



FIDH - International Federation for Human Rights

Alternative ASEAN Network on Burma (ALTSEAN-Burma)

Joint press release

Burma: Four reporters sentenced to lengthy prison terms

<http://www.fidh.org/en/asia/burma/15728-burma-four-reporters-sentenced-to-lengthy-prison-terms>

Paris, Bangkok, 10 July 2014: The conviction of four reporters to lengthy prison terms is the clearest sign of Burma's backsliding on press freedom, FIDH and its member organization, the Alternative ASEAN Network on Burma (ALTSEAN-Burma), said today. On 10 July, a court in Pakokku, Magwe Division, sentenced all four Unity Weekly reporters Lu Maw Naing, Yarzar Oo, Paing Thet Kyaw, and Sithu Soe and the Unity Weekly CEO Tint San to 10 years in prison with hard labor under the 1923 Official Secrets Act.

On 31 January and 1 February, police arrested the four reporters and CEO in response to a 25 January article published by the Unity Weekly, which claimed that the country's military had a secret chemical weapons factory in Pauk Township, Magwe Division. Their trial began on 17 March.

“Burma’s sentencing of reporters to 10 years in prison for writing an investigative journalism story serves as a stark reminder of the fragile nature of the country’s transition to democracy and marks a giant step backwards for its press freedom,” said FIDH President Karim Lahidji. ***“What’s deeply troubling about the trial of the Unity Weekly reporters is that the government brought charges against them using an outdated security law instead of applying the recently-enacted press law,”*** he added.

On 4 March, Burma's Parliament adopted the Printing and Publishing Law. The legislation replaced the draconian 1962 Printers and Publishers Registration Act and removed prison terms for violators of the law.

“Today’s verdict is a shocking reality check for the international community. Without sustained external pressure, the Burmese government feels increasingly emboldened to commit human rights abuses, such as curtailing freedom of expression,” said ALTSEAN-Burma Coordinator and FIDH Secretary-General Debbie Stothard. ***“The international community must exert renewed pressure on Naypyidaw to respect press freedom, repeal all oppressive laws that unnecessarily restrict freedom of expression, and immediately and unconditionally release the four Unity Weekly reporters and CEO,”*** she urged.

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