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BURMA | CSW returns from Kachin State with evidence of continuing grave human rights violations

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) returned this week from a three-week fact-finding visit to Rangoon and Kachin State on the China-Burma border, where the CSW team recorded evidence of grave human rights violations.

CSW interviewed internally displaced people (IDPs) from Kachin State and northern Shan State, and heard first-hand testimonies of killings of civilians, torture, the destruction of homes, churches and villages. CSW also received reports of rape.

In a report released today, Burma's Union Day, which marks the 65th anniversary of the Panglong Agreement, CSW documents these violations and concludes that while "a window of opportunity for change in Burma after decades of oppression and conflict may have now opened," the situation in Kachin and northern Shan States illustrate that "there is still a very long way to go".

Benedict Rogers, CSW's East Asia Team Leader, said, "There are clear signs of change in Burma, such as the release of significant numbers of political prisoners and the decision by Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy (NLD) to contest parliamentary by-elections, which we should welcome and encourage. However, the evidence we heard from Kachin people was among the worst we have ever heard. A very high proportion of the people we interviewed had family members killed by the Burma Army. These were unarmed civilians, in their paddy fields or homes, who were not engaged in armed combat in any form. The accounts of torture and other abuses are a cause for very grave concern, and the humanitarian challenges facing the internally displaced people require an urgent and sustained response from the international community."

CSW was in Kachin State when the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) held a first round of peace talks with the Government of Burma. In the report CSW details the political steps required for a meaningful, lasting peace process, including "a genuine inclusive political process that involves all the ethnic nationalities, the democracy movement and the government, that addresses the desire of the ethnic nationalities for autonomy and equal rights within a federal democratic structure in Burma, and that results in an end to military offensives and armed conflict."

Benedict Rogers added, "Today, on Burma's Union Day, as the country marks the 65th anniversary of the Panglong Agreement, we urge the government of Burma to build on the reforms made so far by introducing institutional and legislative reforms required to lead the country to genuine change. These include amendments to the constitution, repeal or amendment of unjust laws, and a sincere effort to begin a political process that results in a mutually acceptable political solution for all the people of Burma. The spirit of Panglong was based on equal rights for all the ethnic nationalities, a degree of autonomy, and respect for ethnic identity, within the Union of Burma. We urge President Thein Sein to recapture that spirit today, and we call on the international community to develop a balanced response, recognizing and encouraging progress while maintaining pressure for real change."