

Baseless imprisonment of two Reuters journalists decried

Monday 3 September 2018

(Bangkok, Paris) FIDH and its member organization Alternative ASEAN Network on Burma (ALTSEAN-Burma) condemn the conviction and harsh prison sentence handed down to two Reuters journalists today and call for their immediate and unconditional release.

At approximately 10:30am, the Yangon Northern District Court handed down a seven-year prison sentence to Reuters journalists Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo under Article 3.1(c) of the British colonial-era 1923 Official Secrets Act. The charges stem from allegations that the two had collected and obtained secret documents detailing the movements of security forces with the intention to harm national security. The two reporters remain detained in Yangon's Insein Prison.

"Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo have been arbitrarily detained on trumped-up charges for uncovering a massacre of Rohingya civilians, which has been acknowledged by Myanmar's military. Today's prison sentence against the two Reuters journalists is baseless and marks a massive setback for press freedom and the rule of law in Myanmar."

Debbie Stothard, FIDH Secretary-General and ALTSEAN-Burma Coordinator

On 12 December 2017, Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo were arrested on suspicion of violating the 1923 Official Secrets Act almost immediately after meeting police officers at a restaurant in Yangon and being handed documents allegedly linked to security operations in Rakhine State.

One of the witnesses for the prosecution, a senior policeman, admitted in court that a senior officer had ordered his subordinates to "trap" the journalists by handing them the classified documents. He was subsequently sentenced to a one-year prison term for violating police discipline.

At the time of their arrest, the two had been working on an investigation into the killing of 10 Rohingya Muslim men and boys in September 2017 during military 'clearance operations' in Inn Din Village, Maungdaw Township, Rakhine State.

During the trial, Kyaw Soe Oo told the court that immediately after their arrest, they were hooded and brought to the Aung Tha Pyay special police interrogation site in Yangon's Mayangone Township for interrogation. They were subsequently held incommunicado by police for two weeks and their right to legal counsel withheld until their first hearing on 27 December 2017. They also reported being subjected to sleep deprivation and forced to kneel for hours during interrogation during the early stages of their incommunicado detention. Wa Lone testified that during the interrogation an officer offered a "negotiation" over the journalists' arrest if they agreed not to publish the story – an offer he rejected.

FIDH and ALTSEAN-Burma reiterate their call for the repeal of the 1923 Official Secrets Act and other draconian laws that are not in line with international standards. The two organizations also urge the immediate and unconditional release of the 85 political prisoners that remain incarcerated in jails across

Myanmar.

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