

18 December 2017

Myanmar: Two human rights journalists arrested under Official Secrets Act

On 12 December 2017, two human rights journalists, **Ko Wa Lone** and **Ko Kyaw Soe Oo**, were arrested in Yangon. They were working on stories about the military crackdown on the Rohingya Muslim minority in Rakhine State. They will be charged under Myanmar's colonial-era Official Secrets Act, 1923, which carries a maximum sentence of 14 years.

[Ko Wa Lone](#) is a correspondent for the Yangon bureau of **Reuters** news service. He was formerly a senior reporter for the Myanmar Times and joined Reuters in July 2016. He has regularly reported on military activities in northern Rakhine State. This year he jointly won an honorable mention from the Society of Publishers in Asia for his Reuters coverage of the Rakhine crisis in 2016. [Ko Kyaw Soe Oo](#) has been working with Reuters since September 2017. He has previously reported on the segregation enforced by local Buddhists between the Rohingya and Rakhine communities.

On 12 December, Ko Wa Lone and Ko Kyaw Soe Oo went missing after they had been invited to meet police officials for dinner. The two reporters were arrested and officially charged at Htauk Kyant station in Mingalardon Township in northern Yangon on 12 December at 11:30 pm. The two police officials whom they were meeting were also arrested and charged under the Official Secrets Act. On December 13, The Ministry of Information of Burma released a short statement claiming that the reporters had “illegally acquired information with the intention to share it with foreign media”. On 14 December, the police told Ko Wa Lone's wife that the reporters were taken from Htaunt Kyant police station in north Yangon to an undisclosed location by an investigation team shortly after their arrest.

Journalists are not allowed to travel independently to Northern Rakhine State, which is the main location of the Rohingya crisis. Pre-publication censorship has ended, but the government is clamping down on freedom of speech through colonial laws, threats, intimidation and imprisonment. On 30 July 2017, human rights defender and chief editor of Myanmar Now news agency Ko Swe Win was [arrested](#) at Yangon International Airport as he was trying to fly to Bangkok for a short work trip. He was later freed on bail on 31 July. He was reportedly taken into police custody in relation to a defamation case brought by a follower of an extremist Buddhist monk.

Front Line Defenders condemns the arrest and detention of human rights defenders Ko Wa Lone and Ko Kyaw Soe Oo, which it believes are directly connected with their peaceful and legitimate work for human rights in Myanmar and the legitimate exercise of their right to freedom of expression.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Myanmar to:

1. Immediately free **Ko Wa Lone** and **Ko Kyaw Soe Oo** and drop all charges against them, as it is believed that they are solely motivated by their legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights;
2. Inform the families and lawyers of Ko Wa Lone and Ko Kyaw Soe Oo of their place of detention, and allow them immediate and unfettered access to the human rights defenders;

3. Ensure that the treatment of Ko Wa Lone and Ko Kyaw Soe Oo, while in detention, adheres to the conditions set out in the 'Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment', adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 43/173 of 9 December 1988;
4. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Myanmar are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, including judicial harassment.

Front Line Defenders respectfully reminds you that the United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by consensus by the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1998, recognises the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders, their right to freedom of association and to carry out their activities without fear of reprisals. We would particularly draw your attention to (to Article 6 "Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others: (a) To know, seek, obtain, receive and hold information about all human rights and fundamental freedoms, including having access to information as to how those rights and freedoms are given effect in domestic legislative, judicial or administrative systems"

Please inform us of any actions that may be taken with regard to the above case.

Yours sincerely,



Andrew Anderson

Executive Director