



Chin Human Rights Organization

P.O. Box 202, Phrasing Post Office, Chiang Mai, Thailand 50205

Tel: +66.53.210.302

www.chro.ca info@chro.ca

Tuesday 9 July

PRESS RELEASE: for immediate release

Burma: Ethnic Chin in historic hearing at the European Parliament

[Chiang Mai, Thailand] A public hearing on the situation of the ethnic Chin in Burma took place at the European Parliament in Brussels for the first time ever today. The event, “The struggle of ethnic Chins in a changing Burma/Myanmar” - hosted by a member of the European Parliament Working Group on Freedom of Religion or Belief, László Tőkés MEP – examined some of the key challenges facing the predominantly Christian Chin people, including ongoing human rights abuses.

Salai Za Uk Ling, Program Director at the Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO) who testified at the hearing said, “We welcome the reforms that President Thein Sein’s government has introduced, but there is still a long way to go. In a sense, what is happening in Chin State is a barometer for the rest of the country. There is a ceasefire agreement in place, and it is holding. Despite this positive development, serious human rights abuses by the Burma Army continue with impunity, including sexual violence. We want to shine a light on the root causes, such as ethnic and religious discrimination, and the urgent need to deepen the reforms.”

The Chin National Front (CNF) first signed a ceasefire deal with the government in January last year, and the 27-point agreement dating from December 2012 is one of the more detailed to come out of the peace process so far. Dr. Sui Khar of the CNF said, “Over 60 years of armed conflict in Burma intensified mistrust, doubt and suspicion between the government and ethnic nationalities, and now it is deeply rooted. We have to start with confidence building, by implementing the provisions in the current ceasefire agreements as a matter of urgent priority. Both sides should also work towards negotiating a national comprehensive peace and ceasefire accord, in order to kick off political dialogue. The international community including the European Union should focus not only on economic development and investment, but on enhancing the peace building process as well.”

The hearing also addressed the challenges facing Chin political parties in Burma. There are three main Chin political parties, including the Zomi Congress for Democracy (renamed from the Zomi National Congress, which contested the 1990 elections), and two parties which formed in advance of the 2010 elections, the Chin Progressive Party and the Chin National Party (CNP). Salai Ceu Bik Thawng, General Secretary of the CNP and panelist at the hearing said, “The challenges faced by most political parties, especially those of the ethnic-based parties in Burma, are enormous. The European Union should focus attention on strengthening the institutional capacities of the ethnic parties so that there is a more level

playing field in the 2015 elections. Those elections can potentially determine whether the changes in Burma are truly irreversible or not."

CHRO's Rosalinn Zahau also spoke about the significant challenges facing the estimated 100,000 Chin refugees in India, including more than 100 violent sexual assaults in Delhi over the past two years. Dozens of Chin refugee families in Mizoram, the northeastern state bordering Chin State, have faced "push-backs" to Burma in recent months.

The event was held with financial support from the Chin community in the United States.

-ENDS-

To arrange an interview with one of the panelists, please contact:

Salai Za Uk Ling, CHRO Program Director in Brussels: +32466102770

Notes to Editors:

What: Public hearing: "The struggle of ethnic Chins in a changing Burma/Myanmar"

When: 10am – 12pm Tuesday 9 July 2013

Where: European Parliament
Altiero Spinelli Building, Room A5E3
Brussels
Website: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/>

Panel of Speakers:

1. **Salai Za Uk Ling (CHRO)** – Freedom of religion or belief and general human rights situation for the Chin
2. **Rosalinn Zahau (CHRO)** – The situation of Chin refugees, focusing on their situation in India
3. **Salai Ceu Bik Thawng (General Secretary – Chin National Party)** - The challenges and opportunities for political parties inside Burma
4. **Dr. Sui Khar (Chin National Front)** - Updates on the ethnic peace process in Burma with a focus on the Chin process
5. **Human Rights Without Frontiers** – Lobbying the EU Institutions
6. **European External Action Service** – EU policy on Burma