

31 January 2017

Myanmar- Killing of human rights defender U Ko Ni

On 29 January 2017, human rights defender Mr **U Ko Ni** was shot dead by a gunman at the international airport in Yangon.

U Ko Ni was a human rights defender and human rights lawyer. He was the legal advisor for the National League for Democracy. He participated in the pro-democracy protests known as the [88 Uprising](#) and was a former political prisoner. Upon release, he became actively involved in the interfaith peace movement and advocated for the rights of Muslim citizens in Myanmar. He strongly opposed the country's race and religion protection bill which was introduced in August 2015 and which restricted interfaith marriage and caused a rise in anti-Muslim sentiment. In 2016, he helped found the Myanmar Muslim Lawyers Association. He also wrote six books on good governance and various human rights issues.

On 29 January 2017, U Ko Ni travelled from Indonesia to Yangon after attending a meeting to discuss sectarian tensions in Rakhine state, where there is significant public support for a military operation. When he arrived at Yangon International Airport that afternoon he was shot dead by a gunman at close range. When the gunman attempted to flee the scene, he was chased by a taxi driver named U Nay Win, who was also shot dead by the gunman. The police have detained a suspect but no motive has been established.

U Ko Ni's daughter reported that the human rights defender often received threats for speaking out against the continuing influence of the military on politics. Since 2012, there has been an increase in violence against the stateless Rohingya in Arakan state and the Muslim population, which has made it more difficult for Rohingya and Muslim human rights defenders to work freely. Community leaders working to promote interfaith dialogue and document human rights violations face arrest and charges and are held in pre-trial detention.

Front Line Defenders condemns the killing of U Ko Ni, which it believes was solely motivated by his legitimate and peaceful activities in the defence of human rights in Myanmar.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Myanmar to:

1. Strongly condemn the killing of U Ko Ni;
2. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the killing of human rights defender U Ko Ni, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Myanmar are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.

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