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PRESS RELEASE

BURMA: End the prosecution of Rohingya human rights defender Kyaw Hla Aung

Bangkok-Geneva-Paris-Rangoon, July 4, 2014. *The Burmese Government must end the prosecution of Rohingya human rights defender Kyaw Hla Aung and immediately release him, the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, an FIDH-OMCT joint programme, and the Alternative ASEAN Network on Burma (ALTSEAN-Burma) said today.*

On July 7, 2014, **Kyaw Hla Aung**, a prominent human rights lawyer, will appear before the Sittwe District Court to face various charges, including “rioting and being armed with deadly weapons” (Article 148 of the Criminal Code) and “injuring a civil servant, interfering with his official duties” (Article 333 of the Criminal Code).

“The ongoing detention of Kyaw Hla Aung is symptomatic of the Burmese Government’s relentless persecution of Rohingya and its misguided policies in Arakan State”, said FIDH President Karim Lahidji. ***“Kyaw Hla Aung is a moderate and well-respected member of the Rohingya community. Instead of keeping him behind bars, the Burmese Government should release him and work with him to promote dialogue between Buddhist and Muslim communities, including Rohingya, in Arakan State”,*** he added.

On July 15, 2013, authorities in Sittwe Township, Arakan State, arrested Kyaw Hla Aung in connection with Rohingya internally displaced person (IDP) protests against attempts by the Government to register them as ‘Bengali’ in April 2013. Clashes between Rohingya IDPs and immigration officials during the protests at Thetkalpyin IDP camp in Sittwe Township forced the authorities to suspend the registration process. However, Kyaw Hla Aung was not present during the protests and, in fact, had tried to contact camp leaders in order to advise them to keep the protests peaceful.

“The arrest and persecution of Kyaw Hla Aung has all appearances of a reprisal seeking to quell protest by the Rohingya. The level of violations remains disquieting. Any way forward must respect an absolute baseline consensus that those who defend the rights of others, including minority populations, need to be protected”, said OMCT Secretary General Gerald Staberock.

Former United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Burma Tomás Ojea Quintana, who repeatedly called for Kyaw Hla Aung’s release, described him as a prisoner of conscience and said his detention was arbitrary. Kyaw Hla Aung suffers from hypertension and stomach problems that require regular medication.

In 1986, Kyaw Hla Aung was imprisoned for two years for writing an appeal to the authorities on behalf of local farmers whose land had been confiscated. In 1990, he was arrested during a crackdown on Rohingya activists and spent the next 10 years in jail. In June 2012, Government authorities detained him, along with several other Rohingya aid workers, for his alleged involvement in the sectarian unrest that hit Arakan State. He was released in August 2012.

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