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BURMA | CSW urges government to stop violence in west

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) today called on the Government of Burma to end sectarian violence in Arakan State, western Burma immediately and take steps to address the underlying causes.

In the past week, horrific violence has erupted between the majority Buddhist Rakhine (or Arakanese) people, and the predominantly Muslim Rohingyas in northern Arakan State, leaving hundreds of homes burned and many people dead.

According to Rohingya sources, mosques have been burned, homes destroyed, women raped and people killed. Many Rohingyas have reportedly been shot dead by the security forces and by Rakhine militias. The precise death toll is unknown, but is rising daily. Rohingyas have issued urgent appeals for international intervention to prevent "genocide".

On Sunday, President Thein Sein declared a State of Emergency in Arakan State, and yesterday the United Nations announced it was withdrawing its staff from the area. The British government issued a travel warning.

Benedict Rogers, CSW's East Asia Team Leader, said, "The reports coming in on a daily basis in recent days are shocking and horrific. The scale of the tragedy is only just becoming apparent, and has not been properly reported by the media. This appears to be a racially and religiously motivated pogrom against the Rohingyas, although it is clear that Rakhine communities are also suffering from the eruption in violence. We have grave concerns about the UN's decision to withdraw its staff – now is the time for international monitors and aid organizations to be on the ground, to provide independent reporting and verification and provide much-needed humanitarian assistance to the communities devastated by this violence. We urge the international community, including the UN, the European Union, the United States, the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and neighboring countries such as Bangladesh and India to take this crisis extremely seriously and to pursue every possible action to prevent further killings and destruction. Steps towards inter-faith and inter-ethnic dialogue and reconciliation will be needed to address the underlying factors, but for now the priority has to be to end this spiraling cycle of devastating violence."