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NEPAL CSW welcomes potentially crucial step forward in peace process, urges focus on protecting rights in constitution

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) welcomed this week's four-party settlement in Nepal to implement the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, describing its potential to be "the most important step forward in five years", but noted with concern the disagreement about the terms of the agreement expressed by a faction of the UCPN (Maoist) party.

As political attention is refocused on completing a draft of the new constitution by November 30, CSW again called for all fundamental human rights, including freedom of religion, to be enshrined fully.

The agreement negotiated between all four major political parties on November 1 ends a long-standing deadlock over the integration of Maoist soldiers into the Nepali Army. It includes the acceptance of 6,500 Maoist former combatants as a third of a new unit which will be involved in development projects, disaster rescue and forest security. It also achieves a solution to questions of compensation and rehabilitation for over 12,000 former combatants, central control of Maoist weapons, and the dissolution of Young Communist League paramilitary structures.

It also reaffirmed existing commitments to establish commissions on truth and reconciliation and on disappearances, and to publish a first draft of the new constitution by the current November 30 deadline, although many see this as unfeasible.

CSW South Asia Team Leader David Griffiths said, "The current developments have potential to be a crucial step in the completion of the peace process – perhaps the most important step forward in five years. However, we hope the leaders of the main parties will engage with the concerns expressed by members of the UCPN (Maoist) who do not feel they can support the agreement. As for the constitution, it remains to be seen whether it will be possible to complete a first draft by November 30, but CSW again urges Constituent Assembly members to ensure that human rights are protected in a manner consistent with the international human rights framework. This includes the right to freedom of religion, which is particularly important in light of Nepal's new status as a secular republic".

Notes to Editors:

1. CSW recently published a briefing, '[Nepal: Protecting religious freedom for a new Nepal](#)', which has been presented to members of the Constituent Assembly. It advises them not to include within either the constitution or penal code clauses such as "no person shall be entitled to convert another person from one religion to another". The briefing points out that such proposed anti-conversion clauses are in violation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Nepal is a state party, and proposes alternative forms of wording which would be consistent with international standards.