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BURMA | CSW Calls on UN General Assembly to Address Violations

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) today urged the United Nations General Assembly to focus on continuing violations of human rights, including abuses of freedom of religion or belief, in the forthcoming annual resolution on Burma.

While significant changes have taken place in Burma during the past two years, including the release of many political prisoners, the participation of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and her party, the National League for Democracy (NLD) in Parliament, increased space for civil society, political actors and the media, and the agreement of fragile, preliminary ceasefires with most armed ethnic resistance organizations, grave violations of human rights continue to be perpetrated, in particular against religious and ethnic minorities. In a statement, the European Burma Network warned that none of the calls to action in last year's resolution have been implemented by the Burmese government: "On some there has been some progress, but on most there has been almost none. For some, the situation has got worse."

CSW recommends that the UN General Assembly resolution call on Burma to take urgent action to protect religious minorities from further violence, ensure that the perpetrators of violence are brought to justice and urge political and religious leaders from all communities to speak out against religious hatred and intolerance. The General Assembly resolution should specifically call on Burma to invite the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion of Belief to visit the country, following the wave of anti-Muslim violence this year.

Furthermore, while welcoming recent progress toward a nationwide ceasefire with the ethnic nationalities, CSW calls on the General Assembly, in its resolution, to press Burma to initiate a peace process involving a political dialogue with the ethnic nationalities, leading to a political solution and a genuine national peace and reconciliation.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "In the past two years we have seen real signs of hope in Burma, after decades of repression, and we warmly welcome the changes the Government of Burma has introduced. The UN General Assembly resolution on Burma should

reflect these positive developments, and encourage the Government to continue on the path of reform. However, for the reform to be genuine and long-lasting, respect for and protection of human rights must be promoted. In the past year, a wave of appalling anti-Muslim violence has swept the country, and there are concerns that this could turn into a wider campaign of intolerance impacting all religious communities. There has never been a more important time to speak up for freedom of religion or belief in Burma, and to ensure that the UN General Assembly resolution reflects these concerns. It is vital that the resolution call on Burma to uphold freedom of religion or belief, to end the war in Kachin State, to stop rape as a weapon of war, to end the forcible recruitment of child soldiers and the use of forced labor, to stop the use of torture and to put an end to military attacks against civilians. We urge the UN General Assembly to ensure that, while progress must be recognized and applauded, the continuing very grave challenges are addressed and the Government of Burma is left in no doubt as to its responsibilities to its own people and to the international community.”