ASSESSING DETENTIONS OF JOURNALISTS IN MYANMAR

Assessment from February 2021-2024

The Myanmar military launched a crackdown on media freedom as part of a coup d'état on 1 February 2021, persecuting journalists and rolling back a decade of legal reforms. ICNL has built a large case database of detained journalists, cross-corroborating multiple civil society monitoring efforts, and complementing them with an analysis of the legal status of cases.

Over the past three years, the military has detained over 200 journalists from almost 100 media outlets, charging 160 with a crime under nine separate laws, mainly incitement, “false news”, and weaponized counter-terrorism provisions.

The military’s sham courts have ignored domestic and international law and disregarded due process, sentencing 76 journalists so far to a combined total of 335 years imprisonment, with individual terms up to 20 years long. At least 59 journalists were languishing in prison by February 2024, causing a chilling effect across the media and presenting severe challenges to media outlets’ resources, capacity, and morale.

Despite all of this, Myanmar’s journalists and media outlets remain bravely committed to building a robust information ecosystem for a public desperately seeking to know the truth about military oppression.

Stakeholders, including the United Nations internationally and within Myanmar, should strengthen the support for detained journalists and the media, ensuring it adequately reflects their role as the oxygen of the ongoing movement for a return to democratization. Now is also the time for the development of reform proposals for a legitimate government to roll back the military’s attacks on the rights to freedom of expression and association.