Your Excellency,

I am writing to urge you to immediately and unconditionally release all human rights defenders, activists and journalists who are imprisoned in Myanmar solely for the peaceful exercise of their human rights.

While the reforms of recent years are welcome, we are deeply concerned that human rights defenders and activists continue to be arrested, prosecuted, and imprisoned solely in connection with their peaceful activities. In some cases, they are targeted after participating in peaceful protests, where they often speak out against injustice and human rights violations. In other instances, they have criticized the authorities online, including the Myanmar military.

Amnesty International is further alarmed that, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the authorities are targeting journalists and peaceful activists through politically motivated charges, and restricting access to information clearly in the public interest by banning news websites and through internet shutdowns. Now more than ever the rights to freedom of expression and information should be respected and protected. Any limitation on these rights must be provided for in a clear and accessible law, and necessary and proportionate for the protection of public health or other relevant legitimate purposes.

Politically motivated arrests and imprisonment are made possible by Myanmar’s legal framework, which comprises laws that arbitrarily restrict the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly. These include Sections 500, 505(a) and 505(b) of the Penal Code; the Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Law; the Telecommunications Law; the Law Protecting the Privacy and Security of Citizens; and the Unlawful Associations Act. These laws have no place in a country committed to moving away from its repressive past. Amnesty International notes people’s expectations that the National League for Democracy (NLD)-led government would put an end to politically motivated arrests and imprisonment. The NLD’s 2015 election manifesto vowed to secure “freedom and security for all”, including by “revoking legislation that harms the freedom and security that people should have by right”. While the authorities have made some efforts to amend or repeal repressive laws, many still fall far short of complying with international human rights standards.

To end politically motivated arrests and imprisonment in the long term, Myanmar needs to repeal or amend repressive laws and bring those laws in line with international human rights standards. In the interim, we urge the Myanmar authorities to stop using the laws to arrest, prosecute, or imprison anyone simply for exercising their human rights.

Please do not hesitate to contact us should you have any questions. Thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Julie Verhaar
Acting Secretary General

9 April 2020