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CHINA | CSW Calls Attention to Ongoing Human Rights Abuses

Christian Solidarity Worldwide remains deeply concerned about the situation of freedom of religion or belief and other human rights violations in China ahead of the G20 summit in Hangzhou, China next week.

The 11th G20 Summit will be held Sept. 4 and 5. Hangzhou is the capital of Zhejiang Province. The province has made headlines since 2014 because of a campaign which allegedly aims to rid the province of structures which violate building regulations, but which critics say targets churches. Under the campaign, hundreds of crosses have been removed from churches, and the authorities have sometimes employed violent tactics in the face of protests by members. Several Christian leaders who have opposed the cross removals through letters or peaceful gatherings have been arrested and accused of economic crimes. Restrictions on religious activities in Hangzhou ahead of and during the G20 summit have also been reported.

CSW is also concerned about ongoing and serious human rights violations across China, including the arrest, interrogation, detention and disappearance of over 300 human rights lawyers, activists, their colleagues and family members since July 2015. Some of the detainees have been released on bail after making televised “confessions” which are believed to have been coerced. Other lawyers and activists have been convicted of subversion and sentenced to lengthy jail terms.

Immediately after the summit, U.S. President Barack Obama will visit Laos to participate in the US-ASEAN Summit and East Asia Summit. Although Laos has seen some improvements in religious freedom, including an apparent reduction in the number of long-term Christian prisoners of conscience, CSW continues to receive reports of religious freedom violations by both state and non-state actors, including detention without charge or trial, eviction, confiscation

of land and livestock, destruction of property, harassment and discrimination, and enforced disappearance.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "We are deeply concerned about the ongoing and extremely serious decline in human rights standards in China, and the repression of civil society. The cross removals in Zhejiang have undermined any trust between the Christian community there and the state. The restrictions on religious activities during the G20 meeting further demonstrate the authorities' approach to religion as a "security issue". We believe G20 leaders should use every opportunity to raise these concerns with their Chinese counterparts. In addition, we urge President Obama to raise with the Laotian authorities cases and issues concerning violations of the right to freedom of religion or belief, particularly for ethnic minority Christians in the country."