



**CHRISTIAN
SOLIDARITY
WORLDWIDE**
VOICE FOR THE VOICELESS

CSW is a Christian organisation working for religious freedom through advocacy and human rights, in the pursuit of justice.

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The Honorable Hillary Clinton
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Clinton,

We are writing on behalf of Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), an international human rights organisation specialising in freedom of religion, to welcome the announcement of your forthcoming visit to Burma. As President Obama has said, in recent months we have begun to see some “flickers” of progress in Burma, and on that basis we support your proposed visit and regard it as a unique opportunity to encourage significant and substantial change in the country.

CSW has offices in Washington, DC, London and Brussels, is a registered 501c3 Non-Profit organisation in the United States, and has a supporter base in the United States, United Kingdom and affiliates and partners around the world. CSW has worked on Burma for more than two decades, and our personnel have travelled frequently to the country, both inside and along all of Burma’s borders. Our core concern has been the plight of Burma’s ethnic nationalities, many of whom are also religious minorities, and we have documented their plight in numerous reports over the years. Our staff have travelled many times to the Karen, Karenni and Shan along the Thailand-Burma border, the Chin on the India-Burma border, the Rohingya on the Bangladesh-Burma border, and the Kachin on the China-Burma border. We have also worked very closely with the democracy movement, highlighting the plight of political prisoners, and have close contact with Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy (NLD). We work for human rights, including religious freedom, for all the people of Burma.

As you are aware, since July President Thein Sein and the new government in Burma has taken some welcome steps which may create the conditions for positive change in the country. We believe such steps need to be encouraged, and the regime urged to go beyond largely symbolic steps, welcome gestures and reformist rhetoric and embark on more meaningful, significant, substantial and long-lasting change.

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There are, in our view, two areas of concern where change is essential if the regime is to demonstrate it is serious about reform. First, the continued detention of hundreds of political prisoners. If the regime were to release all political prisoners, including Buddhist monks such as U Gambira and prominent activists such as Min Ko Naing, whose involvement in the political process is crucial, it would provide a clear indication of change. We hope you will urge the regime to do this and emphasise that the release of political prisoners is an important benchmark for measuring progress and thereby considering the lifting of sanctions.

Secondly, we are deeply concerned about the continuing grave violations of human rights perpetrated by the Burma Army in the ethnic areas, and in particular Kachin State. For many years, the regime in Burma has been accused of violations of international law amounting to war crimes and crimes against humanity. These include violations such as rape, forced labour, torture, the use of human minesweepers, the use of child soldiers, religious persecution, the destruction of villages and displacement of civilians, and killings. There is no sign of the situation in the ethnic states improving, and in some areas the human rights and humanitarian crisis is deteriorating.

In June this year the regime broke a 17-year ceasefire with the Kachin Independence Organisation/Army (KIO/A), and launched a major offensive against Kachin civilians. In recent weeks, we have received reports from sources inside Kachin State describing attacks on churches, killings of civilians, and the widespread use of rape, torture and forced labour. For example, on 6 November soldiers from the Burma Army's 88th Light Infantry Division attacked the Assemblies of God church in Muk Chyik village, Wai Maw Township, injuring several people. The congregation was expelled from the church, and soldiers reportedly looted church donation boxes. The house of one church member, Mr Jumhpawkw Hawng Lum, was burned down. At least fifty church members are taken to work as forced porters for the Burma Army. The pastor of the church, the Reverend Yajawng Hkawng, was severely tortured and was hospitalized, while his assistant, Rev Shayu Lum Hkawng, died the next day as a result of the torture. Hpalawng Lum Hkawng, deacon and youth music team leader, who was injured in the attack, has disappeared.

On 16 October soldiers from Light Infantry Battalion 438 seized control of a Roman Catholic Church in Namsan Yang village, Waimaw township, where 23 worshippers, mostly women and elderly people, had gathered for the 8am Sunday service. The worshippers took refuge from the gunfire behind the Maria prayer sanctuary. When the troops saw them, they shot several rounds of bullets into the sanctuary. The Catholic assistant to the priest, 49 year-old father-of-four Jangma Awng Li, decided to speak to the troops as he is fluent in Burmese. He was beaten in his head with a rifle butt, and injured his forehead when he hit a concrete wall. He and four other men were handcuffed and detained by the soldiers. The troops, who were later joined by soldiers from Light Infantry Battalion 121, continued to march through the village shooting, and reached the Baptist church compound in the evening. During the march the detainees, including four from other villages who had been with the troops for two weeks, were used as forced labor. The detainees had to stay with the troops overnight and were temporarily

stationed in the Baptist church compound. The whole northern part of village was burned and both church properties were destroyed.

On 18 October, a 19 year-old girl, Maran Kawbu, was detained, tortured and gang-raped by soldiers from the same battalion in Namsan Yang. Her body was left on the river bank. The next day, Light Infantry Battalion 121 shot 72 year-old Maru Je Hkam Naw in the arms and legs whilst he was erecting a fence around his house in Namsan Yang village. Houses in Namsan Yang were burned by the Burmese Army and Mr Jangma Awng Li and other detainees, too afraid to return home, fled the village. At least 21 villagers were detained and used for forced labour, and a 19 year-old Rakhine boy was shot dead. His body was burned and thrown into the mine in Namsan Yang where he worked.

In a separate incident, the pastor of Banggaw Kachin Baptist Church, Rev Gam Aung, was arrested by Burma Army soldiers in Manwin village at 3pm on 17 November, while speaking on the telephone in a shop. Local sources say no reasons were given for his arrest and his whereabouts are unknown.

According to information received this week, nine villagers from Nawng Zang Kung village for internally displaced people, in Nam Jang, northern Shan State, were taken by Burma Army soldiers to a military camp at Nat Tsin Kung, at midnight on 17 November. Four villagers were released the next day, but five were detained and have reportedly been subjected to severe torture. Dawshi Roi Ji, aged 60, the mother of two of the detainees, Zakhung Yaw Zung and Yaw Sau, was taken to the camp and badly tortured, released the next day, but taken back to the camp that evening by the local ward official, Mr Sai Aik Nyen. Her situation and that of the remaining detainees remains critical. Other civilians from the local area have fled to China in order to escape forced labour, harassment and torture.

CSW is also deeply concerned about the well-being of Ms. Sumlat Roi Ja, aged 28, mother of a 14-month old baby, from Hkai Bang village, who was captured by the Burma Army on 28 October and forced to work as a porter. It is believed she has been held in the Burma Army camp and repeatedly gang-raped and her whereabouts are now unknown.

Attacks and abuses are continuing in other areas as well, particularly Karen State. In eastern Burma, at least 500,000 people are internally displaced, having been forced to flee attacks by the Burma Army. Over 3,500 villages have been destroyed since 1996.

The plight of the Muslim Rohingya people is another concern. Despite having lived in northern Arakan State for generations, the Rohingyas are denied citizenship in Burma and are effectively stateless. They continue to face severe restrictions on movement, marriage, religion and access to education.

We therefore hope that during your visit to Burma, you will raise these specific concerns, and urge the government to stop attacking ethnic people, recognise the Rohingyas as full and equal citizens of Burma, declare a nationwide ceasefire, release all political prisoners, and engage in a meaningful process of dialogue with the ethnic nationalities and the democracy movement led by Aung San SuuKyi. There may be a unique opportunity now for decades of oppression and suffering in Burma to come to an end, and we hope you will do everything you

can during your visit and following it, to encourage a process that would lead to a genuine and lasting peace, freedom and protection of human rights for all the people of Burma.

Thank you for your serious consideration of these issues and for your attention to the situation in Burma.

Yours sincerely,

PP



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