

Burma

Myanmar Junta Charges Kachin Faith Leader With Unlawful Association

Tuesday 3 January 2023, by [The Irrawaddy](#) (Date first published: 30 December 2022).

Myanmar's military regime has charged Dr. Hkalam Samson, the former president of the Kachin Baptist Convention (KBC), under Section 17(1) of the Unlawful Association Act.

The doctor has been remanded in custody at Myitkyina Prison in the Kachin State capital Myitkyina, a relative told The Irrawaddy. If convicted, he faces three years in jail plus a fine.

"He was remanded on December 28 and sent to Myitkyina Prison. The military has not yet officially notified us about the charge. But we learned that he has been charged under the Unlawful Association Act. We went to the prison, but we were not allowed to see him," said the family member.

The military did not bother to take Dr. Hkalam Samson to court to ask that he be remanded, but instead made the demand via the Viber messaging application, the relative added. The Irrawaddy could not independently confirm that.

"We learned that he was freezing cold [inside prison]. He could not bring any clothes with him. We don't understand why [the military] is doing this in such an underhand way. He was detained on a trumped-up charge and we want his immediate release," said the family member.

The Baptist faith leader left Myitkyina for Mandalay on December 5 to catch an onward flight to Bangkok. He was detained at Mandalay airport and put on a flight back to Myitkyina, while his two companions were allowed to fly on to Bangkok.

Dr. Hkalam Samson was then detained on his arrival at Myitkyina's airport. Family members have not been allowed to see him since his arrest. They are concerned about his health, as he is on medication for high blood pressure and bronchitis.

His friends said that the junta stopped Dr. Hkalam Samson from leaving the country because it feared he would report on the regime's war crimes.

On Tuesday, civil society organizations in Kachin State issued a joint statement calling for the immediate release of the doctor on humanitarian grounds and for the sake of peace in society.

The detention of a respected faith leader who has devoted his life to the cause of humanity can seriously undermine state building and harmony, said the statement.

In 2019, the Myanmar military's Northern Command attempted to take legal action against Dr. Hkalam Samson for telling then United States President Donald Trump about the military's oppression of ethnic minorities in Myanmar. The case was dropped on the orders of military chief

and current junta boss Min Aung Hlaing.

Dr. Hkalam Samson is also President of the Kachin National Consultative Assembly, a group of Kachin State religious and political leaders who help foster communication between the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) and the local community. The KIO's armed wing, the Kachin Independence Army, has been actively fighting the regime since last year's coup, while also training and arming People's Defense Forces battling the junta.

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