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Father Donald Martin Ye Naing Win, a priest who was found stabbed to death in a targeted attack Feb. 14, 2025, is seen in an undated photo. Thousands of people

gathered in the small village of Pyin Oo Lwin in Myanmar to pay their final respects to the priest killed in a country tormented by violence of a four-year civil war. (OSV News/courtesy ACN)

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Yangon, Myanmar — February 19, 2025

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Thousands of people gathered Feb. 16 in the small village of Pyin Oo Lwin in Myanmar to pay their final respects to Father Donald Martin Ye Naing Win, a priest who was found stabbed to death in a targeted attack.

According to Fides, the news agency of the Dicastery for Evangelization, an estimated 5,000 people attended the funeral with Archbishop Marco Tin Win of Mandalay presiding. He called for an end to violence in the country's civil war, which "only brings death and destruction."

The archbishop called on "all armed groups and actors involved in the conflict to lay down their weapons and take a path of peace and reconciliation."

Myanmar has been in the throes of a civil war since 2021 when a military coup dashed democratic aspirations. Since then, the governing military junta has been accused of violence against civilians opposed to its rule and has been engaged in multiple conflicts with armed groups in the country.

The military junta was responsible for carrying out airstrikes that destroyed Sacred Heart Church, located in Chin state in western Myanmar Feb. 6. The church was supposed to serve as the cathedral of the new Diocese of Mindat, which was erected by Pope Francis at the end of January.

Win was stabbed to death and mutilated Feb. 14. Parishioners discovered the priest's body on the grounds of Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Kan Gyi Taw, a small village in central Myanmar's Shwe Bo district.

According to Fides, several unnamed sources indicated that the nature of the priest's brutal murder "suggested a targeted attack." The People's Defense Force, a rebel group fighting the military junta that controls the area, are investigating the murder and have arrested ten men who lived in the same village Win was murdered.

The suspects, Fides said, were transferred "to a court set up by the People's Defense Force in the areas currently defined as 'liberated areas,' that is, not under the control of the Burmese government."

Burmese Cardinal Charles Maung Bo of Yangon, president of the bishops' conference of Myanmar, also lamented Win's death and prayed that in "learning from these heartbreaking experiences that we have encountered, may the fraternal spirit be awakened, and we earnestly appeal for an end to the violence."

"May the blood and sacrifices of countless innocent people, along with Father Donald Martin Ye Naing Win, serve as an offering to ending the violence that is occurring throughout the Nation," Bo said.

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He also called on authorities in the area "to take appropriate action and ensure justice is served, so that such incidents do not occur again in the future."

The Vatican also expressed its condolences for Win's death in a message read at the funeral by Msgr. Andrea Ferrante, the Holy See's chargé d'affaires in Myanmar.

Calling Win a "victim of unjustified violence," the Vatican encouraged the missionaries, clergy, and the faithful to "continue their mission with zeal, despite all difficulties, following the example of Jesus, the Good Shepherd" and prayed that Mary "sustains the Burmese people in a spirit of communion, unity, and solidarity."

In a statement published Feb. 17, Regina Lynch, executive president of the pontifical charitable organization Aid to the Church in Need, said Win's death reflected "the challenge and immense risk that the Church faces in a context of widespread violence, as clashes between the Myanmar army and opposition militias continue."

"In the face of such violence, that affects the entire population, priests like Father Donald Martin dedicate themselves to helping their communities, providing spiritual comfort and support to the suffering people in the region," Lynch said. "His death highlights the difficult situation faced by the Catholic community in Myanmar and the courage of those who continue to serve the people, despite the dangers."

Commenting on the attack on Sacred Heart Church earlier in the month, Lynch reiterated that "the destruction of a place of worship, no matter of which religion, is an attack not only against the faith community but also against the fundamental right of all people to have a place to express their faith."