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ASIA/MYANMAR - Appeal for respect for the rights of ethnic and religious minorities

Yangon (Agenzia Fides) - A strong appeal for respect concerning the rights of ethnic and religious minorities in Myanmar: was launched by a group of non-governmental organizations that include "Human Rights Watch", "Christian Solidarity Worldwide" (CSW), "Chin Human Rights Organization "(CHRO)," Kachin Women's Association Thailand "(Kwat). The Forum calls on the international community, in particular the USA and the European Union to put pressure on these issues in order for them to be included in the agenda of reforms in Myanmar.

In a note sent to Fides, Salai Za Uk Ling, activist of the CHRO organization says that children and young Christians of ethnic Chin "are forced to convert to Buddhism in so-called 'development schools for the formation of young people' run by the military." "Discrimination based on religion and ethnic identity is deeply rooted and institutionalized. The reforms should dismantle the structures that implement the forced assimilation of ethnic and religious minorities," he says.

The forum of the NGOs remembers "the offensive of the Burmese army against civilians in Kachin State, the continuing conflict and the suffering of the Rohingya in Rakhine State, the continuing violations of religious freedom and other human rights in Chin State." I therefore ask to "keep up the pressure on Burma so that they face the human rights violations and the government of Thein Sein to engage in a meaningful peace process," allowing "immediate humanitarian access to those areas."

According to the latest episodes reported, in the State of Chin a 13-year-old girl was raped by the military and many children are forced to hard labor by the army. The NGOs also note the crucial issue of religious freedom is violated, stating that "ensuring equal rights for ethnic and religious minorities is a vital step on the road to democracy, freedom and lasting peace." (PA) (Agenzia Fides 22/03/2013)

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