

Joint Statement on behalf of the co-chairs of the United Nations Group of Friends for the Protection of Journalists on the situation in Myanmar

**March ... 2021
New York**

The co-chairs of the United Nations Group of Friends for the Protection of Journalists - Lithuania, France and Greece - and the undersigned Members of the Group of Friends and the UN Member States, express their deep concern over the attacks on the right to freedom of opinion and expression and the situation of journalists and media workers in Myanmar and strongly condemn their harassment, arbitrary arrests and detention, as well as of human rights defenders and other members of civil society.

Reiterating the Statements of the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the President of the Security Council, we are appalled by the escalating violence in Myanmar and the killing of demonstrators, arbitrary arrests and violence, including against journalists and media workers covering these events, and human rights defenders, as well as the reported torture of prisoners. We join the call for an immediate release of all those detained arbitrarily.

At least 328 people are reported killed¹ and hundreds injured since February 1 in Myanmar. More than 2,000 have been detained, including dozens of local and international journalists and media workers, with numerous credible allegations of torture and ill-treatment in detention, torture and enforced disappearances. Journalists have become a key target of repression in Myanmar amidst the violent crackdown on widespread protests. Some of the journalists face lengthy prison sentences. Several media companies were banned from broadcasting or providing information on any media platform, had their licenses in the country revoked and their offices raided. They all had covered the protests extensively and often live-streamed video.

We strongly condemn the attacks on the right to freedom of opinion and expression, including for members of the media, in Myanmar, both online and offline, the use of internet shutdowns to curtail access to information and the apparent specific targeting of both local and international journalists for violence and arbitrary detention.

We call for an immediate and unconditional release of all peaceful protesters, journalists and members of civil society and other persons who have been arbitrarily detained in Myanmar and demand that the charges against them are dropped.

We share deep concern raised by UN Women over violence that has disproportionately targeted women, recorded during the crackdown against peaceful protesters in Myanmar. Women in detention are also reportedly experiencing sexual and gender-based harassment and violence. We call on the security forces to respect the human rights of women, including female journalists.

¹ As of March 26 (The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, AAPP). Number of casualties will be updated on the day of the release of the Statement.

We call for an immediate end to assaults on journalists and media workers in Myanmar, an accounting of those reported missing, and transparent investigations into all allegations of human rights violations and abuses, and access to justice and redress for victims.

Journalists must be free to report on the developments in the country, including the protests, without fear of reprisal or intimidation. Independent reporting is all the more important in the current context, helping to counter the disinformation campaigns, both online and offline, in Myanmar and to provide the public with factual accounts of events taking place in Myanmar.

We are inspired by the testimonies demonstrating the tremendous resilience and bravery of the local and international journalists and media workers in Myanmar, who risk their freedom and their lives for independent reporting. We remain fully committed to supporting them in their vital mission.

We extend our support to the efforts of the international, non-governmental and grass roots organizations to promote the protection of journalists and media workers, their human rights and fundamental freedoms, and to all the Member States in promoting an environment in which journalists can carry out their work without fear of reprisal or intimidation.

Signed,

Co-chairs of the UN Group of Friends for the Protection of Journalists, Ambassadors, Permanent Representatives of Lithuania, France and Greece

Annex:

Co-signatories (in alphabetical order):