



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Three Karen human rights defenders face charges for attending peaceful gathering

KHRG strongly condemns the criminal charges brought against Daw Sein Htwe, Ma Zar Chi Linn, and Naw Larshee Htoo for attending a peaceful gathering in support of Naw Ohn Hla, a Karen activist who was on trial for commemorating Karen Martyrs' Day in Yangon on August 12th 2019.

Approximately 130 people attended the gathering on September 27th 2019, which started at the Maha Bandula Park and subsequently ended in front of the High Court in Kyauktada Township, Yangon. They demanded for the charges against Naw Ohn Hla to be dropped and for equal rights for ethnic minorities in the country. The three aforementioned activists were wrongfully accused of leading the protest and were charged under Section 19 of the Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Law. Based on these charges, they face up to three months in prison. They were summoned for questioning at the Kyauktada police station on October 4th 2019.

The Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Law effectively criminalises peaceful expression in Myanmar, and has been repeatedly used to arbitrarily detain and arrest organisers and participants of peaceful assemblies, in direct violation of international human rights standards. These charges are one in a series of the Myanmar government's efforts to further curtail the already constrained civic and democratic space in the country through the criminal justice system. The increasingly prevalent use of this and other provisions in the Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Law restricts the people's right to freedom of expression and assembly, and evidently creates a chilling effect on activities that promote human rights and fundamental freedoms in Myanmar.

We urge the Myanmar authorities to immediately drop all criminal charges against Daw Sein Htwe, Ma Zar Chi Linn and Naw Larshee Htoo, and cease the instrumentalisation of laws to undermine the legitimate work of human rights defenders. KHRG further calls on the Myanmar government to amend the Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Law to ensure that its provisions comply with international human rights standards.

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Ma Zar Chi Linn - Democracy and Peace Women (DPW)

Naw Larshee Htoo – Karen Women Union (KWU)

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