



Joint Statement: Myanmar to Immediately Release Journalists

(Bangkok, 12 October 2018) – The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA), Equality Myanmar and Progressive Voice condemn the recent arrests of three journalists from Eleven Media - Nayi Min, Kyaw Zaw Linn and Phyo Wai Win. It is a worrying deterioration of press freedom and freedom of expression in Myanmar. Human rights groups call on the Government of Myanmar to immediately release the three journalists and urge the authorities to refrain from further suppression of press freedom.

The three journalists were arrested after Aung Kyaw Khine, a Director in the Yangon Regional Government, filed a complaint with police over the alleged violation of Section 505(b) of the Penal Code which penalises ‘whoever makes, publishes or circulates any statement, rumor or report with intent to cause (...) fear or alarm to the public or to any section of the public whereby any person may be induced to commit an offense against the state or against the public tranquility.’ If found guilty, they could face up to two years’ imprisonment.

The complaint was filed over an article published on 8 October by Phyo Wai Win criticising Yangon Regional Government’s business ventures, including a public private partnership which involves Regional Ministers as shareholders. This is not the first time that Eleven Media, the largest private newspaper in the country, is facing such attack. U Than Htut Aung, its Executive Director and U Wai Phyo, its Senior Editor were arrested in late 2016 for an alleged violation of Section 66(d) of the Telecommunications Law over an editorial that implied corrupt dealings involving a Chief Minister.¹

This is only the latest in a long series of cases brought against the media under vague and outdated laws in an attempt to muffle criticism against the Government. Myanmar has been sliding in the World Press Freedom Index, ranking 137th out of 180 countries in 2018.² It enforces repressive laws that have been used to target human rights defenders, journalists and critics. Last month, Reuters journalists Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo were sentenced to seven years’ imprisonment under the Official Secrets Act for investigating a massacre in Rakhine State.³

Human rights groups FORUM-ASIA, Equality Myanmar and Progressive Voice urge the Myanmar Government to immediately release Nayi Min, Kyaw Zaw Linn and Phyo Wai Win and drop all charges against them. Myanmar must abide by international human rights standards on the upholding of

¹ [Eleven Media Team Granted Bail as Defamation Case Continues](#)

² [World Press Freedom in Myanmar](#)

³ [Myanmar: Government fails to protect Press Freedom](#)

freedom of expression and revoke repressive laws used to target defenders, journalists and critics. Myanmar's transition from the military regime to the quasi-civilian Government raised hopes of a new democratic rule in the country – hopes that have remained unfulfilled. Human rights groups call on the regional and the international community to hold Myanmar and its leaders accountable to this vision of Myanmar, where fundamental freedoms prevail, and the rights of all are respected.

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