



Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma)

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Statement on International Day of Democracy-Democracy under Strain

15th September 2018

On this year's International Day of Democracy AAPP expresses concerns about the lack of protection for democratic rights in Burma. Today, we are reminded of the historic entanglement of human rights abuses and authoritarian rule. In Burma, those who exercise their freedom of expression endure the risk of being incarcerated for speaking truth to power.

The case of Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo illustrates the limits of Burma's democratic rights. The use of a colonial era act to persecute and intimidate journalists investigating military offences is against the very tenets of democracy. In 1948, the freedom of expression was enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Now 70 years on, fundamental democratic rights are under threat.

We must apply an invigorated focus on oppressive laws used by the regime to suppress democracy and ensure they are repealed so all of Burma's citizens can enjoy their fundamental, inalienable human rights. There remains a number of laws that are inherently undemocratic.

- Section 66(d) of the 2013 Telecommunications Act has been repeatedly and increasingly used to target those defending their right to freedom of expression. The act has a 100% conviction rate.
- The 2016 Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Law (PAPPL) is another important law that is used to stifle activists and protests within Burma. Its restrictions and guidelines are deliberately vague or arbitrary.
- The 1908 Unlawful Association Act Sections 17(a) & (b) has been used by the current government to prosecute a wide array of activists and journalists.
- The 1861 Penal Code Section 505(a) & (b) has also been regularly used to persecute those disseminating information calling for political change.

If Burma is to continue any semblance of a democratic transition, these laws must be repealed and all political prisoners released. A free press and freedom of expression are basic tenets of democracy, they need to be respected.

In solidarity.