



Freedom of Expression: International Law and the Practice in Myanmar

**Online Course
18 March – 17 May 2024**

The course will consist of a series of nine classes of one and one-half hours, each one combining lectures, group discussions, and interactive exercises.

Each week includes a core background reading material which all students will be expected to read and additional resources that are optional reading. The classroom component, conducted online, will be held on Thursday of each week at 7:30-9:00 PM BKK time.

The course will be taught by staff of the Centre for Law and Democracy (law-democracy.org), a Canadian-based international human rights organisation with expertise in freedom of expression issues under international law.

The course is in English but key readings are available in Burmese and Burmese interpretation will be available for the live online lectures. Certificates will be awarded to those who attend six of the nine online lectures.

Course Outline

Week 1: Introductory Week (18 March-22 March)

Lecture: Thursday 21 March, 7:30-9:00 PM BKK time

This week will introduce students to the concept of international human rights law and, more specifically, freedom of expression. It will provide an overview of the history and development of human rights law, and discuss how human rights law imposes binding legal obligations on governments. The class will then focus on the right to freedom of expression, explaining its core features and scope.

Week 2: Restrictions on Freedom of Expression under International Law (25 March-29 March)

Lecture: Thursday 28 March, 7:30-9:00 PM BKK time

This week will examine, according to international law, what circumstances can justify a government restriction on freedom of expression. It will then explore some of the more challenging types of “content restrictions”, meaning government restrictions on certain types of content.

Week 3: General Principles of Freedom of Expression for the Media (1 April-5 April)

Lecture: Thursday 4 April, 7:30-9:00 PM BKK time

This week will focus on how freedom of expression protects freedom of the press. It will discuss what kinds of interferences with the media are a violation of human rights law, as well as basic principles governing media freedom.

Week 4: Media Regulation and Freedom of Expression for the Media (8 April-12 April)

Lecture: Thursday 11 April, 7:30-9:00 PM BKK time

Building on the basic principles learned last week, this class will focus on how international standards guide regulation of the media.

Week 5: Digital Rights under International Law (Part I) (15 April-19 April)

Lecture: Thursday 18 April, 7:30-9:00 PM BKK time

This class will discuss freedom of expression online. International human rights law applies to online speech just as it applies to offline speech. But unique features of how we communicate online have also required some new international law standards. In discussing content restrictions online, this week will also be an opportunity to review the standards learned in Week 2 regarding restrictions on freedom of expression.

Week 6: Digital Rights under International Law (Part II) (22 April-26 April)

Lecture: Thursday 25 April, 7:30-9:00 PM BKK time

This week will discuss the complex and evolving question of how to protect freedom of expression and respond to harmful speech online when such speech largely occurs on platforms and in fora controlled by private actors, such as large social media companies.

Week 7: The Legal Framework for Media and Freedom of Expression in Myanmar Pre-Coup (29 April-3 May)

Lecture: Thursday 2 May, 7:30-9:00 PM BKK time

This class will help participants understand the basic laws governing the media in pre-coup Myanmar, with a focus on the evolution of laws governing media freedom in the decade of relative openness prior to the coup. Understanding this history is important for understanding Myanmar's current reality, but also many of these laws are still in effect today.

Week 8: Legal Changes Affecting Freedom of Expression in Myanmar Post-Coup (6 May-10 May)

Lecture: Thursday 9 May, 7:30-9:00 PM BKK time

This week will discuss the situation of freedom of expression in Myanmar post-coup, with a focus on changes to the laws by the military. It will take a close look at these changes, such as the amendments to the Penal Code (including the introduction of Section 505A) and changes to the Broadcasting Law.

Week 9: Freedom of Expression in Myanmar in Comparison with International Standards (13 May-17 May)

Lecture: Thursday 16 May, 7:30-9:00 PM BKK time

This week will review everything learned in the prior weeks. Students will have an opportunity to practice using the international standards learned during this course by applying them to the current situation in Myanmar.