September 13, 2018

Secretary of State
Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Pompeo:

We write to express our deep concern about two Reuters journalists, Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo, who were sentenced to seven years in prison by a Burmese Court on September 3, 2018. As you know, they were arrested last December for reporting on the genocide in Rakhine State against the Rohingya. Many of us raised the issue with Secretary Tillerson at that time. We appreciated your raising their case on the sidelines of the ASEAN Ministerial. Now that the journalists have been formally sentenced, we believe it is necessary to raise the issue again this time directly with State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi. We also urge you to publicly call on the Burmese Government to immediately and unconditionally release these journalists and other prisoners of conscience.

This case is only the latest example of the ongoing erosion of press freedom in Burma, especially directed at those covering military abuses, religious intolerance, and the Rohingya genocide. For many years under the military junta, journalists in Burma repeatedly faced intimidation, harassment, arrest, and imprisonment. Under a democratically elected civilian government, this should no longer be the case.

Like numerous leaders from around the world, we believe that the journalists’ sentence as politically motivated. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet demanded that the sentence be “quashed and for them to be released, along with all other journalists currently in detention for their legitimate exercise of the right to freedom of expression.” US Ambassador to the United Nations, Nikki Haley, has called for their “immediate and unconditional release.” She added, “The conviction of two journalists for doing their job is another terrible stain on the Burmese government… It is clear to all that the Burmese military has committed vast atrocities. In a free country, it is the duty of a responsible press to keep people informed and hold leaders accountable.”

Additionally, this case comes on the heels of the report from the United Nations Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar issued on August 27, 2018 which contains ample evidence of “reasonable grounds” that the Burmese military’s atrocities meet the legal threshold of genocide. Specifically, the report describes the “intent to commit genocide” against the Rohingya people and names six alleged perpetrators, including the Burmese army commander-in-chief. This dramatic step by the United Nations demonstrates the gravity of the
situation and the need for immediate action. The persecution of Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo casts further doubt that there could ever be an impartial and independent domestic investigation into recent events in Rakhine State. We believe an independent, impartial, and international body must investigate the crimes committed in Rakhine state. We urge you to call for and pledge the support of the United States for such an investigation at the upcoming UN General Assembly this month, and demand the immediate and unconditional release of the two journalists.

Sincerely,

Jan Schakowsky  Steve Chabot  Eliot L. Engel
Member of Congress  Member of Congress  Member of Congress

Brad Sherman  Edward R. Royce
Member of Congress  Member of Congress

Joe Crowley  Ted S. Yoho
Member of Congress  Member of Congress

Debbie Wasserman Schultz  Christopher H. Smith
Member of Congress  Member of Congress

Jackie Speier  Ileana Ros-Lehtinen
Member of Congress  Member of Congress

Betty McCollum  Joe Wilson
Member of Congress  Member of Congress
Gene Green  
Member of Congress

Adam B. Schiff  
Member of Congress

James P. McGovern  
Member of Congress

Barbara Lee  
Member of Congress

Seth Moulton  
Member of Congress

Raul M. Grijalva  
Member of Congress

Ro Khanna  
Member of Congress

Colleen Hanabusa  
Member of Congress

Michael T. McCaul  
Member of Congress

Paul Cook  
Member of Congress

Mark Meadows  
Member of Congress

Barbara Comstock  
Member of Congress

Daniel M. Donovan, Jr.  
Member of Congress

Ann Wagner  
Member of Congress

Brian K. Fitzpatrick  
Member of Congress

Thomas A. Garrett, Jr.  
Member of Congress
Mark Pocan  
Member of Congress

Gregory W. Meeks  
Member of Congress

Marcy Kaptur  
Member of Congress

Gwen Moore  
Member of Congress

Yvette D. Clarke  
Member of Congress

Ted Deutch  
Member of Congress

Sean Patrick Maloney  
Member of Congress

David N. Cicilline  
Member of Congress

Mike Coffman  
Member of Congress

Steve Russell  
Member of Congress

Lynn Jenkins  
Member of Congress

John Katko  
Member of Congress

Peter King  
Member of Congress

Karen Bass  
Member of Congress

Ted W. Lieu  
Member of Congress

Donald S. Beyer Jr.  
Member of Congress
Eleanor Holmes Norton  
Member of Congress

Jamie Raskin  
Member of Congress

Bobby L. Rush  
Member of Congress

Frank Pallone, Jr.  
Member of Congress

Pramila Jayapal  
Member of Congress

Alan Lowenthal  
Member of Congress

Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.  
Member of Congress

Albio Sires  
Member of Congress

Gerald E. Connolly  
Member of Congress

Robert A. Brady  
Member of Congress

Joaquin Castro  
Member of Congress

Ruben Gallego  
Member of Congress

Peter A. DeFazio  
Member of Congress

Steve Cohen  
Member of Congress

Raja Krishnamoorthi  
Member of Congress

Robin L. Kelly  
Member of Congress
Lois Frankel  
Member of Congress

William R. Keating  
Member of Congress

Nanette Diaz Barragán  
Member of Congress

Julia Brownley  
Member of Congress

Adriano Espaillat  
Member of Congress

Ted Poe  
Member of Congress