Date : 11 June 2018

Burma Must Release Unfairly Imprisoned Teacher Ma Hla Phyu



The Burma Human Rights network is calling on the Burmese authorities to immediately release 23-year-old Ma Hla Phyu, a Muslim teacher who was arrested, reportedly denied access to a lawyer and sentenced to a year in prison with hard labour for attempting to travel from Kyaukphu, Rakhine State, to the country's economic centre and former capital, Yangon.

Ma Hla Phyu was found guilty of using someone else's ID in order to travel to Yangon, which she apparently did as a last resort due to heavily discriminatory policies restricting the travel of Muslims from Rakhine State. She was arrested on 26 May by a joint force of police and military at 10pm in Taungup Township. She was sentenced to a year in prison with hard labour on May 28th under sections 6(2) and 6(3) of the immigration act. She was then sent to Thantwe Prison. She was in possession of a National Verification Card, a lower status temporary I.D. Muslims are pressured to accept, especially in Rakhine State.

Her arrest and detention highlights Burma's discriminatory and unjust legal system, where Muslims face absurd and damaging restrictions due to their religious and ethnic background.

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Before attempting to travel to Yangon, Ma Hla Phyu was living in an internally displaced persons' (IDP) camp in Kyaukphyu, Rakhine State, where several Muslim Rohingya were resettled following anti-Muslim violence in 2012. Ma Ha Phyu's home was destroyed in the 2012 riots. Ma Hla Phyu was a university student in her first year in Myanmar's language degree course, but due to the violence in 2012 she was not allowed to finish her schooling and then worked as a voluntary teacher in Kyauk Talone IDP camp, where she lived. She applied twice for permission for a 'Form 4' permission to travel but was denied both times. She intended to travel to Yangon to see her grandmother.

"The Minister of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, Dr Win Myat Aye, told a media conference on 19th April 2018, that NVC holders would be allowed to travel freely and that they would get access to education and healthcare. This proved the promised of Burmese authorities is inconsistency and untrustworthy," said BHRN Executive Director, Kyaw Win.

Her case strongly underscores the tremendous flaws of the Burmese legal system and breaching fundamental human rights norms, which discriminates against minorities largely based on religion, unfairly forcing Muslims to accept National Verification Cards and then denying them fundamental human rights after they do so. The International Community must also take notice of this case and make a stand in her defence, to ensure a more just and fair society not just for Ma Hla Phyu, but to prevent further degradation of rights for all Muslims living inside of Burma.

Background on the Burma Human Rights Network (BHRN)
Burma Human Rights Network (BHRN) is based in London and operates across Burma/Myanmar 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.

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