



UNITED STATES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

The Honorable Rex W. Tillerson
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

January 19, 2018

Dear Secretary Tillerson,

We write to bring your urgent attention to the situation of two journalists who face up to 14 years in prison for their reporting on the devastating humanitarian crisis in the northern Rakhine state in Burma. On January 10th, *Reuters* reporters Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo were formally charged with violating the country's dated Official Secrets Act for their reporting on the ethnic cleansing of Rohingya Muslims in Burma. The arrest of these journalists builds upon a disturbing trend of restricting and prohibiting freedom of expression throughout the country. We urge you to continue your efforts to work with Burmese authorities to immediately release these journalists and drop the charges against them.

Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo were in Burma investigating the existence of a mass grave in Rakhine state, where the brutal ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya Muslim community is taking place. As a result of a military crackdown which began in August 2017, nearly 10,000 people have been killed, and around 650,000 Rohingya have fled the country. The journalists' reporting is critical to providing evidence for investigations into these mass murders. According to Amnesty International and reports from other credible sources, the events surrounding their arrests are questionable. Reports regarding the journalists' treatment in prison have been deeply troubling, as neither journalist was allowed to contact his family or lawyer for up to two weeks after their arrests on December 12, 2017. After the charges were announced on January 10th, nearly a month after their arrest, Mr. Wa Lone's lawyer said he is suffering from back pain and a hernia, but has received no medical treatment while in detention.

Freedom of expression is under serious threat in Burma and the U.S. must continue to push Burmese authorities to end the trend of intimidation, harassment, and detention of journalists. One of the main recommendations from a U.N. commission formed to address the situation in Burma was to improve the freedom of journalists to observe and report on the situation in the Rakhine state. In order for Burma to become a successful democracy, authorities must demonstrate their ability to defend and protect the internationally recognized right to freedom of expression, including freedom of the press.

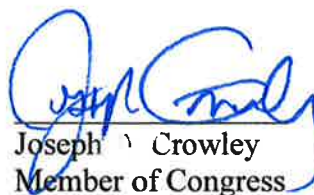
Further, we strongly encourage the Trump Administration to continue the U.S.'s long history of embracing and protecting the freedom of the press. When a president denigrates journalists and their reporting as fake news, it gives license to other countries to crack down on the freedom of press, which can include intimidating, jailing, and torturing members of the media. The U.S. must continue to serve as an example for other countries, rather than allow oppressive regimes to take a cue and act in the same style as Burma.

The next court hearing for Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo is on January 23, 2018. We urge you to continue to reach out to your counterparts in Burma to ask that these unwarranted charges be dropped and the journalists released. I look forward to your response on this important matter at your earliest convenience.


Sincerely,



Mark Pocan
Member of Congress



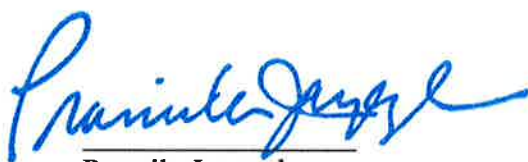
Joseph R. Crowley
Member of Congress



Ro Khanna
Member of Congress



Barbara Lee
Member of Congress



Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress



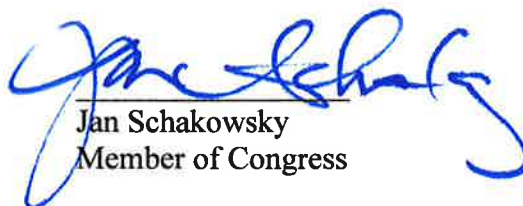
James P. McGovern
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Sander M. Levin
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Jan Schakowsky
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