

2 September 2022

STATEMENT OF CONCERN CONDEMNING ARREST OF FORMER AMBASSADOR VICKY BOWMAN

LAWASIA joins the international community in unequivocally condemning the recent arrest of former Ambassador of the United Kingdom to Myanmar and Chair, Myanmar Centre of Responsible Business (MCRB)¹, Vicky Bowman and her husband Htein Lin on 24 August 2022.

Vicky Bowman has been a champion of the rule of law and human rights, and Htein Lin, is an artist, veteran activist and former political prisoner who spent over six years in prison between 1998 and 2004.² She is also a director of the Myanmar Institute of Directors³ and a strong advocate for transparency and business and human rights.⁴

According to credible reports, Vicky Bowman and Htein Lin have been sent to Insein prison in Yangon city⁵, with a trial scheduled for September 6 for alleged violations of the country's immigration law." Statements from military personnel allege Ms. Bowman broke the law by staying at an address in a town other than Yangon - where she was registered - and failing to notify the authorities. Her husband had been arrested because he had facilitated the move."⁶ This is clearly a politically motivated arrest, and it is suspected "that arrest came as the UK

¹ Myanmar Centre of Responsible Business (MCRB), Statement on Arrest of Vicky Bowman (August 26, 2022) <<https://www.myanmar-responsiblebusiness.org/news/arrest-of-vicky-bowman.html>> accessed August 26, 2022.

² Rappler, Britain's former Myanmar envoy detained in Yangon, (August 25, 2022) <<https://www.rappler.com/world/asia-pacific/britain-former-myanmar-envoy-vicky-bowman-detained/>> accessed August 26, 2022.

³ <http://myanmariod.com/our-governance/board-of-directors/>

⁴ <https://www.myanmar-responsiblebusiness.org/about.html>

⁵ <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/detained-ex-uk-ambassador-to-myanmar-husband-returned-to-local-jails-from-prison.html>

⁶ BBC, Vicky Bowman: UK ex-ambassador to Myanmar arrested (August 26, 2022) <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-62671830>> accessed August 26, 2022.

announced fresh sanctions against the military authorities in Myanmar - coinciding with the fifth anniversary of its crackdown on Rohingya Muslims in the country.”⁷

LAWASIA joins with human rights groups to call on the military to immediately release Vicky Bowman and Htein Lin.

These arrests have occurred amidst a widespread rule of law crisis in Myanmar. Since the coup in February 2021, the military junta has cracked down on dissent, arresting thousands of protesters and political figures and has committed widespread violation of human rights.⁸

LAWASIA, the law association for Asia and the Pacific, has as one of its objectives, the promotion of the rule of law, access to justice and the protection of human rights in Asia and the Pacific region.

Since the military coup LAWASIA has been deeply concerned about the state of human rights and rule of law in Myanmar.⁹ In March 2021, LAWASIA released a statement of concern following the military coup in February 2021, referring to reports that indicated a serious violation of international human rights law and standards, and calling on the junta to step down.¹⁰ As the situation in Myanmar escalated, LAWASIA submitted a Communication to the International Criminal Court in May 2021, requesting that the Office of the Prosecutor investigate, under Article 15 of the Rome Statute, the crimes being perpetrated by the unelected authorities in Myanmar against Myanmar’s civilian population. The Communication has been supported by a number of LAWASIA’s member organisations.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Myanmar arrests former British ambassador and her husband (August 25, 2022) <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/08/25/myanmar-arrest-vicky-bowman-ambassador/>> accessed August 26, 2022.

⁹ LAWASIA, Statement condemning executions in Myanmar (18 August 2022) <<https://lawasia.asn.au/sites/default/files/2022-08/LAWASIA%20Statement%20Condemning%20Executions%20in%20Myanmar%2C%2018%20August%202022.pdf>> accessed August 26, 2022.

¹⁰ LAWASIA, Statement of concern on Human Rights Violations and the Rule of Law (3 March 2021) <https://lawasia.asn.au/sites/default/files/2021-03/LAWASIA%20Statement%20of%20Concern%20on%20Human%20Rights%20Violations%20%20Rule%20of%20Law%20in%20Myanmar%2C%2003%20March%202021_0.pdf> accessed August 26, 2022.

By a statement of concern issued on 18 August 2022, LAWASIA condemned the recent executions of four people by the Myanmar military junta, including political activist Kyaw Min Yu (Ko Jimmy) and lawmaker and former Member of Parliament, Phyo Zeya Thaw.

We reiterate our call to the military junta in Myanmar to immediately release all those who have been detained on political grounds, permit Parliament to be restored and to reach a peaceful resolution with all relevant parties, immediately restore open access to the internet and all forms of communications and ensure that Rohingya and other ethnic minorities are accorded the highest level of protection.

The Law Association for Asia and the Pacific (LAWASIA)