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BURMA CSW welcomes one-day ceasefire by Karen National Union

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) today welcomed the decision by the Karen National Union (KNU) to observe a unilateral one-day ceasefire on September 21st, the International Day of Peace. CSW calls on Burma's military regime, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), to declare a permanent nationwide ceasefire and end its military offensives against civilians in the ethnic states.

The KNU is the major representative organization for Burma's Karen people, one of the largest ethnic nationalities in Burma. The KNU is also one of the largest armed groups, and has been fighting for over sixty years to defend the Karen people against military offensives by successive regimes.

In a statement issued today, the KNU said it is "struggling for peace, democracy and human rights, equality, self-determination and freedom" for all Karens and is engaged in armed struggle simply "in order to protect the lives and properties of the Karen". The KNU also said it is working to achieve equal rights for all ethnic nationalities in Burma, and the establishment of a federal union.

CSW's East Asia Team Leader Benedict Rogers said, "We warmly welcome the KNU's unilateral declaration as an important sign of respect for the International Day of Peace and a symbol of the Karen people's desire for peace and freedom. For more than sixty years, the KNU has been fighting to defend the Karen people's very existence. Successive military regimes have conducted brutal offensives against Karen civilians, and the cruel campaign against the Karens has intensified in the past 15 years under the current junta. Civilians are shot at point-blank range, tortured, raped, used as forced labor or as human minesweepers, and since 1996, over 3,500 villages in eastern Burma alone have been destroyed. The KNU has demonstrated in its statement today, as it has on many previous occasions, its desire to resolve the issues by peaceful, political means. It is now up to the regime to respond, by calling an end to its campaigns of brutality, declaring a permanent, nationwide ceasefire, withdrawing its troops from ethnic areas, and engaging in a meaningful, tripartite dialogue with the representatives of the ethnic nationalities and the democracy movement to build a peaceful, federal democracy in Burma which respects human rights. We hope and pray that the International Day of Peace will have real and lasting meaning for all the people of Burma."

Notes to Editors:

1. The International Day of Peace was introduced in 2001 by the UN General Assembly, resolution 55/282.
2. For a copy of the KNU statement, see:
<http://www.karennationalunion.net/index.php/burma/news-and-reports/news-stories/knu-to-observe-one-day-ceasefire-on-international-day-of-peace1>
3. Benedict Rogers is the author of the first biography on Than Shwe, *Than Shwe: Unmasking Burma's Tyrant*, and has visited the Karen and other ethnic nationalities in Burma's borderlands many times.