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## BURMA Local authorities in Kachin State issue new order regulating Bible study, Sunday school, fasting and prayer

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Burmese authorities are imposing new restrictions on religious activities in Kachin State, according to information received by Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW).

On October 14, 2011 the Chairman of Maw Wan Ward in Phakant Township, Kachin State sent a letter to local churches, titled "Concerning Christians conducting cultural training". The letter refers to an order by the General Township Administration Department requiring Christians in Phakant Township to submit a request at least 15 days in advance for permission to conduct "short-term Bible study, Bible study, Sunday school, reading the Bible, fasting prayer, Seasonal Bible study and Rosary of the Virgin Mary Prayer". A request for permission must be accompanied by recommendations from other departments, and must be submitted to the Township Administration Office.

CSW obtained a copy of the document in Burmese, and a translation, last week. Churches in Burma are already required to obtain permission for any events other than Sunday services, but this new regulation imposes further severe restrictions.

CSW's East Asia Team Leader Benedict Rogers said, "For many years, successive Burmese regimes have suppressed freedom of religion and imposed serious restrictions on Christians and other religious minorities. Christians and Muslims in particular have been the target of discrimination and persecution. It appears that despite changes in rhetoric, there has been no change of attitude, particularly at a local level, on the part of Burmese authorities to religious minorities. Burma is already regarded as one of the world's worst violators of religious freedom, and is one of the US State Department's Countries of Particular Concern. To impose a requirement on churches and individuals to seek permission to read the Bible, pray, fast and hold a Sunday school is an extreme restriction and an extraordinary further violation of freedom of religion. We urge the Burmese authorities to withdraw this requirement, in Phakant Township and in any other parts of the country where it may have been issued, and to uphold freedom of religion for all the people of Burma. We also urge the Burmese regime to invite the UN Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Religion or Belief to visit the country, and conduct an independent investigation."