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BURMA Reports of intimidation and arrests in ethnic areas during elections

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) has received reports of harassment, intimidation, violence and arrests in several of Burma's ethnic states, during and immediately following the sham elections three days ago.

In Maungdaw, northern Arakan State, at least 38 Rohingyas were reportedly arrested on election day, and other arrests were reported in other towns. Supporters of a Rohingya party, the National Democratic Party for Development (NDPD), were arrested and tortured last week in Maungdaw by soldiers of the border security force known as 'Na Sa Ka'. Seven NPDP supporters were beaten up by Na Sa Ka soldiers in front of a polling station on election day.

According to Rohingya sources, it is believed the NPDP won a landslide victory in Buthidaung Township, northern Arakan State, but the election commission has forced NPDP to sign a document accepting that the regime's party, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), had won. NPDP candidates refused to sign and are facing the possibility of arrest. One source told CSW that their refusal to sign the document has put their lives in danger. CSW understands that the military has arrested approximately 100 villagers in Buthidaung who voted for the NPDP, to subject them to forced labor.

In Chin State, according to the Chin Human Rights Organization, some polling stations were guarded by USDP agents. USDP campaigners asked voters if they would be voting for USDP, and those who said no were refused entry to the polling station. In Tedim town, some voters found that ballots had already been cast on their behalf, and were warned that soldiers from the Burma Army Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) 269 would arrest them if they tried to vote.

Although the official result has not yet been announced, the USDP has unofficially claimed to have won over 80 per cent of the nationwide vote.

CSW's East Asia Team Leader Benedict Rogers said, "We believe these reports from Arakan and Chin states are just the tip of the iceberg. This election was rigged before polling day, and there has clearly been a campaign of intimidation, harassment and violence, designed to ensure that the regime gets the result it wants. The international community must not give this process any recognition, legitimacy or credibility whatsoever. Instead, the international community, led by the UN, must intensify its efforts to convince the regime to enter into a meaningful dialogue with the democracy movement led by Aung San Suu Kyi and the ethnic nationalities. It is essential that genuine representatives of the ethnic nationalities are fully involved and included in that process."