

## Burma: Lift The World Longest Internet Ban in Rakhine and Chin State



Yangon/London -- Burma Human Rights Network calls upon the Burmese government to lift restrictions on phone and internet coverage that have been in place in northern Rakhine State and parts of Chin State for the past year, beginning on 21 June 2019. The restrictions were put in place by the Ministry of Transportation and Communications, which is under control of Aung San Suu Kyi's NLD party, as fighting between the Burmese Army and the insurgent group Arakan Army intensified in the region.

*"The restrictions on internet and telephone service in Rakhine and Chin by Aung San Kyi's NLD Party have significantly harmed the civilian population. By blocking internet and phone usage in these areas, Burma has prevented reports from civilians on human rights violations in the conflict and the medical and aid needs of those impacted by the conflict. There is no apparent need for the internet ban for the Burmese Army except to inflict suffering on civilians and cover up their crimes,"* said BHRN's Executive Director, Kyaw Win.

The restrictions are in place in Maungdaw, Buthidaung, Rathedaung, and Myebon townships in Rakhine State and one additional township in Chin State. Since the restrictions on the internet were established the conflict in the region has continued uninterrupted while civilians have been killed regularly by artillery, helicopter assaults, and in crossfire incidents. In February of this year the International Court of Justice imposed provisional measures on Burma to ensure no acts which contribute to the Genocide of the Rohingya could occur. However, reports of attacks on civilians, including Rohingya, from the region have decreased significantly as a result of internet ban and several incidents have likely gone unreported. Displaced civilians and those living in remote areas reported severe shortages on medicine and aid before the restrictions and they are less able now to seek help from outside of their immediate area.

The spread of Covid-19 cases in both Rakhine and Chin State makes communications and internet access for civilians particularly vital. Restriction on internet and blockade on humanitarian aid imposed by NLD government significantly undermining international humanitarian and human rights norms, putting millions of civilian lives into high risk in this pandemic.

Burma must lift all restrictions on communication in Rakhine and Chin State and allow full access to NGOs and press to the region. The UN, UK, US, and ASEAN nations must insist that Burma lifts all restrictions on communications and allows full unfettered access for NGOs and journalists to the region. The Internet blackout should be considered by the International Court of Justice as part of an ongoing campaign to deprive civilians of fundamental human rights and access to life-sustaining aid and treatment, which would be in concert with crimes and violations in their investigation of Genocide of the Rohingya.

### **Background on the Burma Human Rights Network (BHRN)**

Burma Human Rights Network (BHRN) is based in London and operates across Burma/Myanmar 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.

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