



## **Burma: Drop Charges Against Rakhine Student Activists Immediately**

10<sup>th</sup> September 2020 – London/UK -- Burma Human Rights Network calls on the Burmese authorities to immediately release the leaders of the Rakhine State Student Union, Ko Toe Toe Aung, Ko Kyaw Naing Htay, and Ko Than Naing. The leaders were arrested in front of the State Government Office by officers from the No.1 Police Station of Sittwe on 9th September 2020, at 1 pm local time. The arrest was made during a protest against the on-going civil war which has targeted Rakhine civilians. The protest also called on the Burmese government to lift the internet ban in Rakhine state and Chin state.

“These student leaders were only practicing their rights – freedom of expression and arresting them is clearly a breach of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which Burma is a state party. This was a peaceful protest against the brutal military operations in Rakhine state and the unethical and inhumane internet ban during the Covid-19 pandemic. Free speech and freedom of expression are shockingly undermined by the NLD government. Burma must immediately overturn its policies and behaviours which violate the fundamental human rights of its citizens,” said BHRN’s Executive Director, Kyaw Win.

Police in riot gear stormed the protest and arrested the student leaders. They have been charged with violating the Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Law section 19. The punishment is not more than three months in jail or thirty thousand kyats fine or both. If the evidence proves that they have breached the law another time the punishment is not more than a year jail or a hundred thousand kyats fine or both.

These Rakhine University Student Union leaders recently visited the Rohingya IDP camps and reached out to their Rohingya peers in the camps in solidarity. Their efforts for peace and reconciliation were remarkable and established a new page in the history of Rakhine state that bridged the two communities and restored communications. They stand as an example of a way to a better future in Burma, yet have been criminalised and deprived of their freedoms by the authorities who themselves have done so much harm to the peace and prosperity of the country. They should, at very least, not be arrested for practicing their rights. BHRN calls on the international community to utilize all tools at their disposal to apply pressure on the Burmese government to release these university student leaders immediately.

### **Organisation’s Background**

BHRN is based in London, operates 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**

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