



Press Release: 20 Organizations, including BHRN, call on ASSK to Ensure the Rights of Burmese Muslims

3 August 2017 London, UK – The Burma Human Rights Network and 19 other Organizations have issued a letter to Burma's State Chancellor, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, calling on the Burmese Government to ensure the rights of Burmese Muslims following a spat of anti-Muslim incidents inside the country. The incidents, many of them broadly documented by rights groups and local and foreign media, involved efforts by ultra nationalist and authorities to limit the ability of Muslims to freely practice their religion inside of the country. The undersigned includes a variety of ethnic and religious groups in and outside of Burma concerned about the rise of religious nationalism in the country.

The Organizations are:

Arakan Rohingya National Organisation ARNO, Burma Campaign UK, Burma Human Rights Network BHRN, Burma Task Force, Burmese Muslim Association BM, Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK, Chin Human Rights Organization, Christian Solidarity Worldwide CSW, Free Burma Campaign (South Africa), Geutanyoe Foundation, Humaniti Malaysia, International Campaign for the Rohingya, Jewish Alliance of Concern Over Burma (JACOB), Majlis Perundangan Pertubuhan Islam Malaysia (MAPIM), Malaysian Humanitarian Aid and Relief (MAHAR), Odhikar, Progressive Voice (Myanmar), Restless Beings, Stefanus Alliance International.

The letter to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi follows a series of incidents including the efforts against Muslims living in Tharkayta Township in Rangoon (Yangon), where two Islamic schools that were used for prayers were shut down by authorities after protests by ultra-nationalist mobs. Following the closing of the schools, Muslims in the township had to pray in the streets during the beginning of the holy month of Ramadan. On 2 June authorities charged three men for prayers held outside where a crowd of 50 to 100 people had gathered for Ramadan prayers. Similar incidents occurred in Meikhtila and East Yangon's Dagon.

In a broader view, these events are part of a greater pattern of limiting non-Buddhists from freely practicing their religion in the country without significant obstacles. While the population of Burma has grown, the number of Mosques in the country has decreased due to laws banning the building of new mosques and renovation of old mosques. Similarly, Muslims face significant restrictions on the use of schools for religious purposes. These restrictions do not apply to Buddhists who take part in religious activities in their schools freely.

As the religious schools in Tharkayta Township were prohibited from holding prayers, many Muslims took to the streets in the rain to hold prayer as they felt they had greater religious obligation to do so during Ramadan. The prayers were subsequently stopped by authorities as unauthorized public religious organizing they claimed “threatened stability and rule of law.” While three men were charged as a result, legal experts in Burma have argued that the laws used in these cases are negated by Article 24 (b) which states that authorities must protect the right to freedom of religion for residents.

The undersigned have called upon the Burmese Government to immediately address these incidents as systemic and to respond appropriately to the organizing of ultra-nationalists who have successfully pressured authorities to limit and block the religious freedoms of minorities inside the country. As Myanmar is transitioning into a more democratic society, it is imperative that all citizens have unhindered access to universal human rights and that no group may dominate or oppress another formally or informally.

Notes for Editors

There are 50,000 Muslims living in Thaketa and the schools in Thaketa Township were used for prayers for decades prior to recent events, but were forced to stop in 2015 after complaints from ultra-Nationalists. Originally the Township was denied permission to build a mosque, but in 1990 local Muslims were granted permission to use the school to host prayers instead. Following the closure of the two schools which were protested by the ultra-nationalists, some of the remaining Islamic schools closed as a precaution temporarily to avoid confrontation. As a result hundreds of student are going without education.

Background on the Burma Human Rights Network (BHRN)

Burma Human Rights Network (BHRN) works for human rights, minority rights and religious freedom in Burma. BHRN has played a crucial role advocating for human rights and religious freedom with politicians and world leaders.

Media Enquiries

Members of The Burma Human Rights Network (BHRN) are available for comment and interview.

Please contact:

Kyaw Win

Executive Director of the Burma Human Rights Network (BHRN)

E:kyawwin78@gmail.com

T: +44(0) 740 345 2378