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BURMA CSW: Today's election in Burma is a sham which must not be legitimized

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) is urging the international community to reject the election process taking place in Burma today as a sham, and instead to revive a United Nations-led effort to convince the regime to enter into meaningful dialogue with democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, currently under house arrest, her party, and the ethnic nationalities.

The new constitution that will come into force after today's elections guarantees the military 25 per cent of the parliamentary seats and immunity for past, present and future crimes. It offers no meaningful autonomy for ethnic nationalities, no genuine protection for human rights, and it has been described by one ethnic leader as "a death sentence for diversity".

Election laws issued earlier this year excluded Aung San Suu Kyi's participation, and as a result her party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), which overwhelmingly won elections in 1990, has been banned. In recent months, the regime announced that many areas in the ethnic states would not hold polling, disenfranchising a large proportion of the population. More than 2,100 political prisoners remain in jail, many of whom would be leading political candidates in a genuine election.

CSW's East Asia Team Leader Benedict Rogers, author of *Than Shwe: Unmasking Burma's Tyrant*, said, "Today is a charade designed to perpetuate military rule and protect Than Shwe, his family and his cronies in power. It will result in nothing more than a change of clothing for the regime, from military uniforms to civilian suits. Indeed, it is very likely that this process will create further tension, instability, conflict and suffering in Burma. We may see an escalation in offensives in eastern Burma, and perhaps a renewed conflict with the Kachin in northern Burma. To prevent this, the international community must send the regime a clear, strong message that the process violates every principle of democracy and has no legitimacy or credibility. The UN Secretary-General must take the initiative to revive a UN effort to facilitate meaningful dialogue between the regime, the democracy movement and the ethnic nationalities; and at the same time to investigate crimes against humanity."