mindat abbot from the Hill Region Buddhist Mission.

CHRO Executive Director Salai Bawi Lian Mang said, "This latest order for the forcible destruction of an important Christian symbol is yet another manifestation of the long-standing state policy of persecution and discrimination directed against ethnic Chin Christians."

Since 1994, at least nine crosses have been destroyed or dismantled on the orders of the local authorities, in all of Chin State's nine major Townships.

"The SPDC claims to respect religious freedom for all faiths in Burma and yet they are actively pursuing a policy to persecute religious minorities in contravention of their own constitution and other international human rights standards, which they claim to observe," added Salai Bawi Lian Mang.

Originally built with wood, the cross was replaced with a concrete structure in 2008 with official permission from local authorities. The cross had been built on a 20-acre "Prayer Garden" that has traditionally carried spiritual significance for the local people.

**-ENDS-**

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## Background

Approximately 90 percent of Chin State's population is Christian, making it the single largest Christian-concentrated state in a predominantly Buddhist Burma. Christianity was introduced to the Chin people by the American Baptist Missionaries in 1889 and has since become an integral part of Chin identity. Increased militarization in Chin State since the time of the popular uprising in 1988 has led to a dramatic increase in human rights violations against the local population, including religious persecution. In 2004 CHRO published [“Religious Persecution: A Campaign of Ethnocide Against Chin Christians in Burma”](#), documenting the destruction of churches and Christian infrastructure; the arrest, torture and extrajudicial killings of Christian pastors; and restrictions on freedom of assembly and worship.

Since 1994, the regime has destroyed nine Christian crosses in Falam, Hakha, Kanpalet, Mindat, Matupi, Paletwa, Teddim, Tonzang and Thantlang Townships. In some cases, Buddhist religious infrastructure such as pagodas, monasteries and statues have been built on the very sites where Christian crosses were destroyed, sometimes with forced labor exacted from the local Christian population. The regime has also prohibited the construction and renovation of Christian churches. By contrast, according to the regime's own data, eight pagodas and 56 monasteries have been built by the authorities in Chin State in the last 20 years, with full funding from State Ministries such as the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and Ministry for Progress of Border Areas and National Races Development Affairs.

## NOTES TO EDITORS

1. The cross was located between Pyung and Bawng villages, on a hill above Khyauk-yaw village of Mkui Circus, Mindat Township.
2. Images of the cross and its destruction are available for publication on request (copyright CHRO). Please email [zauk@chro.ca](mailto:zauk@chro.ca)
3. CHRO received this information very recently. Road and telecommunications infrastructure is very poor in Chin State, especially in the south, which makes human rights documentation in the area particularly challenging.
4. Article 34 of the ruling State Peace and Development Council's 2008 Constitution supposedly guarantees freedom of religion, “subject to public order, morality or health and to the other provisions of this Constitution.” Article 348 refers to freedom from discrimination on religious grounds, while 354(d) elaborates on religious and other fundamental freedoms.
5. The right to freedom of religion is enshrined in article 18 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.