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BURMA CSW calls for ceasefire and international support for refugees in Burma's Kachin Civil War

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) is calling for a ceasefire in Burma's Kachin state and urges the international community, including the United Nations (UN) and European Union (EU), to press Burma's nearest neighbors, China and India, to protect refugees who have fled the Kachin conflict to seek refuge in the border regions.

According to reports, following a series of clashes in early June, an agreement had been reached between the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), which is the armed wing of the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), and Burma Army on June 9, in which prisoners held by both sides would be released, and the Burma Army would withdraw from the area. The KIO have had a ceasefire agreement with the regime since 1994.

The KIA reports that it returned six Burmese soldiers, including Captain Myat Ko Ko, to the regime. However, the regime returned the dead body of Lance-Corporal Sau Ying, who appeared to have sustained severe beating and torture. The regime allegedly said he was killed during battle.

Heavy fighting and artillery shelling continued on June 11 after the deadline set by the regime for KIA troops to withdraw from the area was missed. On June 12 the KIO Central Committee informed Major General Zay Yar Aung, Commander of the Northern Military Command, that the KIO will not withdraw its troops from the area and requested a peaceful resolution to the conflict. A government minister responded on June 13 with a request for negotiations, but insisted on the withdrawal of KIO troops from the area, and did not resume negotiations by the 12pm deadline set by the KIO. As a result, hostilities broke out again between the two sides.

It has been reported that the Burma Army sent in large numbers of heavily-armed troops into Kachin State and at least 100 mortar shells were launched overnight. At least 2,000 civilians from villages between Myitkyina and Bamaw fled to the China-Burma border, with the number of refugees predicted to rise as clashes between the KIA and Burma Army continue, prompting fears of a renewed civil conflict.

CSW, which has sent research teams to the area on three occasions in the past, has received reports of people living in Bamo, Waing Maw, and Myitkyina Townships being forced to carry weapons and ammunitions for the Burmese troops. A number of private vehicles have also been commandeered for use by the Burma Army.

CSW's East Asia Team Leader Benedict Rogers said, "We are deeply concerned about the outbreak of civil war in Kachin State, caused by the regime's desire for total control and refusal to engage in dialogue in search of genuine peace. If the conflict continues to escalate the humanitarian consequences will be dire. Burma's neighbors, particularly China and India, have a responsibility to provide sanctuary for those who flee from Kachin State, and we urge the international community, particularly the UN and the EU, to hold urgent talks with China and India to ensure a just solution to the current crisis. We call on the international community to invoke the Responsibility to Protect mechanism in relation to the crisis in Burma, and we urge the regime to end its attacks, declare a nationwide ceasefire and engage in a meaningful dialogue with ethnic nationalities and the democracy movement. It is time to end decades of civil war which have caused untold suffering, and seek a genuine, lasting peace."