



9.3.18

BURMA | Journalists' Jailing Undermines Law

Two Reuters journalists were sentenced to seven years in prison Sept. 3 after exposing a massacre of Rohingyas in Rakhine State, Burma which took place a year ago. Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo were investigating the killing of 10 Rohingya men in Rakhine State by the Burma Army and Rakhine Buddhist villagers on Sept. 2, 2017. As a consequence of their journalistic investigations they were charged with violating the country's Official Secrets Act.

CSW's East Asia Team Leader Benedict Rogers said, "This sentence is a grotesque and outrageous miscarriage of justice, which fundamentally undermines the prospects of democratization in Burma. Without press freedom, there is no democracy, and with the perpetrators of crimes against humanity continuing to commit gross violations of human rights with impunity while those who legitimately expose their crimes are imprisoned for doing so, there is no rule of law. It is Burma's generals, not its journalists, who should be on trial, and the decision to jail these two brave and remarkable reporters is an abhorrent decision. We call for this appalling verdict to be reversed and for the two journalists to be released immediately."

August 25 marked the first anniversary of the Burma Army military offensive that forced more than 700,000 Rohingya to flee their villages into neighboring Bangladesh and led to the deaths of thousands. Zeid Ra'ad al Hussein, the outgoing United Nations high commissioner for human rights, described the events as "a textbook example of ethnic cleansing," and the UN special rapporteur on human rights in Myanmar, Yanghee Lee, said she saw "the hallmarks of genocide."

On Aug. 27, the UN Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar recommended that top military generals, including Commander-in-Chief Senior-General Min Aung Hlaing, be investigated and prosecuted for the crime of genocide in Rakhine State, and crimes against humanity and war crimes in Kachin and Shan States, stating that the abuses in these states "undoubtedly amount to the gravest crimes under international law."