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BURMA | CSW welcomes Aung San Suu Kyi's visit to Britain, urges UK government to increase aid for refugees

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) today welcomed Aung San Suu Kyi's arrival in the United Kingdom and urged the British government to heed her call for increased aid to Burmese refugees along the Thailand-Burma border, made in her Nobel Peace Prize Lecture in Oslo on June 16.

In her Nobel Peace Prize Lecture, Aung San Suu Kyi described her recent visit to Mae La refugee camp on the Thailand-Burma border: "I met dedicated people who were striving daily to make the lives of the inmates as free from hardship as possible. They spoke of their concern over 'donor fatigue,' which could also translate as 'compassion fatigue.' 'Donor fatigue' expresses itself precisely in the reduction of funding. 'Compassion fatigue' expresses itself less obviously in the reduction of concern. One is the consequence of the other. Can we afford to indulge in compassion fatigue? Is the cost of meeting the needs of refugees greater than the cost that would be consequent on turning an indifferent, if not a blind, eye on their suffering? I appeal to donors the world over to fulfill the needs of these people who are in search, often it must seem to them a vain search, of refuge."

Severe cuts in funding from the international community, particularly the European Union, have resulted in reductions in food rations of up to 25 percent, as well as in provision of clothing, blankets, mosquito nets and shelter. The cuts are having a serious impact on the health of more than 140,000 refugees in camps along the Thailand-Burma border, and have also led to serious cuts in aid to internally displaced peoples in Burma. Since 1996, more than a million people have been internally displaced and over 3,700 villages destroyed in eastern Burma. In villages with Christian communities, CSW has documented the ransacking and destruction of churches, while worshippers are conscripted as forced labor, along with other villagers, or join other refugees in the camps along the border.

Aung San Suu Kyi, who celebrates her 67th birthday tomorrow, will address both Houses of Parliament in Westminster Hall on 21 June, becoming the first person who is not a Head of State to do so. She will also meet the Prime Minister David Cameron, other government officials, members of the Burmese exiled community and Non-Governmental Organizations.

Benedict Rogers, CSW's East Asia Team Leader, said, "This is a hugely significant and historic week and a sign of the positive changes in Burma. Even less than a year ago, such a visit was inconceivable. However, it is vital that we remember that even though there are some steps towards reform in Burma, there is still a very long way to go. There remain several hundred prisoners of conscience in jail in Burma today, and the military is continuing to attack ethnic civilians, especially in Kachin State. Rape as a weapon of war, torture, forced labor, the destruction of villages and killing of civilians continues. There is an urgent need for substantial reform or repeal of repressive legislation, significant constitutional reform and the development of the rule of law. The recent horrific sectarian violence between Buddhist Rakhine and Muslim Rohingya people in western Burma illustrates the challenges Burma faces in protecting human rights and working towards national reconciliation. Religious freedom must be protected, and inter-religious and inter-ethnic dialogue promoted. It is essential that at this time of potential change in Burma, the international community invests in the lives of refugees, to ensure that they can return home in good health, security and with skills to contribute to reconstruction and reconciliation in their country when the time is right. Britain is the largest bi-lateral donor to Burma and has provided significant assistance which is welcome, but now is the time to act to ensure that the basic needs of

refugees and internally displaced peoples are met and that a serious humanitarian challenge caused by a shortage of funding can be averted.”

Notes to Editors:

1. Benedict Rogers is the author of *Burma: A Nation at the Crossroads*, published this month by Random House.