



# Chin Human Rights Organization

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## **MEDIA STATEMENT: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Burma's Electoral Process Marred by Human Rights Violations in Chin State**

[Chiang Mai, Thailand] The Chin Human Rights Organization today raised serious concerns about human rights violations and the electoral process in Chin State and Kalay Township in Sagaing Division, where many ethnic Chin live.

Since the electoral laws were passed on 8 March 2010, the organization has documented ten cases of forced labour and portering in Chin State. Most recently, in October, police officers ordered local villagers in a remote area of Thantlang Township to carry their belongings from village to village while they surveyed possible polling station locations and collected information to compile the voter registration list.

“The use of portering is so endemic in rural areas of Chin State that officials think nothing of ordering it, even while they are on a mission related to Burma’s so-called democratic electoral process,” said Salai Za Uk Ling, CHRO Program Director.

In an election briefer published today, CHRO also highlighted the lack of secret balloting in advance voting, forced membership of the junta-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party, and inadequate election preparations.

“In Kalay Township there are not enough polling stations to cope with the number of registered voters, in breach of the Union Election Commission’s own guidelines. This could lead to overcrowding and compromising of the secret ballot on polling day. In Cinnual ward, Falam Town, an army checkpoint is one of the designated polling stations. How can people feel free to vote for the party of their choice, if soldiers are watching them?” continued Salai Za Uk Ling.

Portering and forced labour are two of the most pervasive human rights violations in Chin State. Since the organization was founded, CHRO has also documented numerous incidents of religious persecution, land confiscation, torture, arbitrary arrest, extra-judicial killing, and rape.

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**Notes to editors:**

1. According to the Polling Officials' Manual issued by the Union Election Commission, one polling station should be established per 300 registered voters. In Kalay Tsownship, Sagaing Division there are 60 Chin villages, which are home to 76,000 ethnic Chin registered voters. There are another 110,000 Burmese voters, making a total of 186,000 registered voters in the area. However, there are only 151 designated polling stations, making an average of more than 1,200 voters per polling station, four times as many as issued in the UEC guidelines.

**About the Chin Human Rights Organization**

The Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO) is a non-governmental, non-profit advocacy organization legally registered in Canada. It was formed in 1995 on the India-Burma border by a group of Chin activists committed to promoting democracy in Burma, and documenting previously unreported human rights abuses being perpetrated against the Chin people by the Burma army and local authorities of the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). CHRO is the primary rights-based advocacy organization for the Chin.

**About the Chin people of Burma**

Around 500,000 ethnic Chin live in the northwestern area of Chin State in Burma. The Chin are ethnically very diverse. The six main tribes of Aso, Cho (Sho), Khuami (M'ro), Laimi, Mizo (Lushai), and Zomi (Kuki) can be further broken up into at least 60 different sub-tribal categories. The Chin speak more than 20 mutually distinct languages. Despite such diversity, the Chin are unified through a common history, geographical homeland, traditional practices, and ethnic identity. The missions of the American Baptist Church starting in the late 1800s served to further unify the Chin people through religion. In a country that is predominantly Buddhist, the Chin are 90 percent Christian with most belonging to the American Baptist Church.