



## **Burma: Overturn the Conviction of Activist Maung Saungkha**

5 September 2020 -- London, U.K. -- Burma Human Rights Network calls on the Burmese authorities to immediately overturn the conviction of poet and activist Maung Saungkha. Maung Saungkha was convicted under Section 19 of the Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Law for hanging a banner from an overpass that read, "Is the internet being shut down to hide war crimes and killing people?" The banner referenced the internet blackout in Rakhine and Chin State where the conflict between the Burmese army and the ethnic armed organization, Arakan Army has been ongoing with numerous instances of suspected human rights violations. Maung Saungkha was ordered to pay a fine of Kyat 30,000 (\$22.55) or spend 15 days in jail. Maung Saungkha chose the fine.

"The conviction of Maung Saungkha is another troubling example of Burma's lack of respect for free speech and their disregard for the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Even though he escaped with only a fine, the charges against him are meant to stifle free speech, political activism, and any opposition to the military's brutal tactics in their wars against minorities. Burma must immediately overturn his conviction and get rid of all laws which violate the fundamental human rights of their citizens," Said BHRN's Executive Director, Kyaw Win.

Maung Saungkha's case is one of many examples in recent years of worsening restrictions on free speech since the National League for Democracy took power. The party's head and country's de facto leader, Aung San Suu Kyi has failed to deliver many of the reforms the international community had hoped would come when she took power. Yet, she is seldomly held accountable by the international community for her and her party's shortcomings.

BHRN calls on Burma to immediately overturn the conviction of Maung Saungkha and to revoke any laws which undermine free speech, free assembly, and any other fundamental human rights. Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD must make measurable steps towards a government that allows a freer and more equitable society in Burma. Further, Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD should be embracing the activism of the brave men and women like Maung Saungkha that call for a better society that is free from the oppression of the Burmese military. BHRN calls on the international community to utilize all tools at their disposal to apply pressure to the Burmese government and military to reform in a way that benefits their people and not those clinging to power.

### **Media Enquiries**

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