



4.10.2012

BURMA | CSW urges British Prime Minister to press for peace process and political dialog with ethnic nationalities during visit

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) today welcomed the announcement that British Prime Minister David Cameron will make a historic visit to Burma later this week, to meet Burma's President Thein Sein and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi. However, CSW urges the Prime Minister to make the issue of Burma's ethnic nationalities a priority during his talks with the president, and to press for an end to the conflict, particularly in Kachin State, and for a nationwide, inclusive peace process with all ethnic nationalities, in order to secure a durable political settlement.

The Prime Minister's visit to Burma is the first by any western head of government in decades. It comes just over a week after Aung San Suu Kyi and her party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), won 43 of the 45 parliamentary seats contested in by-elections on 1 April. Aung San Suu Kyi won a landslide victory in her own constituency, Kawhmu, and hailed the results as a "triumph of the people"*, expressing the "hope that this is the beginning of a new era".

On 7 April, leaders of the Karen National Union (KNU), representing one of Burma's largest ethnic nationalities, held an historic meeting with President Thein Sein in Naypyidaw, and held talks with Aung San Suu Kyi the following day, in an effort to bring an end to 65 years of civil war. The regime has held ceasefire talks with other ethnic nationalities, and established some ceasefire agreements. However, the Burma Army continues to perpetrate serious human rights violations in the ethnic states, and in Kachin State, northern Burma, the military is carrying out widespread and systematic abuses and attacks on ethnic civilians. The Rohingya people, a predominantly Muslim group who have lived in northern Arakan State for generations, are denied citizenship and are effectively stateless, subjected to severe restrictions and persecution.

CSW's East Asia Team Leader Benedict Rogers said, "We warmly welcome the Prime Minister's visit, and his continued interest in the situation in Burma. This historic visit is a rare opportunity to press home a clear message to President Thein Sein and the Burmese government: we welcome the steps taken so far, applaud the reforms and recognize the progress made; however, there is still a long way to go and much more to be done before Burma can be celebrated as a democracy. All remaining political prisoners must be released and unjust legislation repealed or amended. There needs to be substantial institutional and constitutional reform. Most importantly, the plight of the ethnic nationalities must be addressed through a meaningful, inclusive, nationwide political dialogue which leads to a political solution for the ethnic nationalities. The war in Kachin State must end, and the citizenship of the Rohingya people must be recognized. Ceasefires – an end to active fighting – are not enough, because without a political solution there can be no durable peace. The Burma Army must end its practices of forced labor, rape, torture, the destruction of villages, recruitment of child soldiers and killing of civilians; the government, the ethnic nationalities and the democracy movement must hold talks, and a political system which grants the ethnic people equal rights and a degree of autonomy must be established through dialogue. These are the points we hope the British Prime Minister David Cameron will make during his important visit."

Notes:

1. Benedict Rogers is the author of a forthcoming book, *Burma: A Nation at the Crossroads*, to be published by Random House in July,