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BURMA CSW renews call for crimes against humanity to be investigated as over 900 Karen civilians flee attacks by Burmese Army

Soldiers from the Burmese Army attacked Tha Dah Der village in Karen State, Eastern Burma on 23 July, burning 50 homes, a school and a church. Over 600 villagers fled as the army advanced, joining 300 more from neighboring areas whose villages have not yet been attacked, but who have abandoned their homes in fear to seek refuge in the jungle.

No casualties have been reported as most of the residents fled in advance of the attack by the army. Burma Army soldiers shelled Tha Dah Der village with mortar rounds before burning the village to the ground. The displaced villagers left most of their possessions behind, escaping with what little food they could carry with them into the jungle. It is the rainy season in Eastern Burma and those in hiding are in desperate need of shelter, food, medicine and security. Lack of clean water and the prevalence of disease-carrying insects in the jungle are of particular concern.

Hundreds more civilians are fleeing towards the Thai-Burma border, and some have already crossed the border to seek refuge in Thailand. It appears that the Burmese Army and troops from the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), which is allied to the dictatorship, are preparing for a new offensive against ethnic Karen civilians in Eastern Burma in the run-up to the regime's sham elections expected at the end of the year.

Benedict Rogers, Christian Solidarity Worldwide's East Asia Team Leader and author of *Than Shwe: Unmasking Burma's Tyrant*, said, "These attacks are the latest in a long litany of offensives against Karen civilians, which amount to crimes against humanity. The regime's record is one of widespread and systematic rape as a weapon of war, forced labor, attacks on civilians, murder, and destruction of over 3,500 villages in eastern Burma alone since 1996. The UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Burma has concluded that these may amount to crimes against humanity, and has urged the UN to establish a commission of inquiry to investigate these crimes. Australia, the Czech Republic, Canada, Slovakia and the United Kingdom have expressed support for this in principle, so now it is time for these countries to work proactively to build an international coalition to establish a UN inquiry. The junta cannot be allowed to continue these attacks with impunity."