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BURMA UN condemns human rights record ahead of sham elections

A draft United Nations General Assembly resolution condemning Burma's human rights record was made public yesterday, just three days before Burma's sham elections take place.

The draft resolution, tabled by the European Union and co-sponsored by 42 countries, demands that the regime release all political prisoners and engages in a "genuine dialogue" with the democracy movement led by Aung San Suu Kyi, and ethnic nationalities. It also calls for an end to displacement of ethnic civilians and the recruitment and use of child soldiers, as well as immediate action to grant citizenship to the Rohingya Muslim people, a minority currently denied citizenship despite living in Burma for generations.

While falling short of calling for the establishment of a UN Commission of Inquiry, the resolution paves the way for such an initiative. It expresses "grave concern" at the continuing human rights violations, including rape, torture and arbitrary detentions, and urges the Burmese regime to hold "without further delay a full, transparent, effective, impartial and independent investigation into all reports of human rights violations, and to bring to justice those responsible in order to end impunity" as a matter of priority.

Burma will hold its first elections in 20 years on Sunday 7 November, but the flawed electoral process has been denounced by the international community, including the United Kingdom, as a sham.

CSW's East Asia Team Leader Benedict Rogers said, "We welcome the UN General Assembly resolution, but we urge the international community to go further and establish a formal Commission of Inquiry to investigate crimes against humanity in Burma. The UN's own Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Burma has recommended it, at least 13 countries support it, and Sunday's sham election will result in no meaningful change in Burma and no hope of addressing impunity. The new constitution guarantees the military immunity for past, present and future crimes, so the onus is on the international community to act. It is abundantly clear that the election on Sunday will be a charade, and the regime must be sent a clear, unambiguous message that this process will not be accepted, and that instead, if it wants to gain international acceptance, it must engage in a meaningful tripartite dialogue with Aung San Suu Kyi, the democracy movement and the ethnic nationalities. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon must take the lead in trying to revive such a process. Meaningful change will not happen in these elections on Sunday, but the UN must be ready to seize the initiative on Monday to bring about meaningful change in Burma."

Notes to Editor:

1. The new constitution that will come into force after the elections guarantees the military 25 per cent of the parliamentary seats, and election laws issued earlier this year excluded Aung San Suu Kyi's

participation. In recent months, the regime announced that many areas in the ethnic states would not hold polling, disenfranchising a large proportion of the population.

2. Benedict Rogers is the author of *Than Shwe: Unmasking Burma's Tyrant*.
3. CSW is a member of the European Burma Network (EBN) and a signatory to the EBN's Election Statement, calling on the international community to unite behind a revived UN-led effort to secure genuine dialogue between the military dictatorship ruling Burma, the democracy movement and ethnic representatives. A copy of the statement can be found on the CSW website, www.csw.org.uk