

## **Catholic church building destroyed in Myanmar**

Catholic church building destroyed as fighting intensifies in Shan State Over 60 churches have been destroyed since the long-running conflict flared up Catholic church building destroyed as fighting intensifies in Shan State

A Catholic church was bombed in the conflict-torn northern Shan State as renewed fighting intensified between the Myanmar military and ethnic armed groups.

In an ironic twist, St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church in Mongkoe Township near the Chinese border was hit by air strikes on Dec. 3, the very feast day of St. Francis Xavier.

The parish priest, nuns and some 1,000 Catholics in Mongkoe had already fled to China. No-one was hurt by the morning raid that caused fires to burn well into the afternoon.

Bishop Philip Lasap Za Hawng of Lashio Diocese, northern Shan State, said that he was dismayed.

"We are yet to know detailed facts but I will write a letter to the authorities, the military commander and chief minister of Shan State once I know everything," he said.

The Kachin bishop called on the government to negotiate with all the armed groups. "We need all the armed groups to participate in peace talks," he said.



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Over 60 Christian churches have been destroyed in neighboring Kachin State since a long-standing ceasefire broke down in 2011, according to UK-based advocacy group, Christian Solidarity Worldwide.

The renewed conflict has intensified in northern Shan State between the military and four ethnic groups, known collectively as the Northern Alliance.

Thousands of civilians fleeing into China prompted the Chinese authorities to deploy its military along the border leaving 2,000 trapped and 10,000 more to take refuge in Manhai, a border town, according to aid workers.

Some 11 non-governmental organizations, including Caritas, have urged authorities to uphold the

rights of conflict-affected people.

"We fear that this increasingly volatile security and humanitarian situation will result in new, secondary and even tertiary displacement across Kachin and northern Shan states as we have already begun to see in the past few weeks with a devastating humanitarian impact," said the organizations in a Dec. 1 statement.

The renewed fighting is a big blow to Aung San Suu Kyi's government who convened the 21st Century Panglong Conference in late August to try and bring peace to Myanmar. Most of the Northern Alliance didn't attend because the military demanded that they give up their arms first.

John Zaw, Mandalay - UCAnews