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## INDONESIA | Letter Urges Obama to Raise Religious Freedom Concerns

A joint letter to U.S. President Barack Obama ahead of his visit to the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit on Oct. 7-8 urges him to raise serious concerns regarding “widespread and grave violations” of freedom of religion or belief in the region, particularly in Indonesia and Burma.

The letter, signed by Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) and CSW-USA, highlights the threat posed to Indonesia’s tradition of religious pluralism by extremism and religious intolerance: “In the past decade incidents of violence against religious communities have increased, affecting all minorities, including Christians, Buddhists and Ahmadiyya, Shia and Sufi Muslims, as well as indigenous traditional believers.” President Obama is asked to urge President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, “to take clear action to protect vulnerable religious minorities, ensure that the perpetrators of violence are brought to justice, and uphold the right of churches and other places of worship to open.”

Religious intolerance in Burma is also of concern following the outbreak of anti-Muslim violence in the country over the past year. The letter reads, in part, “We hope that in your discussions with the President of Burma and other regional leaders, you will address the rising religious intolerance in Burma, and highlight the need for the security forces in Burma to act to prevent further violence, stop violence when it breaks out, protect religious minorities, counter hate speech and incitement to violence, and promote inter-religious dialogue at the national and grassroots levels.”

Benedict Rogers, East Asia Team Leader at CSW said, “President Obama has a unique opportunity during the APEC Summit, and in bilateral meetings, to provide a voice for all those within the region who wish to see freedom of religion or belief protected and promoted and to counter hatred and intolerance. Given his own personal history in Indonesia, having spent part of his childhood in the country, he can speak about Indonesia’s tradition of religious pluralism and harmony in a way few other world leaders can, and thereby warn of the dangers if Indonesia abandons this tradition and allows religious intolerance to continue

unchallenged. It is in the interests of Indonesia and Burma, the region, the United States and the international community that the President makes religious freedom one of his priorities during his visit.”