



# BURMESE MUSLIM ASSOCIATION

## Press Release

### **An interfaith and peace activist has been arrested**

A Burmese Muslim activist, Zaw Zaw Latt, who has been working tirelessly for interfaith peace building in Burma, has been arrested.

Zaw Zaw Latt was arrested at 8 pm, on 14th July in Chan Aye Thar Zan Township, Mandalay. He was arrested in a café by police officer U Soe Naing, who arrested him without an arrest warrant. Zaw Zaw Latt is charged under section 17/1 of the penal code for unlawful association with a blacklisted organisation.

Zaw Zaw Latt is a member of an organisation called Thint Myat Lo Thu Myar (Translation: Peace Seekers). A Buddhist abbot known as Asha Alinn Yaung Sayadaw from Pyin Oo Lwin founded the organisation in 2013, in the aftermath of the Meikhtilar anti Muslim pogroms. The organisation is formed with members from diverse faiths including Buddhists, Christian, Muslims, Hindus and Baha'i. He is also a member of NLD party.

The arrest is related to Zaw Zaw Latt's involvement in a peaceful march to Kachin State in 2013. During the visit to Kachin State he took pictures with the member of Kachin arms group and posted on his Facebook account. The pictures were posted two years ago. He is only now having action taken against him because recently members of Mabatha have been targeting him and spreading rumours that he has connections with armed groups. This shows that authorities in Burma react swiftly whenever the extremist groups demand and pressure them. He has been portrayed as a terrorist on social media.

Zaw Zaw Latt has been working tirelessly for interfaith peaceful coexistence at the grassroots level. His peaceful message is spreading among youth very effectively. Therefore, it is clear that he has become an obstacle for the Buddhist extremist group Mabatha and they have been plotting against him. Since a few months ago the extremist group Mabatha has been spreading rumours against him. He has been accused as being a member of terrorist organisations through postings on Mabatha Facebook pages.

On the other hand, U Wirathu has been travelling and meeting with armed group around the country and posted several pictures but he has never been questioned or arrested. Moreover, there are many journalists, who frequently

travelled to the rebel areas, took pictures wearing uniforms and holding arms but they were also never been questioned or arrested. Member of 88 Generation students also visited Kachin state and took pictures but they were never been questioned or arrested. It is also clear that Burmese government never takes any action against Buddhist extremist group that spread hatred among the citizens of Burma whereas they harass and arrest the people who are dedicated to build a peaceful coexistence among diverse faiths in Burma.

BMA strongly urge the international community to put all possible pressure on Burmese government to release Zaw Zaw Latt immediately. The international community should be committed to interfaith peace building in Burma and to protect those who are dedicated to this cause. Activists like Zaw Zaw Latt should be encouraged, not threatened or framed and punished. Peace activist like Zaw Zaw Latt should not be subjected to arbitrary arrest simply for their involvement in peace building. Noticeably, since the election is closer, the current sensitive situation could easily trigger anti Muslim pogroms. Burma needs more people like Zaw Zaw Latt. Therefore, international community need to address this issue seriously.

Zaw Zaw Latt has been remanded for two weeks but is expected to be sent to Obho jail on 21st July. He is currently still in Chan Aye Thar Zan Police station. The punishment for the breach of the section 17/1 shall not be less than two years imprisonment or could be more than three years and shall be liable to fine.

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