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Media Release

Democracy must be defended - Attention of all should be drawn to protect Democracy and Media Freedom in Myanmar– Free Media Movement

The Free Media Movement strongly condemns the military's outrageous assault on democracy by overthrowing the democratically elected Government of Myanmar and considers the seizure of state power in a military coup taking control of the elected government as a deathblow to democracy. The military's restrictions on information flows are deeply concerning and the Free Media Movement expresses its grave concern about the recent events initiated with the intent of restricting the flow of information among the people of Myanmar by disrupting internet and phone lines across large parts of the country and throttling other forms of communication.

According to international media reports, the National League for Democracy (NLD) government, which was elected to power in the last general election on February 1, has been overthrown and the Myanmar military has arrested and detained President Win Myant and Prime Minister Aung San Suu Kyi. Approximately 400 Myanmar lawmakers who were to be sworn in the next day have been placed under house arrest within the city government-housing complex.

Shortly after the army seized power, all telephone networks, the Internet, and communications systems, including electronic media, have been restricted.

In response to a campaign by pro-democracy Myanmar citizens on social media to convene parliament in the city government housing complex, the military unveiled a new governing council with an 11-member unit comprising of the majority of the army's top executives saddled with executive powers and calling it the Public Administration Council.

Social media has been completely banned to quell democratic protests of the people of Myanmar and to silence their dissent. Instances of pro-government groups attacking Journalists have also been reported. This military action and the ensuing series of post-coup events are further exacerbating the challenges posed to democracy in Myanmar by authoritarian tendencies.

International attention should be drawn to the shrinking communication space for clear information regarding the events in the country both to the people of Myanmar and the world at large with severe restrictions imposed on the media and the clamping of censorship on social media networks.

The developed world would never approve of the implementation of authoritarian policies instead of problem-solving within a democratic space. At this crucial juncture, the Free Media Movement takes this opportunity to express its gratitude to the countries and the international community that have already stood in solidarity for democracy in Myanmar.

We urge the Government of Sri Lanka, the people of the country, international organisations and all stakeholders that stand by democracy to express their solidarity with the people of Myanmar in their struggle for democracy and to collectively stand in support of the protection of media freedom and the freedom of expression in Myanmar.

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