



Press Release: Arrest of Two Burmese Journalists Part of Worrying Pattern of Targeting Media

18 December, 2017, London, UK -- The Burma Human Rights Network is extremely alarmed by the arrests of Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo who work as journalists for Reuters. The two were arrested late in the evening on December 12th or early in the morning on December 13th and have been accused of being in possession of documents related to the military's operations in Rakhine State, where the Government has been widely accused of carrying out ethnic cleansing. The arrests of Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo give every indication of an orchestrated attempt to suppress media outlets that challenge official government narratives and fit into a greater pattern of arrests and intimidation against the media.

"The erosion of press freedom in Burma, especially in regards to covering human rights and conflict, is a deeply troubling trend in Burma which can not be ignored by the international community. If Burma is to emerge as a truly democratic state it must respect a free press which at times will rightfully hold them accountable," said Kyaw Win, Executive Director of Burma Human Rights Network.

Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo have been charged with violations under section 3.1 of the Official Secrets Act and if found guilty they could face up to 14 years imprisonment. Their arrest is supposedly the result of their possession of documents related to the military campaign in Rakhine State, where Wa Lone is especially well known for impressive, hard hitting and credible investigations. It is difficult to believe his arrest is not in some part a response to how effective he has been at uncovering atrocities and egregious behavior by the military inside of Rakhine State. These arrests come a little over a month after the arrest and detention of Aung Naing Soe, another Burmese journalist, on trumped up charges based on obscure antiquated laws. Several more arrests have occurred against journalists during the year as well.

The Burma Human Rights Network calls upon the Burmese Government to release Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo immediately and to take appropriate steps to ensure freedom of the press can continue in the country unhindered. The pattern of arrests and intimidation of journalists in the country is antithetical to the democratic reforms Burma is pursuing and represent the repressive and violent history it is trying to emerge from. The international community should use all appropriate measures to aid in the release of the detained journalists and should view these arrests as part of a continuing erosion of press freedom in the country, and likely an attempt to suppress information regarding atrocities committed by the military in Rakhine State. These issues all stem from the same source, the Burmese Military, and the Government must address them within their capacities if they are ever to fully transition to a civilian government.

Editors note

Over the course of the year several journalists have been arrested inside of Burma for minor or obscure offenses or on false accusations. Individuals who have spoken with the press have also been arrested and charged with false assertions of wrongdoing. Before recent democratic reforms the country was notorious for censorship and heavy handed approaches to the media, including the arrests and detention of media. Recently Burma has become significantly more antagonistic with international media as the coverage of the current conflict in Rakhine State has exposed a number of serious accusations against the military. At the same time domestic media has faced serious pressure to repeat government lines.

Background on the Burma Human Rights Network (BHRN)

Burma Human Rights Network (BHRN) is based in London, operate across Burma and works for human rights, minority rights and religious freedom in Burma. BHRN has played a crucial role advocating for human rights and religious freedom with politicians and world leaders.

Media Enquiries

Please contact:

Kyaw Win

Executive Director of the Burma Human Rights Network (BHRN)

E:kyawwin78@gmail.com

T: +44(0) 740 345 2378