



# Chin Human Rights Organization

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## **Media Statement: For Immediate Release**

### **CHRO CALLS FOR INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT FOR A COUNTRY-WIDE COMMISSION OF INQUIRY ON BURMA**

**[Chiang Mai, Thailand]:** The Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO) today warmly welcomes the report of Tomás Ojea Quintana, the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Burma, and urges the international community to support a country-wide commission of inquiry into gross and systematic human rights violations and possible crimes against humanity in Burma.

In his report, the Special Rapporteur notes that while it is primarily the responsibility of the ruling government to address these problems, such responsibility falls to the international community if the ruling government fails to assume it. Article 445 in Burma's 2008 Constitution effectively enshrines impunity for past and present human rights violations, leaving little or no possibility for justice and accountability for such crimes within the domestic legislative framework.

The Special Rapporteur also notes that human rights violations which could constitute crimes against humanity include forced labour and religious persecution. In its recent submission to the Universal Periodic Review process of Burma under the Human Rights Council, CHRO documented more than 70 incidents of forced labour since 2006, some involving orders to 40 villages at a time.

The persistent, widespread and systematic denial of religious freedom in Chin State may amount to religious persecution. Harassment, inhuman treatment and torture of Chin Christian missionaries are ongoing, particularly in remote areas of Chin State. Deliberate destruction of Christian infrastructure like crosses and churches has been widespread in Chin State, carried out or ordered by the local authorities, most recently in the Mindat area in July this year.

CHRO Program Director Salai Za Uk Ling said, "We warmly welcome the renewed support for a Commission of Inquiry by the Special Rapporteur. However, ideally the mandate and terms of reference for such a commission should be country-wide rather than focusing on a specific geographic area. People all across Burma, including in Chin State, want justice and accountability for the human rights violations they have suffered."

To date, 13 countries have expressed support for the establishment of a Commission of Inquiry, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia.

“We urge the international community to support a country-wide Commission of Inquiry. An inquiry with such a mandate would do more to support a national reconciliation process in the longer term,” added Salai Za Uk Ling.

**-ENDS-**

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## **Background**

Approximately 90 percent of Chin State’s population is Christian, making it the single largest Christian-concentrated state in a predominantly Buddhist Burma. Christianity was introduced to the Chin people by the American Baptist Missionaries in 1889 and has since become an integral part of Chin identity. Increased militarization in Chin State since the time of the popular uprising in 1988 has led to a dramatic increase in human rights violations against the local population, including forced labour and religious persecution. Since 1994, the regime has destroyed nine Christian crosses in Falam, Hakha, Kanpalet, Mindat, Matupi, Paletwa, Teddim, Tonzang and Thantlang Townships. In some cases, Buddhist religious infrastructure such as pagodas, monasteries and statues have been built on the very sites where Christian crosses were destroyed, sometimes with forced labor exacted from the local Christian population. The regime has also prohibited the construction and renovation of Christian churches.

## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

1. The 13 countries that have expressed support for the establishment of a Commission of Inquiry include the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, the Netherlands, Ireland, Hungary, Lithuania, Estonia and France.
2. On 24 July 2010 a 23-foot high concrete Christian cross in the Mindat Township area, southern Chin State, was forcibly destroyed by direct order of the authorities, including the District and Township level Peace and Development Council, the District Religious Affairs Department, and a Mindat abbot from the Hill Region Buddhist Mission.
3. To download CHRO’s individual submission to the Universal Periodic review process on Burma, please visit <http://www.chro.ca/action-alerts/advocacy-a-campaign.html>