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## **BURMA | CSW Urges Burmese Government to End Rising Religious Intolerance**

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) is deeply concerned about a dramatic increase in religious intolerance in Burma, illustrated most dramatically in the recent crisis in the central Burmese town of Meiktilar. CSW calls on the Burmese government to take decisive action to secure the safety of citizens in Meiktilar, where a state of emergency has been declared following three days of sectarian violence that has resulted in at least 20 deaths.

On March 20, a dispute between a Muslim shop owner and his Buddhist clients escalated, resulting in the destruction of Muslim homes, businesses and mosques by Buddhist mobs. Local police failed to stem the violence. Hundreds of Muslim residents have reportedly fled their homes to seek shelter in a sports stadium.

According to Reuters, martial law has been imposed in four townships amid concerns of the violence spreading. An estimated 2,000 people are in refugee camps.

The targeting of the Muslim population in Meiktilar is reminiscent of the situation in Arakan State, where clashes between Buddhist Rakhine and Muslim Rohingya erupted in June 2012, leaving at least 140,000 displaced and hundreds dead. Although violence was committed by both sides, the Rohingyas have been subjected to a systematic campaign of persecution and ethnic cleansing.

Anti-Muslim propaganda leaflets have reportedly been circulated in several parts of Burma in recent days, leading to fears that anti-Muslim violence could spread.

CSW's Advocacy Director Andrew Johnston said, "We are gravely concerned about the situation in Meiktilar and the climate of intolerance and violence that appears to be being created by hate speech and anti-Muslim propaganda. We urge the Burmese government, as well as leaders of different religious communities and political groups, to work together to promote inter-religious harmony, respect for religious freedom, and to combat religious hatred,

discrimination and violence. Burma's reform process is at risk, and people of all religions who believe in peace, democracy and human rights must unite to prevent any further deterioration in the situation. We call on the Burmese security forces to restore public order according to the rule of law, and to ensure protection for all people regardless of religion."