1 year after the coup in Myanmar: silencing and oppression of critical voices

Today, exactly one year ago, the military junta seized power in Myanmar and violently cracked down on nationwide peaceful and democratic protests. The crackdown on independent media and freedom of expression within the country that followed immediately after, has degraded press freedom dramatically. Recently, attacks on the free press have intensified extremely, leading to the killing of 3 independent journalists and the arrest of 3 journalists from ethnic media outlets in January 2022 alone. We call on the international community to join us in demanding the military junta to put an end to the escalating violence against journalists, to seek justice for these courageous journalists, and to provide safe refuge to those whose lives are at risk both inside and out of the country.

Since the onset of the coup, the Myanmar military has made sure to keep a tight grip on the flow of information in the country. Centralizing information and censoring independent journalists is one of the main tactics used by the military as a way of seizing control and limiting freedom of expression. On February 1st 2021, the sporadic internet black outs that followed, were a way of limiting citizens’ access to information. Shortly thereafter, the army seized control of state television and the Ministry of Information. In early May 2021, the military subsequently declared all satellite television illegal. The licenses of 9 media houses were revoked and 4 charged under Section 505 (A) ever since.

Alarmingly high levels of censorship, arbitrary arrests, violence and even killings of journalists, demonstrate the increasing danger that journalists in Myanmar are facing. Local journalists and ethnic media workers have become open and physical targets of the junta. Many journalists have already been assaulted, shot at and injured while covering national protests, illegally arrested and prosecuted for carrying out their journalistic work - often accused of supporting opposition forces. So far, 136 journalists have been arrested, 49 remain in detention and at least 3 journalists have been killed (source: ASEAN). After the coup the military changed the Penal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code, and introduced the New Section 505 (A) that prohibits causing fear, spreading false news and agitating crimes against a government employee, all punishable by up to three years’ imprisonment. The junta is using this law against the media.

Following these large threats, many independent journalists have gone into hiding and move around on a daily basis. This makes it next to impossible to operate independently inside the country. A large group of journalists and media houses have fled to neighbouring countries Thailand and India. With the recent battles of Lay Kyaw Kyaw, more than 15 ethnic media organizations were pushed to cross the border into Thailand. The journalists in exile are facing numerous challenges such as the obtainment of work visas, discrimination and ethnofobia that hamper their safety.

Despite all challenges, media organizations and freelance journalists are extremely resilient and haven’t stopped their important work despite the rising pressure. Critical voices continue their work of daily reporting and voicing criticism. Ethnic media continue their work from KNU-liberated areas. New, innovative and creative solutions are developed to continue working and providing access to information for Burmese citizens.

Nonetheless, the crackdown on the media and the hostile environment affecting the safety of journalists of Myanmar is concerning. It is evident that the junta sees journalists as their enemy, and we are concerned that they will not hesitate to use more violence in the battle for facts and information. The crackdown on the media comes at a time where the continuation of independent and accurate information is crucial to the conflict situation in Myanmar, to provide people with lifesaving information, offer them facts about the
ongoing events, counter misinformation, and record human rights violations. Without facts and access to reliable information, the people of Myanmar will remain unable to decide over their own destiny and fully enjoy human rights.

**Our calls to action**
The undersigned organizations strongly condemn the continued violence against media workers in Myanmar. We welcome earlier statements of [UNESCO](https://www.unesco.org) and the [Media Freedom Coalition](https://www.mediareporters.org) condemning the violence and internet shutdowns imposed by the junta. But more is needed. That is why we call for:

- the international community to continue to condemn and address violations of press freedom in Myanmar and ensure that those responsible will be brought to justice;

- governments from both neighboring countries as well as the international community should create a safe haven to the journalists who are stuck in a limbo, by providing them with emergency visas. The situation that many journalists fleeing Myanmar due to threats to their lives are facing, only to find themselves in a situation where their lack of a legal status puts them at risk of persecution and eviction by the authorities, is dire. There is a real sense of urgency in terms of Myanmar journalists requiring safe ways to seek refuge through emergency visas;

- the international community is to provide long term support to independent Myanmar media including smaller ethnic media organizations from remote areas in order to recover, rebuild, and continue their reporting either in Myanmar or in exile. Media development organizations, media outlets and Myanmar journalists have shown resilience and have continued their vital work in order to bring reliable information to the Myanmar public. They need long-term support.

**Undersigned**
ACOS Alliance
Alliance of Independent Journalist (AJI)
Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand (FCCT)
Freedom Forum (FF)
Free Press Unlimited (FPU)
Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD)
IFEX
International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)
Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA)
MiCT - Media in Cooperation and Transition
PEN America
Reporters Without Borders (RSF)
Rory Peck Trust (RPT)
Southeast Asia Freedom of Expression Network (SAFEnet)