



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

**Statement on the charges against the youths who demanded the lift of the internet
blockage in Rakhine and Chin states**

26th June 2020

On June 21st, six youths were charged under section 19 of the Peaceful Assembly Law for demanding the reopening of internet in Rakhine and Chin states. In an interview with Mizzama, Myo Min Tun, one of the youth who was charged stated that the Township administrator Zaw Min brought the charges due to photographs being taken without the permission of the authorities. These photographs were then distributed on Facebook.¹ The other five youths are from Yangon and Kyauktada Township, the police opened cases against them for putting up vinyl banners on the Sule footbridge.

KHRG condemns the charges against the youths who were exercising their right to freedom of expression. This is an illegitimate interference with their right, and it must be stopped. Civilians must be empowered to exercise their right to association, free speech and peaceful assembly. These rights cannot be disproportionately limited, as they have been in this incident. The restrictive provisions of the Peaceful Assembly Law have been frequently used by government authorities to charge civilians raising legitimate concerns while exercising their right to protest. This legislation is unacceptable and must be struck down or amended to ensure that civilians can speak up without fear of imprisonment.

On June 2019, internet access was blocked in all the nine townships of Rakhine State. Access was later reinstated in five townships, but then blocked again earlier this month. As of June 2020 only one township in Rakhine state has internet access. This arbitrary and unjustified policy directly impacts on civilian's ability to exercise their right to freedom of expression and access to independent information. Therefore, for good reason, the youths protested against this internet blockade. There are human rights violations and potentially crimes against humanity being perpetrated in Rakhine and Chin states² and the internet blockade is stopping the locals from reporting them.

¹ Mizzima (June 2020), "[Six people charged under section 19 of the Peaceful Assembly Law for demanding the reopening of internet in Rakhine and Chin states](#)" [Translated from Burmese].

² OHCHR (April 2020), "[Myanmar: "Possible war crimes and crimes against humanity ongoing in Rakhine and Chin States" – UN Special Rapporteur Yanghee Lee](#)".

This prosecution of free speech undermines the core values of democracy and human rights. It has a chilling effect on activists and outspoken people as this is happening under a pro-democracy government. KHRG calls for the charges against the youths to be immediately and unconditionally dropped. Further, prosecution for expressing free speech cannot continue and must be stopped. Activists and civilians should not be punished for speaking up against the government. It is unacceptable for such arrests to continue while the Tatmadaw still operate with impunity. Therefore, we urge for the Government to stop carrying out such charges and to amend the Peaceful Assembly Law to ensure that this does not happen in the future.

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