



His Excellency President Thein Sein
President of Myanmar,
Naypyidaw,
People's Republic of the Union of Myanmar

12 April 2014

Your Excellency,

We are writing as part of the global online campaign '30 Days for Freedom' to call for the release of Zaw Pe, jailed in Myanmar since 7 April 2014.

Zaw Pe, a video reporter with the Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB), was sentenced to one year in jail for trespassing and disturbing a civil servant on duty, charges that stemmed from a story the reporter pursued in August 2012.

Mr. Pe had intended to visit the Magwe Division Education Department for an interview about a Japanese-funded scholarship programme. However, an educational officer pressed charges against the reporter as well as the father of a student, Win Myint Hlaing, who was present to inquire about the scholarships.

As Zaw Pe himself said, while being transferred to prison after his court appearance, "It is my duty as a journalist to interview people, whether it's the government or a civil society organisation." We entirely agree with him, and believe that such a harsh sentence could indeed send a chilling effect through the Myanmar media that discourages other journalists from pursuing interviews with government officials. The effect of this could well "compromise the balance of news," a very dangerous precedent in the build up to presidential elections in 2015.

Your Excellency, we believe Zaw Pe was imprisoned for pursuing a legitimate story that was in the public interest. Furthermore, we are deeply concerned that his is not an isolated incident, despite Myanmar's recent efforts to transition towards a more open, democratic society. The cases of Ma Khine (jailed for "trespassing") and five staff from *Unity Weekly Journal* (charged under the Official Secrets Act) suggest the authorities are once again targeting journalists in order to stifle a free press.

Your Excellency, we therefore urge you to release Zaw Pa and to ensure better guarantees for press freedom in Myanmar so that the media is fully able to fulfil its vital watchdog role in society.

Sincerely,

#FreethePress
The 30 Days for Freedom campaign

Organised by the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) and the World Editors Forum, the '30 Days for Freedom' campaign aims to highlight the plight of imprisoned journalists worldwide in the 30 days leading up to 3 May, World Press Freedom Day.

www.wan-ifra.org / www.worldpressfreedomday.org

