



ARTICLE 19

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Myanmar: HRC must act on dehumanising 'hate speech' and criminalisation of journalists



A man reads a newspaper on a street in Yangon. As part of the reforms, the government has started to open up the domestic media.

ARTICLE 19 welcomes the recommendations

(<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session37/Documents/A-HRC-37-70.docx>) of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of

human rights in Myanmar, Yanghee Lee, who last week called on the Myanmar government to end the arrest and harassment of journalists and publicly condemn all acts of incitement to hostility and discrimination in the country. We urge the Human Rights Council (HRC) to act on these concerns and to take a strong stance on violations of the right to freedom of

expression and other human rights violations in Myanmar. I know you're ok with this, but you

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Special Rapporteur's report follows the December 2017

mission to Myanmar for access to the country. In the past year, at least 12 journalists have been arrested, and others have faced threats of violence while reporting on ongoing conflicts and other sensitive issues, contributing to a deteriorating environment for freedom of expression in the country.

(<https://www.article19.org/resources/myanmar-hrc-must-address-deteriorating-environment-free-expression/>). Detained *Reuters* journalists Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo were arrested in December 2017 and face up to 14 years imprisonment in relation to their investigation of a massacre of Rohingya villagers by the Myanmar military. The Special Rapporteur called the case "unconscionable" in her report to the HRC, and the UN-mandated Fact-Finding Mission tasked with investigating human rights violations in the country similarly condemned the case in its report to the Council.

In the past year, the Myanmar government failed to make progress on the reform of repressive legislation. Rather, laws such as the Unlawful Associations Act and Official Secrets Act, as well as various Penal Code provisions, continued to be used to unjustifiably restrict the freedom of expression. Amendments to section 66(d) of the 2013 Telecommunications Law, which has been frequently used to prosecute journalists and others, failed to address its fundamental flaws (<https://www.article19.org/resources/myanmar-proposed-changes-to-telecommunications-law-fail-to-protect-free-expression/>). Authorities also continued to deny journalists and human rights monitors access to conflict zones in Rakhine, Shan and Kachin States.

In an oral statement before the HRC, ARTICLE 19 highlighted the government's deliberate campaign of misinformation (<https://www.article19.org/resources/myanmar-oral-statement-hrc37-interactive-dialogue-fact-finding-mission-special-rapporteur/>) regarding the crisis in Rakhine State, contributing to dehumanising narratives directed at the Rohingya ethnic minority. ARTICLE 19 is concerned by the government's failure to follow through on recommendations made last year by the Council to address discrimination and prejudice, concerns that were echoed in

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the Fact-Finding Mission's report. Government spokespersons continued to question the veracity of accounts by Rohingya survivors in the wake of the reports to the HRC, going so far as to

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gest that Rohingya refugees who fled to Bangladesh were

ciated terrorists or seeking a better life

(<https://www.article19.org/look.com/mofamyanmar/photos/pcb.841674226032874/841671496033147/type=gallery>).

(<https://www.article19.org>).

"Unless concrete action is taken to ensure accountability for human rights violations, Myanmar authorities will continue to follow in the footsteps of those before them, seeking to obscure abuses by throttling independent media and silencing dissenting voices" said Matthew Bugher, Head of Asia at ARTICLE 19. "Having retained laws that restrict press freedom and played an enabling role in the spread of intolerance and misinformation, the current government is increasingly casting itself in the mould of previous military dictatorships."

ARTICLE 19 urges the Myanmar government to take concrete steps to address hatred, intolerance and violations of the right to freedom of expression, and asks the Human Rights Council to act to ensure accountability for human rights violations and an end to restrictions on press freedom and free speech in the country.

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