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BURMA | Letter to EU Foreign Policy Chief on Violations in Burma Welcomed

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) and the Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO) today warmly welcomed a letter sent by Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) to the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Baroness Catherine Ashton, highlighting ongoing human rights violations in Burma.

The letter, dated Jan. 16 and signed by 14 MEPs from across the political spectrum, including a Vice-President of the European Parliament, highlights “the plight of ethnic and religious minorities in the country.” It focuses on the escalation of the conflict in Kachin State, and calls on the Burma Army to immediately desist and withdraw.

In their letter, the MEPs stated that the European Union must call for the immediate cessation of human rights violations against ethnic and religious minorities. They also called on Baroness Ashton to press the Burmese government to “urgently prioritize political dialogue that will result in a political solution to the root causes of the conflict in Kachin State.”

CHRO’s Program Director Salai Za Uk Ling said, “We strongly condemn the Burma Army’s continued indiscriminate shelling in Kachin State, which has resulted in the deaths of Kachin civilians, including children. We are very concerned for the safety of tens of thousands of Kachin, internally displaced within their own homeland. We have also received worrying reports that hundreds of Chin migrant workers are caught in the crossfire in Kachin State. A local church where over 100 Chin were taking shelter was damaged during the Burma Army military onslaught in the Hpakant area. Given the gravity of the situation, we hope that Baroness Ashton will urgently take forward the recommendations proposed by the European Parliamentarians.”

The MEPs also state that, “Current reforms have not yet extended to freedom of religion or belief, which will be key to long-term peace and stability in the country, given the intersection between ethnicity and religion for several of Burma’s minority groups.” They urge the EU High Representative to follow President Obama’s lead in calling for freedom of religion or belief to be respected.

The letter also highlights problems with the current State policy of segregation of Buddhist and Muslim communities in Rakhine State and the destruction of large Christian crosses in Chin State.

In a statement released on Jan. 30, the Kachin Baptist Convention (KBC), stated that despite President Thein Sein's announcement of a unilateral ceasefire in Kachin State, effective Jan. 19, the Burma Army offensive in Kachin State has continued. According to the KBC, the ongoing war in Kachin State has resulted in the destruction of over 200 villages, with 66 churches reportedly damaged and over 100,000 people internally displaced.

Andrew Johnston, CSW's Advocacy Director, said, "Burma is a multi-ethnic, multi-religious society and it is vital that non-Burman ethnic nationalities and non-Buddhist religious minorities are treated with equal rights, and that freedom of religion or belief, as well as ethnic and cultural rights, are fully respected at all levels if Burma is to make a genuine transition to democracy, freedom and true peace."