

21 July 2022



Rajeev Sethi

Chief Executive Officer
Ooredoo Myanmar

cc: Aziz Aluthman Fakhroo
Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer
Ooredoo Group

Re: Request for engagement on reported sale of Ooredoo Myanmar

Dear Mr. Rajeev Sethi,

I write on behalf of [Access Now](#), an international organisation that works to defend and extend human rights in the digital age.

As you are aware, people in Myanmar have been living under increasingly dangerous and restrictive conditions since the military coup in early 2021. Our organisation has been supporting those in Myanmar by providing recommendations to various stakeholders — including in the telecommunications and technology sectors — on how to ensure protection of their rights amidst extremely challenging conditions.

We write to your office on reports emerging about the sale of Ooredoo Myanmar — potentially to actors linked to the Myanmar military. Ooredoo is the last remaining internationally-owned telecommunications operator in Myanmar, and we are alarmed about human rights risks imminent from this sale. We would like to explore with your office ways to mitigate and protect against these risks.

According to a [Reuters report](#) yesterday (July 20), Ooredoo Myanmar has informed the Myanmar authorities of your intention to sell your Myanmar operations. Potential buyers reportedly include Myanmar conglomerate Young Investment Group, Singapore-headquartered network infrastructure operator Campana Group and telecommunications company SkyNet, owned by Myanmar group Shwe Than Lwin. As of [today](#), it is apparent Myanmar's Post and Telecommunications Department — the body tasked with regulatory oversight — has not acknowledged receipt of a sale request from Ooredoo.

We are troubled to see that some of these named potential buyers appear to have links to the Myanmar military. Shwe Than Lwin, the company that owns SkyNet, is owned by [Kyaw Win](#) who has clear links to high-ranking members of the Myanmar military, and was [previously subject to EU sanctions](#). Young Investment Group, owned by [Thiha Aung](#), is established in the gems industry — where

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the Myanmar military has [significant control and interests](#). We are privy to information that indicates Shwe Than Lwin and Young Investment Group are linked to entities and individuals currently subject to international sanctions.

Prior to yesterday's report, we had received reports that a sale would require significant lay-offs of current Ooredoo Myanmar staff to bring in employees linked to the Myanmar military to ensure direct control over internet and phone services in the country. If true, this will have serious implications on the rights to privacy and security of Ooredoo's users.

We were also informed that the sale will result in further curtailment of internet access for individuals as data usage costs for Ooredoo Myanmar customers will significantly increase. This will widely impact on rights linked to internet access — including freedom of expression and association.

In this light, we would like to request a meeting with you or your office in order to:

- 1. Clarify the accuracy of reports regarding the sale of Ooredoo Myanmar and the conditions of this sale;**
- 2. Clarify the extent of due diligence Ooredoo has conducted on the human rights records of potential buyers, and compliance with the spirit and letter of sanctions regulations;**
- 3. Explore actions to mitigate and protect against the imminent human rights risks that may arise from such a sale, including through urgent engagement with civil society.**

As you are aware, the military junta has been implicated in [gross human rights violations](#) in Myanmar, which have been facilitated and supplemented by a [digital coup](#). The military is enforcing internet shutdowns, increasing barriers to internet access, expanding video surveillance systems in cities, abusing legal tools, spreading hate speech online, and exploiting social media platforms and messaging tools to target people and propagate violence on the ground. This [digital dictatorship](#) has been fortified by increased military pressure on the telecommunications sector and [demands](#) to activate intercept surveillance technologies within telecommunications networks. Military business interests are profiting from [increasing dominance](#) of the telecommunications sector — in potential violation of sanctions regulations.

Ooredoo Myanmar currently remains the only telecommunications service provider in Myanmar not directly linked to the military. If this reported sale goes through, military control over the sector will be cemented – with extremely dire consequences not only on your customers, but people across the country. Not only can intercept surveillance technologies and telecommunications data be abused to monitor individual Ooredoo customers, it can also lead to assaults against family members, friends and other contacts through the targeting of one person.

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We have previously called on you to improve your human rights practices including by making a [commitment to respect your users' rights](#) to privacy and free expression, and providing transparency on [how you respond to government requests](#) to block content or shut down networks. Over the years, Ooredoo has made some improvements, notably releasing a privacy policy. As the only telecommunications provider in Myanmar without direct links to the military, Ooredoo is in an important position to protect the digital rights of people in Myanmar, and the steps you take on these issues matter.

This is why, in spite of the [immense pressures](#) Ooredoo Myanmar may be under on the ground, we implore your office to take all possible measures to uphold your responsibility to protect human rights. We agree with [your own statement](#) that Ooredoo Myanmar has an important role to play in bridging the digital divide in the country by providing internet access to people wherever they are. By selling your operations to the Myanmar military, you are enabling an entity that will not only deepen the digital divide and leave your users in Myanmar without recourse, but curtail their rights further — both online and off.

As a first step, we urge you and your office to directly engage with representatives from civil society who have been monitoring and pushing back against digital rights challenges in Myanmar in your decision-making processes. In this vein, we are keen to speak with your office and also share contacts with other stakeholders who can provide advice and direction on human rights safeguards.

Meanwhile, we urge your company to cancel or pause any efforts to sell Ooredoo Myanmar, and immediately conduct human rights due diligence in line with the [UN Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights](#). We also urge Ooredoo Myanmar to take immediate steps to set in place safeguards to prevent personal data of your customers from being transferred to the control of the Myanmar military.

Considering the urgency of this matter, we would greatly appreciate a response by **28 July 2022**.

We look forward to hearing from you, and are committed to engaging with Ooredoo on potential steps forward to protect human rights in Myanmar.

Yours sincerely,

Raman Jit Singh Chima

Senior International Counsel and Asia Pacific Policy Director

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