



**BNI Multimedia Group
Press Release on
Burmese Government blockage of three member's online news sites,
including those based in Rakhine State and Karen State**

Date: March 31, 2020.

The websites of three BNI member news organizations based in Rakhine State and Karen state, including Narinjara News Group and Development Media Group can no longer be accessed through three telecommunication operators namely the Burmese government owned Myanmar Post and Communication (MPT) and Mytel on March 23 and 24, and then yesterday the Norwegian government owned Telenor. Similarly, English language news page of Karen News could not get access through MPT Internet services on March 26.

While different countries of the world are watching carefully and urgently on the prevention, monitoring and treatment of coronavirus (COVID-19), it is crucial for the people living in different ethnic States and Regions in Myanmar to receive reliable and credible information through independent ethnic news organizations.

This is the time that all independent news organizations should be supported to safely and freely report news. BNI can understand the directives of the Governments' Transportation and Communication Ministry to block the websites containing misinformation as well as pornography.

However any blockage should be evidence based to show who are distributing what misinformation. In addition, there should be an especially careful review on any blockage against independent news organizations which are officially registered. Otherwise such blockage of important news would make people in Rakhine and other ethnic States and Regions unable to access reliable information including in their own languages. These information blockages can further endanger their lives during this pandemic.

According to Nan Paw Gay, chair of the BNI policy committee, "This is a crucial time for the news media to distribute accurate and timely information to the people. For our country to march towards democracy through a sustainable peace process, the blockage specifically against independent ethnic State based media, which are reporting and distributing news on the COVID-19 epidemic and ongoing armed conflicts in each region, would force people to live in darkness and it would also be a violation against the Freedom of Expression".

Therefore, the NLD government should review and reopen the blocked websites of independent ethnic news organizations and end the blockage of internet access in Rakhine and Chin States. BNI

would also like to urge the Myanmar Press Council (MPC) to help work for freedom of information and freedom of expression.

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