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BURMA | UN Establishes Human Rights Investigation

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) welcomes today's landmark resolution on human rights in Burma (Myanmar) by the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC), which establishes an independent international fact-finding mission to investigate alleged human rights violations against Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine State.

The new resolution, which was adopted by consensus, also extends the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights Situation in Myanmar for one year. In its statement to the HRC, the government of Burma disassociated itself from the resolution.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "The groundbreaking Human Rights Council resolution today sends an important message to the people in Burma that the international community is committed to addressing the harrowing situation in the country, in particular Rakhine State. We are disappointed that the government of Burma has disassociated itself from this resolution and we urge the government to collaborate fully with the fact-finding mission and to provide full and unrestricted access to all areas, in particular Rakhine State but also Kachin and Shan States. Although the attention of the international community is focused on the horrific reports from Rakhine State, we believe reports of grave human rights abuses in Kachin and northern Shan States also merit urgent attention."

The human rights situation against the Rohingya in Rakhine State has rapidly deteriorated since October 2016. On Oct. 9, 2016, nine police officers died in an attack on two border guard posts in Rakhine State, on Burma's border with Bangladesh. The Burmese military claimed this was an act of terrorism by a small group of Rohingya. The incident sparked a severe military offensive against civilians, which has led to the worst human rights and humanitarian crisis in Rakhine State since 2012. The military stand accused of committing extensive and severe human rights violations against the Rohingya, including the burning of homes, mass rape, torture, execution without trial, and the blocking of aid.

On Feb. 3, The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights published an extensive “flash report” into human rights violations in Rakhine state, which raised concerns that rights violations in Rakhine State are the result of a “purposeful policy designed by one ethnic or religious group to remove by violent and terror-inspiring means the civilian population of another ethnic or religious group from certain geographic areas.” The report states that “an estimated 22,000 people remain internally displaced as of Jan. 20, which means that nearly 90,000 people are estimated to have suffered internal or cross-border displacement since Oct. 9.”

The independent, international fact-finding mission aims to ensure “full accountability for perpetrators and justice for victims” of alleged human rights violations in Rakhine State.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, and the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Myanmar, Professor Yanghee Lee, have both called for the establishment of a Commission of Inquiry into the situation in Rakhine. On March 3, CSW, together with 12 other organizations, published a joint letter calling for a UN-mandated international Commission of Inquiry or similar mechanism to investigate serious human rights violations in Rakhine State.

Thomas added, “The decision to establish a fact-finding mission rather than a Commission of Inquiry in the new resolution does not adequately acknowledge the severity of the situation in Rakhine, but we are hopeful that the new fact-finding mission will investigate allegations of gross human rights violations without delay and provide recommendations to address the situation, increase accountability and bring perpetrators to justice. We also urge the United Nations and the Government of Burma to urgently address reports of serious human rights violations in Kachin and northern Shan States. We call on the Burma Army to cease military offensives in these areas, to allow immediate humanitarian aid access to those displaced by conflict in northern Burma, and to immediately declare a nationwide ceasefire in order to make progress towards a genuine peace process.”