



## MEDIA ALERT

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Uniting Church appalled by plans to hold Burmese constitutional referendum in face of humanitarian disaster**

The Moderator of the Uniting Church, Robert Watson, today said he was appalled by reports the Burmese military junta is planning to move ahead with a constitutional referendum, despite the fact that thousands of Burmese people have been killed, injured and left homeless by a major hurricane disaster over the weekend.

“We welcome the news that some humanitarian groups have been allowed to enter the country to offer aid, and the Uniting Church, through the Christian World Service, will work with Myanmar Council of Churches to assist the relief efforts.

“The size of the disaster is comparable to the 2005 tsunami, and our prayers are with those affected, and with all those involved in relief efforts.

“The Uniting Church has been working to support Burma for a number of years and the WA Synod is supporting the views of democracy and human rights organisations that the referendum in Burma is a sham.

“We call on the Burmese military junta to abandon the referendum at this time,” said Mr Watson.

The Moderator met with the revered Buddhist leader and head of the International Burmese Monks Organisation, the Venerable U Pannya Vamsa in March. At the meeting he heard about the violent crackdown on the monks in September 2007 and how Australians can assist the democracy movement.

The Burmese community in Perth and internationally has expressed concerns that a new constitution will entrench military rule and prevent opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi from holding an elected office.

A vigil to raise awareness of the referendum has been planned by Democracy for Burma Action Group outside the Perth Wesley Church, on May 9 from 6pm to 8pm. This vigil will now also be an expression of support for those affected by the disaster.

The Moderator also expressed his support for the pro-democracy campaign.

“The Uniting Church actively supports the campaign for freedom and democracy in Burma. Western Australia has the largest Burmese community in Australia and we share with them our hope for peace, justice and genuine reform.”

**The Moderator is available for comment.**