



Special Advisory Council for MYANMAR

Thailand: Deporting DVB Reporters to Myanmar Would Violate International Law

11 May 2021: The Special Advisory Council for Myanmar (SAC-M) says that three DVB reporters and two associates who fled violence and persecution in Myanmar must not be forced back by the Thai authorities. To do so would violate international law.

On 9 May, three reporters from the Myanmar news outlet the Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB) and two associates were arrested in northern Thailand after having fled across the border from Myanmar. The five have been charged with illegal entry into Thailand and are awaiting trial.

“To forcefully send the three DVB reporters and their associates back to Myanmar, where they would face certain arrest and persecution, would be a violation of the customary international legal principle of non-refoulement,” says SAC-M.

On 1 February of this year, the Myanmar military attempted to seize control of the country by launching a coup but was met with massive nationwide peaceful protests and other non-violent forms of civil disobedience that prevented the coup from succeeding.

The military responded by launching a nationwide systematic campaign of terror that has steadily escalated in intensity and is designed to force the population into submitting to military rule. Nearly 800 people have been murdered and nearly 4,000 arbitrarily detained by the security forces, including journalists. Many people have died while in military custody showing signs of torture. Many more have been subjected to beatings and other forms of extreme violence.

Journalists have been systematically targeted as the military tries to suppress information circulating about its violent onslaught against civilians up and down the country. Freedom of the press, essential to peoples' right to information, is under severe attack.

More than 70 journalists have been arrested since the start of the coup. In March, the military revoked the licenses of all remaining independent media outlets. Despite the danger, the DVB reporters continued to carry out their work as journalists, reporting and informing people on what is happening in their country.

“The response from the Thai authorities should not even be in question,” says SAC-M. “The five should be released from detention and the charges against them dropped. They should be granted protection, reassurance and security, with access to their fundamental human rights. Given the situation, this basic response should be taken as granted.”

The Special Advisory Council for Myanmar is a group of independent international experts, who came together in response to the military coup in Myanmar, to support the peoples of Myanmar in their fight for human rights, peace, democracy, justice and accountability.

Yanghee Lee is a former UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, who held the mandate from 2014 to 2020. During this time, she reported on the military's deadly offensives against Myanmar's ethnic and religious minorities, including the mass atrocities committed against the Rohingya in 2016 and 2017. In her final report she warned that the hard-fought democratic space in Myanmar was under threat and called for a national dialogue to bring the nation together.

Marzuki Darusman is former Chair of the UN Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar (FFM) and Chris Sidoti is a former member of the FFM. In 2018, the FFM called for the investigation and prosecution of Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and his top military leaders for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. In 2019, the FFM exposed the extent to which the Myanmar military uses its own businesses, foreign companies and arms deals to sustain its operations and called for immediate targeted sanctions and arms embargoes.

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