

Sigve Brekke
CEO, Telenor Group
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Fornebu, Norway

Date: July 12, 2021

Subject: Myanmar civil society calls on Telenor and the Norwegian government to cancel sale of Myanmar business to M1 Group

Dear Mr Brekke,

We (464) civil society organisations across Myanmar are outraged at Telenor's announcement to sell their Myanmar business to Lebanese company M1 Group. This sale will embolden the terrorist military junta and put our lives at risk.

Telenor rolled out its network in Myanmar in [2014](#) with promises of “connectivity” and “empowerment.” The same year, King Harald of Norway led a [royal visit](#) to Myanmar and met with Telenor staff. Speaking at Yangon University, he said, “we see it as our responsibility to support you... as a true and honest friend.”

In the subsequent years, Telenor built up a highly profitable business. As an indicator, the company's [2020 revenue](#) from Myanmar was over US\$800 million.

Telenor has had a track record of engaging with civil society and independent media, considering human rights concerns and acting with transparency. This did not stop Telenor from implementing secret government orders to shut down the internet and block websites. Parts of Rakhine and Chin states were under an internet shutdown for more than a year, from June 2019. But Telenor was often the only source of information regarding the government's abusive orders.

On February 1, 2021, the military attempted to take power, forming a junta that is conducting a nationwide terror campaign against the Myanmar people. Since the coup, Telenor has issued statements in support of democracy but has also been forced to install interception software that allows the military to conduct surveillance on its network in an abhorrent breach of privacy.

In these circumstances, when the people of Myanmar are faced with the dual crises of Covid-19 and the terrorist military junta, we expected Telenor to live up to its international human rights responsibilities to the people of Myanmar, under the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the OECD Guidelines on Responsible Business. Telenor has an obligation to minimise negative human rights impacts associated with its business and provide remedy when negative impacts occur.

Telenor has a responsibility to consider the human rights impact of any disengagement from Myanmar. Does its current course of action harm the people of Myanmar worse off? Our answer is yes. Telenor and the Norwegian government are not being a friend of Myanmar, as King Harald promised.

Telenor's main competitors have an appalling track record when it comes to human rights. State operator MPT is now under military control and Mytel is part owned by military

business Myanmar Economic Corporation. Ooredoo does not do business with transparency. Telenor had provided crucial ethical leadership in the telecommunications industry, pushing for responsible business practice, even if outcomes were less than we hoped.

Telenor is selling their business to M1 Group, who are included on the Burma Campaign UK's [Dirty List](#) because of their tower business with Mytel. Their tower business was also named by the United Nations Independent [International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar](#). M1 Group has a record of doing business under dictatorships, without regard for human rights, documented by [Justice For Myanmar](#). This includes business in Sudan during the [Darfur genocide](#), in Yemen and in Syria, where it may have financed atrocities. There are also [corruption charges](#) in Lebanon against M1 Group's co-founder, Najib Mikati.

Telenor has not consulted with civil society over the sale. They have not consulted with customers. They have not consulted with the people risking their lives to resist the military junta, whose lives are in Telenor's hands. We have not been presented with any human rights or corruption due diligence regarding the disposal of their Myanmar business. What will happen to the personal data of Telenor's 16 million users? Is Telenor handing that to M1 Group, who are an affiliate of the Myanmar military?

Telenor claims that their ethical approach to business [promotes](#) "internationally recognised standards". They claim that they [try to](#) "always protect society and people in their digital life through security and privacy measures". Telenor is now not living up to these standards.

As civil society, targeted in the military's terror campaign, we call on Telenor and its main shareholder, the Norwegian government, to immediately suspend Telenor Myanmar's sale to M1 Group. We see this sale as not only the disposal of Telenor's business in our country. It is also the disposal of our lives. We urge the following urgent actions:

- Cancel the sale to M1 Group given the serious human rights and corruption concerns.
- Conduct comprehensive and public human rights due diligence on any sale of Telenor's Myanmar business.
- Meaningfully consult with Telenor Myanmar's stakeholders on any disengagement from Myanmar, including civil society, journalists, customers and those who are risking their lives to oppose the military junta.
- Act in accordance with Telenor's obligations under the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, including the principle of responsible disengagement.

Sincerely,
Civil Society Organisations based in Myanmar

Contact:

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Note: Due to safety and security reasons, names of civil society organisations based in Myanmar will not be disclosed.