

CSO Working Group on MNHRC Reform Call on the Myanmar government to Deliver on Commitments Made During its Human Rights Review

[Yangon - 23 September, 2020] Today, the CSO Working Group on Myanmar National Human Rights Commission Reform (‘the MNHRC Working Group’) calls on the Myanmar government to adopt legislative guarantees to enable the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission (MNHRC) to better protect and promote human rights for all persons in the country. The press conference was held the day after the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights, Mr. Tomas Andrews, raised a myriad of human rights concerns during his oral update to the United Nations Human Rights Council, indicating a need for a stronger National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) that will act as an ally for those who continue to work for the protection of human rights and strengthening of democracy in Myanmar.

In July 2020, the MNHRC Working Group made a joint submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review (UPR) specifically addressing key aspects of the performance of the MNHRC in relation to the recommendations made by the UN Member States during the 2nd cycle of the UPR. The Working Group expresses concerns over selection and appointment of commissioners, the MNHRC’s performance in situations of armed conflict and unrest, pluralism, adequate funding and financial independence, interaction with the international human rights system, monitoring of places of deprivation of liberty, and the protection of human rights defenders (HRDs).

“In the context of ongoing civil war and lack of democratic reform, it is vital that the MNHRC takes a leading role in human rights protection,” said Bo Bo from Generation Wave “UN member states should urgently press Myanmar to deliver on much needed reforms, including the reform of the MNHRC.”

Decades-long civil war in Myanmar has continued unabated, and in the past five years since the last review, armed conflict has exponentially worsened. Most recently on 3 September, two villages were burned down by the Myanmar military in Kyauktaw Township, Rakhine State and according to All Arakan Students' & Youths' Congress (AASYC), nearly 190 houses have been set on fire. On 8 September, the Myanmar military’s artillery strikes killed at least four local villagers including two children and 11 villagers were injured in Nyaung Kan Village, Myebon Township, in Rakhine State. Yet, the Working Group is greatly disappointed to learn that the MNHRC is not taking any action to respond to such tragic cases that are taking place in Rakhine State.

“The MNHRC remains silent over ongoing grave human rights violations in conflict-affected areas, especially in Rakhine State. People in Rakhine are severely suffering from atrocity crimes such as arbitrarily killing, burning of villages and forced displacement committed by the Myanmar military. But the military’s perpetrators continue to enjoy impunity. That is why it is so important that we have an effective and independent NHRI that people can rely on, not only for the promotion of human rights, but for the protection of human rights in Myanmar” said Lway Poe Kamaekhour from Ta'ang Women's Organization.

MNHRC was awarded a ‘B’ status in November 2015 by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions’ (GANHRI) Sub-Committee on Accreditation (SCA) due to its poor performance in addressing human rights situations in the country. “The recent appointment of commissioners by the NLD government which consists of former civil servants with ties to the former military regime, also proves

that there is lack of interest from the government in strengthening the MNHRC and that it has blatantly ignored the recommendations provided by the UN Member States in its last human rights review” said Aung Zaw Oo from Association of Human Rights Defenders and Promoters.

“While the MNHRC has been operational nearly ten years, it continues to suffer from a public confidence deficit and lacks legitimacy as it continues to fall substantially far from the minimum international standards mandated in the Paris Principles for a NHRI to be considered credible, legitimate, independent and effective,” said Thet Thet Aung from Future Light Center.

“Countries at the UN review should urge Myanmar to immediately reform the MNHRC so that it is in line with the Paris Principles,” said Bo Bo from Generation Wave.

The Working Group will continue to reiterate its calls to reform the MNHRC until it is an independent, effective, and transparent national human rights institution that promotes and protects the rights of all people of Myanmar in line with the Paris Principles. In addition, the Working Group calls on MNHRC to cooperate with UN Special Rapporteur in addressing the deteriorating human rights situations in Myanmar.

For more information, please contact:

- Nang Zun Moe, Executive Director, Progressive Voice (PV), +66 (0)80 027 4515, zunmoe@progressive-voice.org
- Thet Thet Aung, Director, Future Light Center, +95 (0)979 493 2344, thet2aung2012@gmail.com
- Lway Poe Kamaekhour, Joint General Secretary (1), Ta'ang Women's Organization, +95 (0)925 612 8582, poekamaekhour2013@gmail.com
- Aung Zaw Oo, Communications and Advocacy Director, Association of Human Rights Defenders and Promoters, +95 (0)942 103 9493, 2012hrdpnetworks@gmail.com
- Bo Bo, Executive Director, Generation Wave, +95 (0) 94 210 87992, bobo@generationwave.org

Editor’s note

The MNHRC Working Group consists of 22 diverse Myanmar civil society organizations that works to advocate for the reform of the MNHRC so it is an effective, independent, and transparent NHRI that promotes and protects the rights of all people of Myanmar in line with the Paris Principles – the international standards for NHRIs.

During the 2nd cycle of the UPR, Myanmar received eight recommendations pertaining to the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission, which it supported. These recommendations, in addition to the MNHRC Working Group’s joint submission to the 37th Session of the Working Group, can be viewed [here](#). A factsheet reflecting key issues from the joint submission can be accessed [here](#).