



Human Rights Now

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Myanmar: Human Rights Now calls for the immediate release of Reuters reporters Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo from detention

On 12 December, Myanmar authorities detained two Reuters reporters, Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo, in Yangon. The two reporters had been reporting on the recent military crackdowns in Rakhine state against Rohingya Muslims, which have led to more than 600,000 of them fleeing into Bangladesh since the crackdown started last August. The reporters have been held incommunicado since meeting with two police officers; their location has not been disclosed; and they have not been allowed prompt access to lawyers or contact with family members.

Following their arrest, Myanmar's Ministry of Information released a photo of the journalists in handcuffs and stated that the reporters had "illegally acquired information with the intention to share it with foreign media." It then announced that the two faced charges under Article 3 of the Official Secrets Act. On 18 December, the Myanmar President Htin Kyaw authorized the police to proceed with a case. The colonial-era Act has an incredibly broad definition of an official secret, which can cover any information that "appears" prejudicial to the interests of the State in an official's opinion; and as the information involves military activities the journalists would be subject to a severe 14-year sentence (Art. 3(1), (2)).

This standard subjects any person possessing an unpublished government document or a photo of military activity to arrest, which puts investigative journalists at serious risk of prosecution and makes the law inconsistent with Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It also virtually places the burden of proof on journalists to prove they are not guilty in a situation where guilt is defined by the opinion of the very authorities arresting them. The detentions have been criticized by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and a number of governments, including the US, UK, and Canada, as well as some members of Myanmar's NLD Party.

The detention of journalists reporting on such critical matters to the public interest is an egregious attack on freedom of the press in Myanmar that will severely undermine the ability of journalists to conduct their legitimate work without fear of reprisal.

Human Rights Now (HRN) calls on the Myanmar government to immediately release the Reuters reporters, drop the proceeding of their case, cease any threats or intimidation of journalists for their legitimate activities, and make assurances that freedom of press will be guaranteed to journalists in Myanmar.

Human Rights Now (HRN) is an international human rights NGO based in Tokyo with over 800 members of lawyers academics. HRN dedicates to protection and promotion of human rights of people worldwide.