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## **BURMA | Day of Prayer to be Addressed by Pro-Democracy Leader**

One of Burma's most respected leaders of the pro-democracy movement, Patron of the National League for Democracy (NLD) U Tin Oo, will be among the speakers at the Burma Day of Prayer, hosted by Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) in London on March 9 as part of a series of events worldwide marking the Global Day of Prayer for Burma.

U Tin Oo, 86, served as commander-in-chief of the Burma Army before he was jailed by Burma's dictator Ne Win. In 1988, he joined forces with Aung San Suu Kyi to found and lead the NLD, serving as the party's chairman. He spent many years in prison and under house arrest between 1988 and his release in 2010.

Delegates to the Burma Day of Prayer will also be addressed by representatives from Burma's Kachin and Rohingya communities, while CSW's East Asia Team Leader Benedict Rogers will report on recent developments in the country and CSW's advocacy work.

Despite positive developments in Burma, there has been ongoing conflict in Kachin State since June 2011, when the Burma Army broke a 17-year ceasefire. Since then, over 100,000 people have been displaced and the Burma Army has been accused of serious human rights violations, including the killing of civilians, rape as a weapon of war, torture and the destruction of villages and churches.

In Rakhine State, violence between the Buddhist Rakhine and Muslim Rohingya communities has resulted in the displacement of at least 120,000 people and hundreds of deaths. Although violence has been committed by both sides, the Rohingyas have been subjected to a systematic campaign of persecution and ethnic cleansing.

CSW's Advocacy Director Andrew Johnston said, "At this year's Global Day of Prayer for Burma we are able to give thanks for some very welcome changes in Burma – the release of significant numbers of political prisoners, increased space for freedom of expression, more freedom for civil society, the establishment of fragile preliminary ceasefires with most ethnic armed resistance organizations, and the journey from prison to Parliament for Aung San Suu Kyi and many of her colleagues in the NLD. Yet Burma continues to face many significant challenges, including grave violations of human rights, particularly in Kachin and Arakan states, the continued detention of several hundred political prisoners, and continuing violations of freedom of religion or belief. There is also a need for further institutional and legislative reform, changes

to the constitution, and a nationwide peace process involving a political dialogue in search of a political solution to decades of civil war. Burma needs our prayers, our advocacy and our support now more than ever, as the country stands at the crossroads of potential change for which its people have struggled for so long. We are particularly honored to have U Tin Oo and other speakers from Burma address our gathering in London and urge people around the world to remember Burma in prayer this weekend.”