

Burma/Myanmar: Investigate the assassination of U Ko Ni, and address the alarming situation of minorities

(Bangkok, 2 February 2017) – The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) condemns the assassination of U Ko Ni, a prominent Muslim lawyer and legal advisor to the National League for Democracy (NLD), on 29 January 2017. We extend our condolences to the family of U Ko Ni and the people of Burma/Myanmar at this tragic moment.

U Ko Ni, 65 years old, was shot dead at Yangon International Airport just after his return from a trip to Jakarta. His assassination indicates the alarming law and order situation in Burma/Myanmar, where minorities are more vulnerable than others. The incident also warns the international human rights community of the urgency to call on the Burma/Myanmar Government to urgently address the situation in compliance with the international human rights standards.

The assassination of U Ko Ni was carried out amidst continuous allegations of systemic human rights violations by security forces against the Rohingya people in Rakhine state. Security operations have also simultaneously escalated in other ethnic minority areas in the North where abuses continue to be reported. FORUM-ASIA echoes the view of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Yanghee Lee, that the Government and military should open the country for international assistance including the United Nations to support democratic transition and to combat the climate of impunity and distrust in the society.

The Special Rapporteur concluded her visit to the country on 20th January 2017. She will present her report at the 34th session of the UN Human Rights Council in March. The Member States of the Council must use this opportunity to set up an independent, credible and international investigation into serious allegations of abuses in Burma/Myanmar. Such an international initiative has become necessary, as the Government has failed to consider allegations of egregious abuses seriously and in a credible manner.

The incident occurs at a time when the Government of Burma/Myanmar has created a smokescreen around Rakhine state by blocking access for independent observers as well as much needed humanitarian aid. The Arakan State Commission appointed by the Government to investigate some of these allegations, was neither independent nor credible. Its findings reflect the Government's unwillingness to resolve the crisis. As of January 2017, summary executions, rapes and house destructions continue to be reported, and about 65,000 Rohingya people have fled as refugees from the state. The Burma/Myanmar Government continues to refuse to recognise Rohingya as citizens and provide necessary protection to them.

U Ko Ni advocated for constitutional reform and amendments to the four laws on Race and Religion Protection. His assassination may worsen the situation of distrust between Buddhist and Muslim

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communities in Burma/Myanmar. It is therefore crucial for the Government to promptly and thoroughly conduct an investigation into the killing of U Ko Ni and bring the perpetrators to justice.

We also urge the Government of Burma/Myanmar to cooperate with the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar to develop a benchmark for human rights situation in the country as per the resolution of the 31st session of the Human Rights Council. Any further delay towards these progressive steps will worsen the situation in Burma/Myanmar, and many years of international efforts towards human rights in the country, will be wasted.

About FORUM-ASIA:

FORUM-ASIA is a regional human rights group with 58 member organisations in 19 countries across Asia. FORUM-ASIA has offices in Bangkok, Jakarta, Geneva and Kathmandu. FORUM-ASIA addresses key areas of human rights violations in the region, including freedoms of expression, assembly and association, human rights defenders, and democratization.

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