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PEN International
Writers for Peace Committee

Statement on dangers to peaceful free expression in Myanmar and neighbouring countries

The Writers for Peace Committee of PEN International continues to be extremely concerned by the internal conflict in Myanmar and the surrounding region. Destructive forces are severely curtailing freedom of speech and other human rights across the region. The displacement of people, political imprisonment, destruction of homes, the use of spurious legal harassment of opposition voices, the spreading of fear among parents as young people are forced to serve in military organisations they do not support, and the disruption of public services, are becoming depressingly routine.

While Myanmar is not alone in failing to live up to its obligations under the UN Charter and conventions, the behaviour of Myanmar's military regime is particularly unacceptable. The promulgation of a conscription law is a recent example of this. While many countries have periods of legal conscription in their systems, there is a big difference between serving in armed forces in peaceful democratic countries, especially when there is an alternative form of social service available, and being forced to join the repressive forces of a military dictatorship. Young people and their parents are scared; scared of their duties if they agree, even more scared of the repercussions if they do not. If they flee, they are scared too of taking refuge in countries that are themselves unstable and less than friendly to refugees. This fear has already become a reality for the many thousands who have fled the country out of fear of persecution and now live precariously faced with the risk forced return and statelessness.

The international community has already drawn attention to the appalling treatment of the Rohingya people, caught between the brutality of the Myanmar military and the unsympathetic policies of Bangladesh. At a time when press freedom is being curtailed across the region, when governments are using so many instruments to suppress dissent, and when the standards of international tolerance are being ignored by an increasing number of autocratic regimes, the Writers for Peace Committee demands that Myanmar's military rulers end the civil war they themselves started.

In light of the escalating humanitarian crisis in Myanmar and neighbouring countries, it is imperative for the international community to intervene swiftly and to address the grave violations of human rights and humanitarian law. The ongoing conflict has resulted in unimaginable suffering for the people of Myanmar, particularly vulnerable groups - including women, children, and ethnic minorities. Therefore, we urge governments and international organisations to prioritise diplomatic efforts to bring an end to the violence and facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid. Additionally, accountability mechanisms must be established to hold perpetrators of human rights abuses accountable and ensure justice for the victims.



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