"Let us continue the pilgrimage to peace – not return to war.” His Eminence Cardinal Charles Bo makes a plea for peace and an end of conflict in Myanmar.

Myanmar is passing through some of the most agonizing moments in her history. With our hands reaching out, we appeal to all: Please heal – do not wound.

The people of Myanmar are deeply saddened by what looks like a relapse into darker days. Myanmar needs the world’s attention to strengthen its fragile journey to democracy.

Three major events are disturbing the people of Myanmar. The report published by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on 3 February is heart-breaking and profoundly disturbing. The United Nations reports brutality and other grave human rights violations by Myanmar’s security forces in an area north of Maungdaw in northern Rakhine State. The UN High Commissioner portrays such inhumanity and barbarity that it is hard to read about, and hard to believe.

Over the past five years, Myanmar has experienced many positive changes and has become a more open country. My country men and women believe that it is a dawn of hope.  The opening of the economy and media, a functioning democracy, a smooth transfer of power – all pointed towards a new Myanmar of hopes and dreams.

We pray earnestly that this may not become a false dawn. Merchants of hatred are in full swing. Hatred against others of different races and religions has intensified to a very alarming level. What happened in Rakhine state needs to be stopped once for all.

The situation in Kachin and northern Shan states is equally of deep concern to me, particularly with the arrest of two Kachin Christian pastors, Nawng Latt and Gam Seng, in Mong Ko, following the bombing of a Catholic church. I pray for their trial, that justice will be done and they will be released. I pray too for the thousands displaced by recent military offensives in northern Myanmar.

The tragic assassination of U Ko Ni just over two weeks ago was another step backwards for Myanmar and a blow to our hopes of democracy and peace in our country. I send my heartfelt condolences to his family and friends, and my prayers for his family, and for all those with whom he worked and who continue his courageous efforts to move towards the constitutional reform so needed in Myanmar.

I call on the government of Myanmar to bring an end to the military offensive against civilians in Rakhine state. Peace with justice is possible and is the only way.

I call on the government of Myanmar to bring an end to the military offensives in Kachin and northern Shan states.

I call on the government of Myanmar to allow unhindered access to all parts of Rakhine state, Kachin state and northern Shan state for international humanitarian aid agencies, media and human rights monitors.

I call on the government of Myanmar to work with the international community to investigate the crimes reported by the United Nations, in a truly independent way that results in justice and accountability.

And I appeal to the international community to be vigilant. You have welcomed positive changes. People of Myanmar seek peaceful and positive change. Merchants of hatred who lived by spilling the blood of brother against brother are active again.  Myanmar needs the world community to extend all support to the present democratic government with clear understanding that violence against any population is not acceptable.

I offer my prayers and solidarity to everyone in Myanmar – and especially at this time in Rakhine state, Kachin state and northern Shan state – who is bereaved, vulnerable, fearful, homeless, hungry, sick and to all the orphans and widows, the victims of rape and torture.

Let the UN’s devastating report serve as a wake-up call for us all.

Let us work together to end violence and terror in our country, and to build a Myanmar where every man, woman and child of every race and religion born on Myanmar soil is recognised both as our fellow citizen and as our brother and sister in humanity.

Let us build a Myanmar where hope is not an illusion, and where we can join hands, regardless of ethnicity or religion, in peace and solidarity. I pledge to renew my efforts to that end, and I extend my hand to any of my brothers and sisters of any race or religion who will join with me. Peace with Justice is possible. 2017 has been declared a year of peace by the Catholic Church.

Let us continue the pilgrimage to peace – not return to war.