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BURMA CSW urges int'l community to highlight plight of ethnic nationalities in engagement with Burmese regime

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) today expressed concern that the plight of Burma's ethnic nationalities is being neglected in the process of engagement with Burma's regime. CSW particularly highlights continuing severe violations of human rights, including the use of rape, forced labor, religious persecution, torture and killings in Kachin State, where the Burma Army has been waging an offensive against ethnic civilians since breaking a 17-year ceasefire with the Kachin Independence Organization/Army (KIO/A) in June.

Recent political developments in Burma suggest some potential welcome indicators of change, including the decision by the National League for Democracy (NLD) to re-register as a political party, and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi's announcement that she will run for a parliamentary seat in forthcoming by-elections.

However, reports from the ethnic states, particularly Kachin State, indicate that grave human rights violations continue to be perpetrated by the Burma Army. According to information received by CSW yesterday, nine villagers from Nawng Zang Kung village for internally displaced people, in Nam Jang, northern Shan State, were taken by Burma Army soldiers to a military camp at Nat Tsin Kung, at midnight on 17 November. Four villagers were released the next day, but five were detained and have reportedly been subjected to severe torture. Dawshi Roi Ji, aged 60, the mother of two of the detainees, Zakhung Yaw Zung and Yaw Sau, was taken to the camp and badly tortured, released the next day, but taken back to the camp that evening by the local ward official, Mr Sai Aik Nyen. Her situation and that of the remaining detainees remains critical. Other civilians from the local area have fled to China in order to escape forced labor, harassment and torture.

The pastor of Banggaw Kachin Baptist Church, Rev Gam Aung, was arrested by Burma Army soldiers in Manwin village at 3pm on 17 November, while speaking on the telephone in a shop. Local sources say no reasons were given for his arrest and his whereabouts are unknown.

CSW is also deeply concerned about the well-being of Mr. Sumlat Roi Ja, aged 28, mother of a 14-month old baby, from Hkai Bang village, who was captured by the Burma Army on 28 October and forced to work as a porter. It is believed she has been held in the Burma Army camp and repeatedly gang-raped. The local Burma Army commander promised her family that she would be released by 2 November, but when the family waited for her at a designated location, she did not appear.

According to CSW's sources, Rev Shayu Lum Hkawng, assistant to the pastor of an Assemblies of God church in Muk Chyuk village, Waimaw Township, died on 7 November after severe torture. He had been detained along with the pastor, Rev Lajaw Lum Hkawng, and tied up, after Burma Army soldiers attacked and looted the church the previous day. The whereabouts of Hpalawng Lum Hkawng, deacon and youth music team leader, who was injured in the attack, has disappeared.

CSW's East Asia Team Leader Benedict Rogers said, "Undoubtedly, as President Barack Obama said last week, there are 'flickers of progress' in Burma and these should be welcomed and encouraged. However, it is vital that in our enthusiasm to welcome some political changes, we do not overlook the very grave human rights violations that continue to be perpetrated, particularly in the ethnic states. We therefore urge all international

actors, particularly US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton when she visits next month, to urge the regime to end its attacks on civilians in Kachin State and all parts of the country, to cease its campaign of rape, forced labor, torture, religious persecution and killing, to declare a nationwide ceasefire, release all political prisoners, and to enter into a meaningful dialogue process with representatives of the ethnic nationalities and the democracy movement led by Aung San Suu Kyi. The key test for the regime is to match its rhetoric with action, stop attacking its people, and begin a process that will secure peace and protect human rights for all the people of Burma.”