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BURMA CSW & BurmaInfo return from Thailand-Burma border with fresh evidence of crimes against humanity



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A Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) and BurmaInfo (Japan) team returned from a fact-finding visit to the Thai-Burmese border last week with fresh evidence of gross human rights violations in eastern Burma that amount to “crimes against humanity”.

The delegation, which included CSW’s East Asia Team Leader, Benedict Rogers, and the Director of BurmaInfo, Yuki Akimoto, interviewed new refugees in camps along the Thai-Burma border, and heard first-hand accounts of forced labour, torture and murder. They also visited one of the two temporary camps in Tha Song Yang, where Karen refugees who fled attacks last year were recently under intense pressure from the Thai military to return to Burma, even though their areas are full of landmines and are occupied by the Burma Army and its militias. CSW and BurmaInfo visited the camp ten days after the Thai authorities attempted to forcibly deport refugees. Three families were sent back against their will before NGOs arrived and halted the process. The delegation interviewed two of these families, who are now in hiding in Thailand.

Reports detailing the findings of the visit were released today by CSW and BurmaInfo. The words of one refugee who lost both legs after stepping on a landmine sum up the decades of suffering endured by the Karen: “I had to flee ... many times. I did portering for the [Burma Army] many times ... Run and run and run until now – this is my life.”

CSW’s East Asia Team Leader, Benedict Rogers, said: “The testimonies we heard on this visit were harrowing and shocking. The military regime is continuing to perpetrate war crimes and crimes against humanity, even as it prepares to hold sham elections this year. The harassment of frightened, traumatized and extremely vulnerable refugees by the Thai military, forcing them or intimidating them to return to Karen State even though they would be walking into a death trap, adds further misery to an already tragic situation. The international community, and particularly the United Nations, must act now, to impose a universal arms embargo on Burma’s military regime, and hold a commission of inquiry to investigate crimes against humanity and war crimes. The regime’s brutal reign of terror must not be allowed to continue with impunity.”

Yuki Akimoto from BurmaInfo (Japan) added: “The international community, including Japan, should not underestimate the negative impact that the violent and volatile situation in eastern Burma could have on

the country's political process. There can be no "free and fair" elections as long as hundreds of thousands of people are displaced internally, or are afraid to go back to Burma because of conflict and militarization."

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