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BURMA | EU to suspend majority of sanctions for a year

The Foreign Affairs Council of the European Union (EU) adopted Council conclusions today suspending economic sanctions against Burma for a year, with the exception of the arms embargo.

In a statement released following the meeting, the Council of the EU welcomed the recent reforms in Burma and outlined how the EU will contribute to Burma's economic, political and social development.

"As a means to welcome and encourage the reform process, the Council will suspend restrictive measures imposed on the Government, with the exception of the arms embargo, which it will retain. The Council will monitor closely the situation on the ground, keep its measures under constant review and respond positively to progress on ongoing reforms."

"In this regard, the EU still expects the unconditional release of remaining political prisoners and the removal of all restrictions placed on those already released. It looks forward to the end of conflict and to substantially improved access for humanitarian assistance, in particular for those affected by conflict in Kachin State and along the Eastern border, as well as to addressing the status and improving the welfare of the Rohingyas."

Despite the fact that the regime has established some ceasefire agreements with some ethnic nationalities, 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.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) has also received reports that on April 19 local officials destroyed a clock tower topped with a Christian cross in Mualbem village of Tedim Township, Chin State. The clock tower was built in 2009 to mark the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the Assemblies of God church in the village. No reason has been given for its destruction.

Today, Aung San Suu Kyi and the other newly elected MPs from the National League of Democracy (NLD), boycotted parliament in a dispute over the oath of office, which would require them to pledge to "safeguard the constitution", when in fact they wish to see it amended.

Benedict Rogers, CSW's East Asia Team Leader, said, "We welcome the EU's decision to suspend sanctions for a year, rather than lift them completely. This sends a clear message to the Burmese government that the changes which have taken place so far are recognized and welcomed, and that the international community stands ready to support the reform process, while at the same time making it clear that much more needs to be done before sanctions can be completely lifted. There is also a clear message that if the reform process stalls or reverses, sanctions can be reimposed. We hope this decision will give reformers within the government encouragement and strength to continue, and to turn what is primarily a change in atmosphere into substantial and irreversible change in the political system, including the amendment or repeal of repressive legislation, amendments to the constitution, and a serious peace process with the ethnic nationalities. The EU must continue to monitor the situation in Burma very closely and stand ready to respond proportionately to the developments on the ground, both positive and negative."

Notes to Editors:

1. Please include the following linked text in any online articles using the above information... Find out more about [religious freedom in Burma](#) from Christian Solidarity Worldwide.