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## BURMA CSW urges EU to support inquiry into crimes against humanity

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Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) is urging the European Union to support calls for a United Nations Commission of Inquiry into war crimes and crimes against humanity in Burma, ahead of a meeting of EU Foreign Ministers on April 12.

The Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Burma, Tomás Ojea Quintana, recommended a UN inquiry into possible war crimes and crimes against humanity over a year ago, and repeated his proposal in October last year. He reported “a pattern of gross and systematic violation of human rights” which has been continuing “over a period of many years.” He concluded that the violations “are the result of a state policy that involves authorities in the executive, military and judiciary at all levels.”

Last October, he told the UN that “it is essential for investigations of human rights violations to be conducted in an independent, impartial and credible manner, without delay” and that, if the regime in Burma fails to end impunity and establish justice and accountability, “responsibility falls to the international community” to conduct an investigation.

EU Foreign Ministers will meet on April 12 to renew the common policy on Burma. At least twelve EU member states have voiced support for a Commission of Inquiry so far, although the EU as a whole has failed to endorse the measure. CSW wrote a letter to a number of EU Foreign Ministers today, urging the EU to seek support for the Commission of Inquiry at a multilateral level, adding that “bringing principles such as human rights, rule of law and democracy to the core of EU external action will help to ensure an increased consistency in EU’s foreign policy.”

A new government was sworn in on March 30, although it is dominated by former Generals and military officers. Of the 30 members of the new cabinet, only four are civilians. The sham elections in November last year were marred by widespread reports of harassment, intimidation, violence and arrests in several of Burma’s ethnic states. Under the new constitution, the military is guaranteed 25 per cent of the parliamentary seats and immunity for past, present and future crimes.

CSW’s East Asia Team Leader Benedict Rogers said, “It is overwhelmingly clear that there has been no meaningful change in Burma at all in recent months. The military’s offensives against civilians in ethnic areas continue and are likely to intensify, and more than 2,000 political prisoners remain behind bars. It is vital that the EU support the UN Special Rapporteur’s recommendation for a commission of inquiry. We warmly welcome the support the UK and other nations have already expressed, and we urge those countries that support the commission of inquiry to work hard to build support within the EU and secure an EU policy that backs the UN Special Rapporteur.”