

UN Reiterates Call for Health Workers and Facilities to be Protected

(Yangon, 5 May 2021) - The United Nations in Myanmar warns of the impact on public health, including the COVID-19 response, from attacks on medical personnel and facilities, and reiterates its call for health workers, health facilities and patients to be protected.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) global surveillance system, since the beginning of February there have been 158 reported attacks on health care, resulting in 11 deaths and 51 injuries. This is currently the majority of reported attacks on health care services worldwide since the beginning of 2021. Some 83 attacks impacted facilities, 21 attacks impacted ambulances, 76 attacks impacted health personnel, and 73 attacks impacted patients.

The global tracking system cumulatively lists 51 health facilities across Myanmar as having been under occupation by security forces. At least 31 of these facilities remain currently occupied and have reported a drop in the number of people seeking medical care. Meanwhile, at least 139 doctors believed to be participating in civil disobedience have reportedly been charged under Section 505 (a) of Myanmar's Penal Code. These include highly specialized health personnel whose expertise cannot easily be replaced, which will significantly impact both the quality and quantity of health services available.

Attacks on health care pose a grave risk for the delivery of essential health services, as well as for the COVID-19 response, with potential devastating consequences for Myanmar and beyond. At a time when Myanmar needs them the most, health workers fear arrest or detention for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

"The United Nations in Myanmar stands ready to continue its support of the national COVID-19 response but this requires a return to the comprehensive response to the COVID-19 pandemic previously underway, that the inviolable nature of health facilities and health workers and patients is respected, and the immediate release of urgently needed medical and technical personnel detained or arrested while exercising their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly," Andrew Kirkwood, acting interim United Nations Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator for Myanmar, said.

The United Nations Country Team in Myanmar consists of FAO, ILO, IOM, ITC, OHCHR, OCHA, UNAIDS, UNCDF, UNDP, UNEP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UN HABITAT, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNIDO, UNODC, UNOPS, UNV, UN WOMEN, WFP, and WHO.

NOTE: WHO's recent article link has further information, including that this system does not intend to identify perpetrators or culpability, but to contribute to a conducive environment where health care is protected and safe, and to enable patients and providers to access and deliver health services without fear:

<https://www.who.int/myanmar/news/detail/01-05-2021-who-s-attack-on-healthcare-initiative-advocates-for-safeguarding-healthcare-does-not-aim-at-reporting-incidents>

