

**Joint Statement by Digital Rights Organizations and Other Civil Society  
Organizations on the Ministry of Transport and Communications' Order to Four  
Telecommunication Service Providers to Block 221 Websites**

1. In the last two weeks of March 2020, the government issued several directives to Myanmar telecom operators ordering them to block at least 221 websites. The government did not make these directives public nor did it publish the list of affected websites.

- On March 26 and 27, *Myanmar Now*<sup>1</sup> and *Frontier*<sup>2</sup> reported that all four telecom operators received the same directive on March 21 to block the websites.
- On March 30, Telenor Myanmar issued a statement announcing that it blocked access to 221 websites, following the Ministry of Transport and Communications' directive<sup>3</sup>.
- On April 1, BNI<sup>4</sup> reported that Rakhine based news agencies Narinjara and Development Media Group (DMG) were no longer accessible on MPT and MyTel from March 23 and 24 respectively. BNI also reported that Karen News, a Karen based local news agency, was no longer accessible on MPT from March 26.

2. We, as civil society, believe that the Myanmar Government's order to block these websites lacks an adequate legal basis and is in violation of international human rights law.

- a. We are concerned that the government is taking advantage of the COVID-19 pandemic to censor legitimate information and curtail freedom of expression.
- b. We are further concerned that, as per UN General Comment No.34, the blocking of the website does not comply with the three-part test prescribed in article 19(3) of the ICCPR:
  - 1) blocking must be clearly defined in the law;
  - 2) blocking must be for a legitimate aim;

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<sup>1</sup> <https://myanmar-now.org/mm/news/3391>

<sup>2</sup> <https://frontiermyanmar.net/en/operators-split-as-telenor-rejects-govt-order-to-block-fake-news-sites>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.telenor.com.mm/en/article/blocking-221-websites-myanmar-based-directive-authorities>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/govt-blocks-ethnic-media-groups-mobile-networks>

3) blocking must be necessary and proportionate to achieve that aim.

- c. In the General Comment 34 of International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), it clearly states that mandatory blocking the access of people to an entire website is an extreme and harsh measure. The UN Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Expression and Opinion, further clarified in its May 2011 report (A/HRC/17/27) that website blocking may only be justified in limited circumstances and in order to deal with content which is prohibited under international law, namely: i. child pornography, ii. incitement to commit genocide and iii. advocacy of racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence. He also stated that decisions for such blocking must be made by a competent judicial authority or body which is independent from any political, commercial or other unwarranted influences and the decision, and made available to the public in a transparent and accessible manner. We are concerned that the government's directives did not follow these conditions.

3. According to the statement by Telenor Myanmar, they initially refused to block websites where the government provided no adequate legal basis, but has since Telenor complied. This raises concerns that the government can order blocking without any lawful reason, and a company cannot refuse because of the consequences from the government.

4. We further note with concern that the blocking of the websites, which include independent media websites from Rakhine state, comes in parallel to a 9-month long internet shutdown affecting 9 townships in Rakhine and Chin States, compounding restrictions on the right to information and freedom of expression of the population in these areas. Civil Society Organizations have been consistently demanding to end the shutdown. However, in addition to ignoring civil society voices, blocking websites of the news agencies working in these areas is an authoritarian-like violation of the right to the access to information, a basic right crucial to media freedom, democratic transformation, and regions' development.

5. In light of the above, we call on the Myanmar government to:

- 1) Immediately reinstate all blocked websites with the exception of those for which the authorities can publicly give clear lawful justifications that comply with international standards and public those justifications at the same time
- 2) Public justifications for the directive issued to the operators, that complies with international human rights law
- 3) Immediately reinstate access to the internet in the nine townships of Rakhine and Chin States currently affected by the internet shutdown
- 4) Review and amend the Telecommunications Law, and in particular Article 77 and 78 to ensure compliance with international human rights standards.
- 5) Refrain from resorting to internet shutdown, bandwidth restrictions, as well as blocking of websites under any circumstance, and in any part of Myanmar

6. While we acknowledge that the government has a responsibility to address misinformation relating to the ongoing COVID-19 epidemic, we believe that this can be done in a lawful and right respecting way, in accordance with international best practices.

To this end, we recommend that the Myanmar Government:

- 1) Proactively disseminate up to date information and make services available for media, fact-checkers and the public to seek out official information on their own time (websites, hotline, bot etc)
- 2) Promote the right to information, and be transparent in responding to external requests for information, so as to mitigate the potential for rumours.
- 3) Promote media freedom, recognizing that quality journalism is an essential part of the dissemination of accurate information and countering of “fake news”.

## **Contacts**

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## **Signatures of the local and international civil society organizations and individuals**

8888 New Generation (Mohnyin)

Access Now

Action Committee for Democracy Development (ACDD)

Ahlin Tagar Rural Development Organization  
AhLin Thitsa Development Committee  
Ahnaga Alinn Development Committee  
Ahr Thit Yaung Chi ( Hline Bwe ) အားသစ်ရောင်ခြည် (လှိုင်းဘွဲ့မြို့နယ်)  
Airavati  
Alinn Bhamaw Local Development Organization  
All Kachin Youth Union  
Arakan Humanitarian Coordination Team (AHT)  
Arr Marn Thit Social Development Organization  
Asho Chin National Independence force.  
Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP)  
Association for Progressive Communications (APC)  
Athan - Freedom of Expression Activist Organization  
Ayeyarwaddy West Development Organization. AWDO  
AYY Famar Union  
Ayyar Pyo May Women Development Organization  
Bee House  
Body and Data (Nepal)  
Burma News International  
Candle Light Youth Group  
Cang Bong youth  
Child Care Foundation (မြဝတီမြို့နယ်)  
Child Prevention Network  
Chin MATA Working Group  
Chin youth  
Chinland Natural Resource Watch Group  
Civil Call (စစ်ကိုင်းတိုင်း)  
CLEAN  
Clean Taunggyi  
Community Empowerment and Resilience Association(CERA)  
Community Association Development  
COMREG Community Response Group  
Constitution Network ( Hpa An ) အခြေခံဥပဒေကွန်ယက် (ဖားအံမြို့နယ်)

Daifin

Dama Ahlin Social Development Organization

Dawei Development Association

Dawei Research Association

Dawei Watch Foundation

Dawei Watch Foundation

Development Organization

Digital Rights Foundation

Doe Myae Civil Social Development Organization

Ei Myat Noe Khin (Digital Rights Activist)

EngageMedia

Equality Myanmar

Famar Agricultural Network

Farmer and Labour Union(Myeik)

Farmer Networks Monyin

Farmers and Land Rights Action Group

FHS (ဖာအံမြို့နယ်)

Foundation for Education and Development (FED),

Foundation for Media Alternatives

Free & Fair (Chaung Oo)

Free and Justice Women Network ( Hpa An ) F&J (ဖာအံမြို့နယ်)

Free Education Service Organization

Free Expression Myanmar (FEM)

FREELAND Organization(Lashio)

Future Light Social Development Organization

Future Star Youth Organization

Future Young Pioneer Organization(FYPO)

Gayunarshin Social

Generation Wave

Golden Future Social Development Organization

Golden Heart Organization

Green Network Mergui Archipelago

Green Rights Organization

Green Rights Organization  
Heartland Foundation(Lashio)  
Hkumzup Development Committee  
Hline Bwe Youth Network လှိုင်းဘွဲ့လူငယ်ကွန်ယက်  
Hope For Children Development Organization  
Hsar Du Wor CBO ( Than Taunggyi ) (ဆာဒူဝော် CBO) (သံတောင်ကြီးမြို့နယ်)  
Hsar Ka Baw CBO ( Than Taunggyi ) (ဆာကပေါ် CBO) (သံတောင်ကြီးမြို့နယ်)  
Hsar Mu Htaw ( Than Taunggyi ) ( လူမှုအထောက်အကူပြုအဖွဲ့ ) (သံတောင်ကြီးမြို့နယ်)  
Htaw Mae Pa CSO ( Hline Bwe ) ထော်မဲပါ CSO (လှိုင်းဘွဲ့မြို့နယ်)  
Htoi Gender and Development Foundation  
Htoi San Local Development Organization  
Htum Thit Sa Rural Development Organization  
Human Right Defenders and Promoters (Palaw)  
Human Rights Foundation  
JCA-NET (Japan)  
Jibonet (Korea)  
Job Coach Coalition (Myanmar)  
Justice Movement for Community - Innlay  
Justice Society Organization(Lashio)  
Kachin National Youth Network (KNYN)  
Kachin State Women Network  
Kachin Women Union  
Kan Chay Arr Man Fishery Development Organization  
Kanbawza Youth Library  
Kantbalu Farmers Union  
Karen Affairs Group KAG (ဖားအံမြို့နယ်)  
Karen State Women Network KSWN (Hpa An )  
Karen Youth Organization ( Hpa Pun ) ကရင်လူငယ်အဖွဲ့(ဖာပွန်မြို့နယ်)  
Karen Youth Organization KYO ( Kyar Inn Sate Kyee ) (ကြာအင်းဆိတ်ကြီးမြို့နယ်)  
Karenni Human Right Groups (KnHRG)  
Karuna Foundation ( Kawkareik ) ဂရုဏာဖောင်ဒေးရှင်း (ကော့ကရိတ်မြို့နယ်)  
Katan Land Development Committee  
Kaung Myat Hnalonethar Health Care Organization

KengTung Land Group

KESAN (ဖားအံမြို့နယ်)

kESAN Karen Environmental and Social Action Network

Khine Mye Thitsa Development Committee

KOG (ဖားအံမြို့နယ်)

LAIn Technical Support Group

Land and Farmer Network (NSS)

Lashio Tomboy and Lesbian Group

LatButta Famar Union

Lawng Byit Hkawng Organization

Light Social Development Organization

Lin lake Kyal Social Development Organization

Living Water Organization

Loi Yang Bum Community Development Organization

Lu Mu Htar CBO ( Than Taunggyi ) ( လူမှုထာ CBO) (သံတောင်ကြီးမြို့နယ်)

M,RJ-Myu Sha Rawt Jat

Magway Region.

Mandalay YMCA

MATA စစ်ကိုင်းတိုင်း

Matu Baptist Churches

Matu forum Committee

Matu social welfare

Matu Women Association

May Doe Arrman Women Development Organization

Men fellowship Matupi

Mi Kayin Youth ( Hpa An ) မိကရင်လူငယ် (ဖားအံမြို့နယ်)

Min Hla Development Organization.

Minggalar Foundation

Minhla Youth Centre

Mon Literature and Culture Association ( Kawkareik ) မွန်စာပေနှင့်ယဉ်ကျေးမှုအဖွဲ့ (ကော့ကရိတ်မြို့နယ်)

Muditar Organization

Mwetaung Area Development Group

Myae Latt Journalist Network

Myan ICT for Development Organization (MIDO)  
Myanmar Center for Responsible Business (MCRB)  
Myanmar Cultural Research Society (MCRS)  
Myanmar Deaf Society  
Myanmar Journalist Network (Ayeyarwaddy Region)  
Myanmar Journalist Network (MJN)  
Myanmar Muslim Youth Association  
Myanmar Women Journalists Society  
Myay Latt Journalist Network  
Myit Ma Ayeyarwaddy Development Organization  
NeT Organization  
Northern Shan State Youth Network(NSSYN)  
Nyan Lynn Thit analytica  
Organization, Matupi  
Our Natural Land  
Oway Education and Youths Institute  
Pan Pyo Let(Banmaw)  
Pan Tain Shin Women Rural Development Organization  
Pan Thi Kyo LGBT Organization  
Paungsee Myittar Organization  
Peace and Development Initiative-Kintha (PDI-Kintha)  
Peace and Justice  
Peace Development Initiative-Kintha (PDI-Kintha)  
Peace Working Committee (Arakan)  
Peasant Legal Aid Network(PLAN)  
PEN America  
Pen Myanmar  
People For People  
People for People (PFP)  
Phandeeyar  
Phyu Sin Myittar Social Development Organization  
Pone Yate Sit Regional Development Organization  
Progressive Voice



Protection Committee for Myanmar Journalists (PCMJ)  
Pwint Phu Development Organization.PDO  
Pyoe Social Development Organization  
Rakhine Ethnic Congress(REC)  
Rakhine Ethnic Congress (REC)  
Rakhine Women Network (RWN)  
Rakhine Youth New Generation Network (RYNG-N)  
Rule of Law Watch Group  
Rural Social Development Organization  
S& K mining Watch  
Salween Network သံလွင်ကွန်ယက် (ဖားအံမြို့နယ်)  
Sane Lann Myo Set ( Hpa An ) စိမ်းလန်းမျိုးဆက် (ဖားအံမြို့နယ်)  
Sarnar Kyi Phyu Social Development Organization  
SarPhyu Famar Network  
Save the Farm  
Saytana Shaesaung Youth Organization  
Saytanar Shin Social Development Organization  
Shan Women Association  
Shwe Minn Tha Foundation (Myanmar)  
Shwe Nathar Famar Development Organization  
Shwe Thinkha Social Development Organization  
Social Program Aid for Civic Education (SPACE)  
Southeast Asia Freedom of Expression Network/SAFEnet  
Southern Journalist Network  
Southern Myanmar Journalists Network  
Southern Youth Development Organization  
Swam Su Ti Rural Development Organization  
Synergy - Social Harmony Organization  
Tai Youth Organization (TYO)  
Tanintharyi MATA  
Tarkapaw Youth Group  
Taunggyi Journalist Association  
TEN ,Taunggyi Education Network

Thazin Legal Aid

The Seagull: Human Rights, Peace & Development

Thit Sar Gone Network သစ္စာဂုဏ်ကွန်ယက်

THWEE CSO ( Kawkareik ) သို့: CSO (ကော့ကရိတ်မြို့နယ်)

Township Leading Group

Uakthon Local Social Development Organization

Upper Myanmar Journalist Network

Upper Myanmar Journalists Organization

Waimaw Civil Society Network

Waimaw Farmers Networks

Waing Maw CSO Network

Wan Lark Development Foundation

Wan Lark Development Foundation (WLDF)

Windayel Village Social Organization ( Hpa An ) ဝင်းဒရယ်ကျေးရွာလူမှုရေးအဖွဲ့ (ဖားအံမြို့နယ်)

WITNESS

Womem fellowship,Matupi

Women Capacity Building ( Kawkareik ) အမျိုးသမီးစွမ်းဆောင်ရည်မြှင့်တင်ရေး (ကော့ကရိတ်မြို့နယ်)

Worker Development Organization

Yai Ywal Yar Youth Development Organization

Yangon Watch

Yatanar Youngyi Social Development Organization

Young Ni Oo Social Development Organization

Young Ni Oo Women Group

Zinlum Committee (Tanphaye)

ကချင်နှစ်ခြင်းခရစ်ယာန်အသင်းတော်များအဖွဲ့ (MGZ)

ကချင်နှစ်ခြင်းခရစ်ယာန်အသင်းတော်များအဖွဲ့ (SGZ)

ကျိုင်းတုံလူငယ် အဖွဲ့

ကလျာဏမိတ္တလူမှုစောင့်ရှောက်ရေးအဖွဲ့...ခင်ဦး၊

ကူညီသောလက်များဒေသဖွံ့ဖြိုးရေးအဖွဲ့

ငွေရောင်အနာဂတ်အမျိုးသမီးအဖွဲ့ - Ngwe Yaung A Nar Gat women Organization (Hsipaw)

စံဖိတ်အမျိုးသမီးအဖွဲ့ - San Phate Women Organization (Hsipaw)

တအာင်းကျောင်းသားနှင့် လူငယ်များအဖွဲ့ (TSYU)

တအာင်းအမျိုးသမီးအဖွဲ့ - Ta'ang Women Organization (Hsipaw)

ထွယ်နီနီခေါင်ဖောင်ဒေးရှင်း

ထီးချိုင့်ကွန်ယက်

နမ့်ခုံးကျောင်းသားဟောင်းများကွန်ယက် - Nam Khone Alumni Network

နွေအရိပ်စာကြည့်တိုက်

ပဒေသာမိုး လူမှုဖွံ့ဖြိုးရေး အဖွဲ့

ပေါင်းကူး

ပေါင်းစီးမေတ္တာ အဖွဲ့

ဗေဒါ လူမှုဖွံ့ဖြိုးရေး အဖွဲ့

မြန်မာရပ်လူငယ်အဖွဲ့ - Myanmar Yat Youth Organization (Hsipaw)

မိတ္ထီလာခရိုင် အလင်းတန်းအဖွဲ့၊

မိတ္ထီလာခရိုင် အလင်းတန်းအဖွဲ့၊

မိတ်ဆွေမြန်မာဖောင်ဒေးရှင်း

မိုင်းပန်လူငယ်အဖွဲ့ - Mong Pan Youth Association

မေတ္တာ ဖွံ့ဖြိုးရေး ဖောင်ဒေးရှင်း

ရွှေတောင်တိုက်နယ်တောင်သူအားမာန် (ဝမ်းတွင်းမြို့နယ် )

ရွှေပုသိမ်မသန်စွမ်းသူများအဖွဲ့ (ပုသိမ်ကြီး)

ရွှေဖီမြေသတင်းအေဂျင်စီ

ရွှေမင်းသား ဖောင်ဒေးရှင်း

ရွှေမောင်နှမမသန်စွမ်းသူများအဖွဲ့ (ဓနုဖြူ)

ရွှေအင်အားမသန်စွမ်းသူများအဖွဲ့ (တောင်ဒဂုံ)

ရှမ်းပြည်နယ်ကချင်အမျိုးသားလုံးဆိုင်ရာကွန်ရက်

လွတ်လပ်သောလူ့ဘောင် (ဖားအံမြို့နယ်)

လားရှိုးမူဆလင်အမျိုးသမီးအသင်း

လီဆူအမျိုးသမီးအဖွဲ့ - Lisu Women Organization (Hsipaw)

လောသာရဖောင်ဒေးရှင်း

သူရိယစန္ဒာ

ဟုမ္မလင်း လူငယ်ကွန်ယက် ( Home Ma Lin Youth Network )

အမရကွန်ယက် (အမရပူရ)

အလင်းမီးအိမ်အဖွဲ့(လားရှိုး)

အာရှအလင်းအရောင်ဖောင်ဒေးရှင်း (ပြင်ဦးလွင်)