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BURMA CSW calls on army to stop attacks on Kachin and begin a peace process after one year of war

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) today urges Burma's President Thein Sein and the country's army to stop military offensives in Kachin State, and initiate a political dialogue and peace process with the ethnic armed group, the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO).

Tomorrow marks the first anniversary of the new conflict in Kachin State, which broke out on 9 June, 2011 after the Burma Army broke a ceasefire which had lasted 17 years. The regime launched its new offensive when the KIO refused to join the government-controlled Border Guard Force. The KIO emphasized that they sought a political solution through peaceful dialogue.

In a year of war in Kachin State, in northern Burma bordering China, at least 70,000 civilians have been displaced from their villages, and have fled to temporary camps along the border. Serious human rights violations have been perpetrated by the Burma Army, including rape, torture, forced labor, the destruction of churches and homes, and killings. These may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The government and the KIO have held several rounds of talks in recent months, but the government has still refused to discuss the core political concerns at the heart of the conflict. Humanitarian conditions have deteriorated seriously over the past year, and the international community has provided very little assistance and been given very limited access to the affected areas. CSW visited internally displaced peoples in Kachin State in January and documented human rights violations and the humanitarian situation.

Kachin exiles, other Burmese campaigners and international human rights organizations held a Global Day of Action for the Kachin this week, and sent a letter to President Thein Sein calling for an end to the offensive, the withdrawal of Burma Army troops, unhindered access for humanitarian aid to IDPs and refugees, an end to human rights abuses and the establishment of a meaningful political dialogue.

CSW's East Asia Team Leader Benedict Rogers said: "In some respects, President Thein Sein and his government have taken some positive steps towards reform in the country, including the release of significant numbers of political prisoners, relaxation of restrictions on local media and civil society, ceasefire talks with other ethnic nationalities and engagement with Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy (NLD) which resulted in their election to Parliament in by-elections in March. However, the situation in Kachin State is dire and the abuses perpetrated by the military are horrific violations of international law, amounting to war crimes and crimes against humanity. After one full year of such conflict, it is time Thein Sein showed he is serious about change, by ending the offensives, withdrawing troops, stopping the violations and establishing a political dialogue and a peace process. The international community should increase pressure on his government to stop the killing of Kachin people."