The American Baptist Home Mission Societies stand in solidarity with two Baptist Kachin leaders who will return home to Myanmar this Tuesday, August 12, 2019 following their recent attendance at the second Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom hosted by US Secretary of State Michael Pompeo. We write to you at this time to express our urgent concern for the safety of both Christian leaders who were present during the press conference highlighting those who have endured religious persecution.

The Rev. Dr. Hkalam Samson, President of the Kachin Baptist Convention, has long been a critic of those policies of the Myanmar government and military which have led to over 100,000 Kachin people being driven from their homes and lands by military conflict and becoming Internally Displaced Persons.  He has consistently requested that elements of the military responsible for the destruction of over 200 churches in the Kachin State and those who have used rape as a weapon of war and terror be brought to justice.   During the recent Ministerial he dared to publicly support the sanctions imposed upon some of the military leaders by the US government as a step toward accountability to the standards of justice.

Pastor Langjaw Gam Seng has served in a remote village in the Kachin State. He was arrested, imprisoned and tortured for reporting on the bombing of St. Francis Xavier Church to journalists.  For 16 months he languished in prison before he was released.  His story has been reported in The Christian Post

https://www.christianpost.com/news/eyes-tied-sealed-kachin-pastor-details-torture-in-burmese-prison.html

It has been reported to us and widely shared on Burmese social media that the military has ordered the arrest of both Dr. Samson and Pastor Gam Seng upon their arrival at the Yangon International Airport on Tuesday.  Since their appearance on US television there has been an increase in official rhetoric against “traitors against Myanmar” within the country, and a mass rally was held against such traitors on Aug 3rd. Therefore, we believe that these two Christian leaders are in imminent danger.

We call upon the United States Government, the United Nations, and other concerned powers and human rights advocacy groups to add your voice to ours and speak strongly against any possible action against Pastor Gam Seng and Dr. Samson upon their return.

The American Baptist Home Mission Societies partners with faith communities across the United States to promote religious freedom throughout the world. Through our mission engagement since 1832, ABHMS has cultivated Christian leaders and disciples, and promoted healing and transformation to communities across the United States and Puerto Rico. We have partnered with American Baptists to absorb over 100,000 ethnic Myanmar refugees who are of Chin, Kachin, Karen and others into our churches and communities since 2006, who were denied human rights and persecuted based on their religious beliefs.