

## End The World's Longest Internet Shutdown – Now Entering Its Second Year

June 21, 2020

MCRB and its partners in the [Myanmar Digital Rights Forum](#) including [Free Expression Myanmar \(FEM\)](#), [Myanmar ICT Development Organization \(MIDO\)](#) and [Phandeeyar](#), together with local and international organizations on 21 June issued a [joint statement](#) to mark the passing of one year since mobile data was shut down in eight townships in Rakhine and Chin State.

The statement condemns the continued shutdown, the longest in the world, and calls on the government to immediately lift all restrictions on internet access and to restore telecommunications unconditionally to full capacity. It also calls on the government to:

- Immediately reinstate access to the internet in the remaining eight townships in Rakhine and Chin States
- Review Articles 77 and 78 and other Articles of the 2013 Telecommunication Law, and amend them to be in line with human rights standards
- Refrain from restricting internet access and bandwidth restrictions in the future, either in these currently affected areas or elsewhere in Myanmar, including in other conflict areas, and during periods of elections.

Last year, telecommunication companies in Myanmar were instructed by the Ministry of Transport and Communications (MOTC) to turn off mobile internet in nine townships of northern Rakhine and Paletwa Township, Chin State. Currently, eight townships remain in the blackout ([Maungdaw Township restrictions were lifted on 2 May](#)).

MCRB believes that this shutdown is an ongoing violation of the economic, social, cultural, developmental, political, and civil rights of the residents of these townships, and is causing significant harm to civilians in one of the least developed regions of Myanmar. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it is even more important for all to have access to universal, resilient, open, secure, and affordable access to information and communications technologies. Along with the restrictions on movement and access in relation to COVID19, people in the rural areas lack information about [COVID19](#) outbreak, at a time when the government, including the [State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi](#), is increasingly making use of social media to communicate. Internet shutdown also makes coordination difficult between humanitarian aid groups, medical staff, and undermines safety in the conflict zones. The information flow between civilians and their families, and media outlets is disrupted.

The joint statement follows on from MCRB's recent initiative with MDRF partners to start a move towards [collective action to reform Article 77](#) of the 2013 Telecommunication Law, as well as other articles that do not meet international human rights standards related to freedom of expression and privacy. These were identified in MCRB's [2015 Sector-Wide Impact Assessment \(SWIA\)](#) on the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Sector in Myanmar. (Article 77 has been used by the government has used to force telecommunications operators to shut down data and block websites).

The [4th Myanmar Digital Rights Forum](#) on 28/29 February 2020 recognized the importance of universal access to the internet as a fundamental enabler of a wide range of human rights. This has been repeatedly reaffirmed by the UN, and in 2018, the UN Human Rights Council maintained a



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JOINT STATEMENT

consensus on the Resolution on [‘The promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the Internet’](#). Furthermore, a 2015 [Joint Declaration on Freedom of Expression and responses to conflict situations](#) by several UN Human Rights Special Rapporteurs inter alia notes that *“filtering of content on the Internet, using communications ‘kill switches’ (i.e. shutting down entire parts of communications systems) and the physical takeover of broadcasting stations are measures which can never be justified under human rights law”*.

[The UN Human Rights Office for South-East Asia](#) urges Myanmar’s Government to end an internet shutdown in Rakhine and Chin States, as does [ARTICLE 19](#) and [Human Rights Watch](#).

[Delegation of the European Union to Myanmar](#) issued a statement together with diplomatic missions of Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Over the coming months, [MCRB will work with companies and other stakeholders to build a coalition](#) to make proposals for change to the next Myanmar government and parliament.

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## Read also

- [Joint Statement on Mobile Internet Shutdown in Myanmar](#)
- [MDRF calls for the end of the 2G digital blackout](#)
- [MCRB Joins Call to Lift Internet Shutdown and End Website Blocking that Fails the ‘Three Part Test’](#)
- [Imagine Spending a Day Without Data!](#)



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