

Feb. 24, 2021

## Joint-statement by foreign correspondents' clubs and associations on the situation in Myanmar

The foreign correspondents' clubs and associations of Thailand, Japan, Jakarta and Taiwan are deeply concerned by harassment and intimidation of the media in Myanmar following the Feb. 1 coup and detention of the country's civilian leaders and members of civil society. At least six journalists had been detained as of Feb. 20, 2021, while countless more have been subject to threats and intimidation by security forces and those associated with the military regime in their reporting. Overall more than 600 people are in detention, most whose whereabouts are unknown, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma).

Increasingly regular internet and social media blockages are hampering information flows and communication. The military regime has also proposed a law that would require local internet service providers to disclose user information to authorities, and to remove content deemed to "cause hatred, destroy unity and tranquility" or be "untruthful news or rumors." Anyone who posts "misinformation or disinformation" could face up to three years in prison if they are deemed to have done so "with the intent of causing public panic, loss of trust or social division."

Further pressure on media comes from the changing legal environment. From Feb. 11, the military regime under the State Administration Council changed laws to allow for warrantless searches, detentions without court approval, and enhanced surveillance. Separately, the Ministry of Information issued a statement to the Myanmar Press Council, an independent media adjudication body, on Feb. 12 alleging that some media outlets were using "incorrect words" in their news reports, including referring to the military's takeover as a "coup" and its installed government as a "junta." The statement said inaccurate usage could be deemed as "acts of instigation that may arouse civil unrest" and may violate publishing laws.

In one recent case of media harassment, security forces in Myitkyina in northern Kachin state detained five Myanmar journalists (working with Mizzima News, Eternity Peace News Network, and 74 Media). They were later released after signing documents saying they would not violate an emergency rule banning gatherings of more than five people and a nighttime curfew.

We urge the State Administration Council to allow journalists to do their jobs without fear of reprisal, and support the call by the Committee to Protect Journalists to the junta authorities to cease and desist harassing, detaining and threatening the media.

**Signed,**

**Foreign Correspondents' Club of Thailand (FCCT)**

**Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan (FCCJ)**

**Foreign Correspondents Association of the Philippines (FOCAP)**

**Jakarta Foreign Correspondents Club (Jakarta FCC)**

**Taiwan Foreign Correspondents' Club (TFCC)**

