



Condemnation of Attack on Freedom of Press

March 10, 2021

The Karen Human Rights Group expresses its strongest condemnations of the military regime's attack on free speech in the wake of the February 1 coup that toppled Burma's democratically elected government. In the weeks since taking power, the ruling State Administrative Council and its security apparatus have systematically targeted journalists reporting on the ongoing protests and Civil Disobedience Movement.

Dozens of journalists have been arrested with many more attacked and beaten by police and civilian supporters of the regime, despite being clearly identified as members of the press. Police barricades restrict their freedom of movement and many reporters have expressed fear of escalating reprisals for documenting the government's worsening human rights violations. State police have also conducted raids and seizures of vital equipment on press offices of several major news organizations. Many of these press agencies have had their licenses arbitrarily revoked.

These egregious attacks on the freedom of the press have unfolded against a backdrop of worsening violations of free expression across society. Since taking power, the military has twice carried out nationwide restrictions on mobile and internet services. In recent weeks, it has imposed nightly blackouts on telecommunication services, which have been used to arbitrarily arrest protestors and opposition leaders in their homes.

Even as these abuses carry on in the streets, the State Administrative Council has proposed a cybersecurity law that would impose draconian restrictions on the internet by allowing the military to intercept data, block sites and target citizens for what they share on social media. Even as this new law is discussed, the regime has already implemented many of its provisions through amendments to existing laws, including the 2017 Law Protecting Privacy and Security of Citizens and the 2004 Electronic Transactions Law.

Freedom of expression, both by citizens and members of the press, is an essential component of the right of all people to live free and dignified lives. The freedom to receive and impart information is guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, alongside other international human rights conventions. The regime's attempt to impede journalists from reporting on its treatment of protestors is a troubling harbinger of escalating violence and human rights violations at the hands of state security forces.

The military State Administrative Council would see the people of Burma forced back into the dark ages that Burma suffered under during earlier eras of military rule. It would build walls between its citizens and the outside world, preventing the international community from bearing witness to the gross human rights violations that it commits against its people. However, they will not succeed. Hundreds of thousands of Burma's children take to the streets nationwide every day to declare that Burma has taken its place among the democratic nations of the world and that its citizens will defend their hard-fought liberty against any attempt to return them to subjugation and tyranny.

KHRG calls on the State Administrative Council to restore press freedoms, revoke all legislative attempts to deny free expression, and to respect the demands of protestors around the country. We urge the international community to take all measures to compel the military regime to step

aside. Finally, we call on the United Nations Security Council to recognize the unfolding humanitarian crisis and threat to peace in Burma and to invoke its responsibility under chapter 7 of the UN Charter to restore peace and security to the country.

Media Contact

Naw Htoo Htoo – +66 (0) 85-268-5519

Saw Nanda Hsue - +66 (0) 85-268-5519