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BURMA | Democracy Activist Sentenced to Two Years Imprisonment

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) is concerned at reports that Htin Lin Oo, the former information officer of the National League for Democracy (NLD), was handed a two-year prison sentence following his conviction on charges of insulting religion.

Htin Lin Oo was charged under articles 295 (a) and 298 of Burma's Penal Code after a speech he made Oct. 23 criticizing Buddhist extremists for inciting hatred and violence. A Buddhist himself, he argued the extremist Buddhist nationalists' behavior was contrary to the teachings of Buddhism but was charged with insulting Buddhism as a result.

There has been a growing climate of religious intolerance in Burma in recent years, resulting in violations of freedom of religion or belief, violations of freedom of expression and violence incited against religious minorities. Htin Lin Oo's sentence comes as Burma's Parliament continues to consider a package of new laws known as the Protection of Race and Religion Laws, which if implemented will include legislation restricting religious conversion and inter-religious marriage.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "We are deeply concerned at the sentence handed down to Htin Lin Oo, who bravely and peacefully spoke up for religious tolerance and against extremism. We call for his unconditional release. We also urge the Burmese parliament to abandon the proposed new legislation and to take steps to protect and promote freedom of religion or belief and freedom of expression for all."