

Myanmar: End Reprisals against Kyaw Soe Oo and Wa Lone

(Bangkok, 29 March 2019) – The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) urges Myanmar to end reprisals against journalists Kyaw Soe Oo and Wa Lone, for their investigations into what the United Nations has referred to as ‘gravest crimes under international law’ against Rohingya.¹

The journalists were convicted of violating Myanmar's Official Secrets Act in December 2017, for allegedly disseminating sensitive information detrimental to national security. The journalists' lawyers have argued that the police planted secret documents on the two journalists during a planned meeting. Both were sentenced to seven years of imprisonment, and have been in jail since their conviction. A previous appeal was rejected by the Myanmar High Court in January 2019. The Supreme Court has recently decided to rule on an appeal on the case.

Kway Soe Oo and Wa Lone's convictions were globally condemned as a reprisal for their investigation into the massacre in Rakhine State, and for the press freedom in Myanmar.² Their investigative report³ led to widespread international condemnation of the Myanmar military, the Tatmadaw, and eventually to the convictions of seven soldiers.⁴ It shed further light into the plight of Rohingya, and contradicted the Government's denial of the use of disproportionate force by the military. The UN Fact Finding Mission report,⁵ released in 2018, would later refer to ‘genocidal intent’ by security forces, reflected in the use of hate rhetoric and the ‘extreme scale and brutality of the violence committed’.⁶

The Government of Myanmar must protect and promote press freedom in the country in line with international standards. Releasing Kyaw Soe Oo and Wa Lone, and remedying their unjust detention is a first step towards demonstrating the willingness to protect press freedom. FORUM-ASIA also calls on the review, amend or repeal of existing repressive laws in Myanmar, including the Official Secrets Act, which target human rights defenders and journalists with the intent of silencing dissent. In the absence of a genuine commitment from the Myanmar Government, the international community must step up to protect the journalists who have exposed human rights violations suffered by Rohingya, and other marginalised groups in Myanmar.

¹ Report of the independent international fact-finding mission on Myanmar

https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/FFM-Myanmar/A_HRC_39_64.pdf

² Myanmar: Government fails to protect Press Freedom <https://www.forum-asia.org/?p=27179>

³ Massacre in Myanmar <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/myanmar-rakhine-events/>

⁴ Seven soldiers sentenced to 10 years over Inn Din Killings <https://frontiermyanmar.net/en/seven-soldiers-sentenced-to-10-years-over-inn-din-killings-army>

⁵ (N 1)

⁶ Since the violence escalated in 2017, more than 700,000 Rohingya are estimated to have left the country following mass atrocity crimes committed by Myanmar military and security forces. Civil society called for Myanmar's case to be referred to the International Criminal Court following consistent refusal from the Government to hold its military accountable.

About FORUM-ASIA:

FORUM-ASIA is a regional human rights group with 67 member organisations in 21 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 democratisation.

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