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## **BURMA | Army Continues Crackdown on Christians**

The United Wa State Army (UWSA) has expelled a group of eight Catholic clergy and laypeople from the Wa region in Burma's Shan State, which is near the Chinese border, this week. The case is the latest indicator of an increasing crackdown on Christians in the region.

Two priests, three nuns, and three lay teachers were expelled following an expulsion order issued Oct. 12 aimed at clergy who arrived in the region after 1992. Last month, another priest, five nuns, and six teachers were similarly expelled.

The expulsions are part of a campaign of increased targeting of Christians by the UWSA in the region since Sept. 13. According to the Union of Catholic and Asian News (UCAN), pastors have been detained, churches destroyed and shut down, and religious schools closed as part of a crackdown on what the UWSA has referred to as religious extremists.

The UWSA announced that all churches built after 1992 were constructed illegally and will be destroyed, and has forbidden the construction of new churches. Five churches have reportedly been destroyed and 52 shut down. Undated videos have emerged online which appear to show UWSA officials destroying crosses.

Last week, reports emerged of approximately one hundred Christians who were released by the UWSA after being forced to sign pledges stating that they would only pray privately in their homes. Days later, religious leaders in the region reported that 41 male and female Bible students were forcibly recruited into the UWSA.

"The scale, suddenness and severity of this crackdown is profoundly concerning. We urge the international community to monitor this situation closely and consider what action could be taken to protest at this repression and protect the Christians in UWSA-controlled areas," Benedict Rogers, CSW's East Asia Team Leader, said. "The influence, at some level, of the Chinese authorities appears to be a factor driving this persecution, which is an alarming indication of the extension of China's influence and repression beyond its borders. Religious and ethnic minorities in Burma are already facing a rise in persecution at the hands of the Burma Army and a militant Buddhist nationalist movement, but this particular crackdown appears to be related more to

China's influence, with economic, security and political interests at play. If Burma is to have any chance of peace and any hope of democracy, it must respect basic human rights for all its people of all religions and ethnicities, and protect freedom of religion or belief for all. Violations of freedom of religion or belief, whether by the Burma Army, militant Buddhist nationalists, ethnic armed groups or by China extending its repression beyond its borders are unacceptable and must be held accountable."