



Younes Mjhed  
President

Anthony Bellanger  
General Secretary

## **International Federation of Journalists (Asia-Pacific) submission to the Australian Parliament Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade regarding recent developments in Myanmar.**

1. The International Federation of Journalists [IFJ], is the world's largest organisation of journalists. It represents 600,000 media professionals from 187 trade unions and associations in more than 140 countries. The International Federation of Journalists (Asia Pacific) is the Asia Pacific division of the IFJ. The Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance [MEAA] is its Australian Affiliate. The Myanmar Journalists Association [MJA] is affiliated to the IFJ.

2. The IFJ Asia Pacific has taken a keen and anxious interest in the distressing developments in Myanmar with special emphasis on Press Freedom and the safety of journalists, especially members of the MJA. Press freedom conditions have rapidly and drastically deteriorated since the coup. Reports indicate that journalists have been beaten, shot and injured by live bullets and arbitrarily arrested and charged by security forces while doing their jobs covering the demonstrations and the regime's retaliatory clampdown.

3. Australian Journalist and MEAA member Phil Thornton has served pro bono as an adviser to the International Federation of Journalists in South East Asia on events in Myanmar. Phil is an experienced journalist who has lived on the Thai Burma border and written extensively for a wide range of publications on (inter alia) SE Asian matters.

[See: Myanmar's Bloody Sunday - Press logos are becoming a target as Myanmar's military takes aim with weapons and international-supplied surveillance, <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/blog/detail/category/myanmar-campaign/article/myanmars-bloody-sunday.html> Journalists arrested, independent media shut down in Myanmar

<https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/blog/detail/category/press-releases/article/journalists-arrested-independent-media-shut-down-in-myanmar.html>

4. By way of a general background committee members are referred to Phil Thornton's recent article on the IFJ Blog 'After the smoke clears, what will be left of media in Myanmar?' <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/blog/detail/category/asia-pacific/article/after-the-smoke-clears-what-will-be-left-of-media-in-myanmar.html>

5. According to the latest reports, at least 56 journalists have been detained since the coup and five media organisations have been banned. Although some detained journalists have been released, others are facing criminal incitement charges that carry a prison term of up to three years. Other journalists have been injured while trying to do their job: *In the line of fire: the deadly job of covering Mandalay's protests*. Frontier April 6 <https://www.frontiermyanmar.net/en/> The military is using Section 505 (a) of the Penal



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Code to arrest journalists without a warrant. Section 505(a) makes it a crime for journalists to publish statements critical of the military.

6. The situation in Myanmar continues to deteriorate rapidly, and the military has begun broadcasting the names and faces of wanted journalists on national television. ‘Myanmar’s last remaining independent newspaper, *The Standard Time Daily*, has now also been forced to stop printing because of Martial Law restrictions enforced by soldiers and police, as well as concerns for staff safety. The closure of *The Standard Time Daily* is another huge loss for freedom of information. The military’s sponsored *Global New Light of Myanmar (GNLM)* reported the licenses of *Myanmar Now*, *Mizzima Media*, *Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB)*, *7 Day News* and *Khit Thit Media* had been withdrawn from 8 March. The *GNLM* said the five media outlets were “banned from publishing or broadcasting” or using any kind of media or technology platforms.

7. Internet blackouts and a lack of protection for journalists is making it extremely difficult to conduct news gathering work and easy for security forces to act with impunity. A journalist who spoke to the IFJ said: *“The press are targets. My organization cannot print hard copies of our publication... we are restricted to reporting online only, if we can get access. We’re still trying to provide accurate information to the people, show what’s happening in our country. The police and army have deadly weapons, we have our cameras, but we must keep working to show the military crimes, the world must know the truth.”*

8. Faced with extraordinary repression, many journalists are endeavoring to leave Myanmar. Members of banned media outlets have arrived or are making their way to the border. Journalists spoken to by the IFJ have expressed impatience with having to stay on the Burma side of the border. There is an expectation UNHCR registration would solve their security problems and guarantee safety. Experience suggests, however, that a UNHRC card is ineffective in most situations, except in a formal refugee camp.

9. Burmese journalists who have bravely stayed behind will need help with legal assistance and costs associated with arrests, relocation, communication, computing equipment, rent, cameras, transport and other work-related costs – and safe outlets dedicated to their unidentified reporting.

10. The Australian Government should, at a minimum, take the following steps:

- \* provide visas to Burmese journalists fleeing the military regime;
- \* provide relief and funding to Burmese journalists to assist in the conduct of their activities in exposing the conduct of the military regime;
- take a leading role in diplomatic representations to the government of Thailand for support for Burmese journalists, including the facilitation of granting Burmese journalists asylum to settle in Australia.
- take a leading role in opposing the human rights violations of the Myanmar military regime in diplomatic representations in all available international fora, along with ASEAN, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the United Kingdom, the United States the EU and New Zealand.



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11. An Australian Magnitsky Act should be enacted act swiftly to establish a Magnitsky-like sanctions regime. All steps taken to target the military regime in Myanmar by the USA, UK and European Union should be closely followed and emulated.

12. The IFJ Asia Pacific welcomes and opportunity to participate in the Committee processes. It proposes that Phil Thornton represent it at the hearing of the Committee on April 13.



Jane Worthington,  
Director,  
International Federation of Journalists (Asia-Pacific)  
IFJ Asia & Pacific  
C/- Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance,  
245 Chalmers St,  
Redfern Sydney NSW 2016



Philip Thornton



Jim Nolan



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