

May 16, 2022 | Myanmar

**Military-linked company Shwe Byain Phyu has taken control of
Telenor Myanmar
*M1 Group and Telenor Group must be investigated for breach of
sanctions***

Lebanon's M1 Group has transferred control of Telenor Myanmar to the Myanmar military-linked Shwe Byain Phyu conglomerate on Thursday, May 12, completing Telenor Group's sale of the mobile network.

The sale has violated UK, EU and Norwegian sanctions due to the inclusion of lawful interception technology.

In the final stage of the sale, the Cayman Islands registered M1 Infrastructure Ltd transferred 310 shares in Investcom Pte Ltd, a Singapore holding company, to Shwe Byain Phyu Telecom Company Limited, according to corporate records.

Investcom Pte Ltd owns 100% of Telenor Myanmar Limited, largely through redeemable preference shares.

Shwe Byain Phyu Telecom Company Limited is a Myanmar registered company, fully owned by Shwe Byain Phyu Company Limited.

As a result of the share transfer, Shwe Byain Phyu owns 80% of Telenor Myanmar, up from its earlier 49% stake

M1 Group is owned by the family of the current Lebanese Prime Minister, Najib Mikati.

Sanctions violations

As part of the sale, M1 Group transferred a German-made Utimaco lawful interception gateway (LIG) to Shwe Byain Phyu, in breach of UK sanctions on Myanmar, which are in force in the Cayman Islands as a British Overseas Territory.

The Utimaco LIG was delivered to Myanmar and installed by Telenor in 2018. Telenor Group then transferred the LIG to M1 Group in March 2022, violating Norwegian sanctions.

When activated, the LIG will give the Myanmar military junta, a terrorist organisation, capabilities to monitor calls and SMS made over the Telenor Myanmar network in real time.

The latest transaction between M1 Group and Shwe Byain Phyu follows the first stage of the sale from Telenor Group to an M1 Group subsidiary registered in Cyprus, in violation of EU sanctions due to the transfer of the LIG.

The sale has exposed the historical call data of more than 18 million people to the junta, which it can use to identify, locate, detain, torture and kill Myanmar people. This may make Telenor Group and the Norwegian government complicit in crimes against humanity.

Telenor Group failed to do human rights due diligence on their ultimate buyer, Shwe Byain Phyu, in breach of their responsibilities under the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises.

Telenor Myanmar's new players

Shwe Byain Phyu chair Thein Win Zaw is the chairperson of the Telenor Myanmar Limited board, and his son, Win Paing Kyaw, is the deputy CEO. Thein Win Zaw's wife, Tin Latt Min, also sits on the board. Other Telenor Myanmar board members are Hicham Ramadan and Rana Shatila of M1 Group.

Telenor Myanmar's new CEO, Muhammad Ziaullah Siddiqui, sits on the board of Investcom Pte Ltd, along with Rana Shatila, Thein Win Zaw, Win Paing Kyaw and Benjamin Szeto Yu Hwei.

From 2007-2010, Siddiqui was CEO of the telecommunications company MTN Afghanistan, according to his LinkedIn page, at a time when the company was accused of paying protection money to the Taliban and Al Qaeda.

From 2010 to 2016, Siddiqui was CEO of MTN Sudan, providing a source of revenue to the genocidal al-Bashir regime.

MTN is a South African publicly listed company that acquired M1 Group's Investcom in 2006. As part of the takeover, the Mikati family gained a 10% stake in MTN.

Justice For Myanmar calls on the UK, Cypriot and Norwegian governments to urgently investigate Telenor Group and M1 Group for violating sanctions on Myanmar.

We call on the Oslo Stock Exchange, which lists Telenor, to investigate the legality of Telenor's Myanmar sale under Norwegian and EU law.

We call on Singapore to investigate the use of its territory by Telenor Group, M1 Group and Shwe Byain Phyu in violation of UK, EU and Norwegian sanctions, and to take concrete steps against Singapore registered businesses that are complicit in the Myanmar military's international crimes.

Justice For Myanmar spokesperson Yadanar Maung says: "It is reprehensible that Telenor Group and the Norwegian government have completed the sale of Telenor Myanmar to Shwe Byain Phyu Group, wilfully ignoring sanctions regulations and their human rights responsibilities.

"The junta has weaponised telecommunications in its campaign of terror, and Telenor Myanmar is now part of its arsenal.

"We call on the UK, Norway and Cyprus to investigate sanctions breaches from the transfer of lawful interception technology from Telenor to M1 Group, and from M1 Group to Shwe Byain Phyu, and ensure accountability.

"The fact that this transaction has taken place in Singapore yet again shows how its financial system is being exploited by the Myanmar military and their associates. Singapore must take concrete action to end the use of its territory to finance and arm the Myanmar military."

More information

See our investigation into Shwe Byain Phyu's military links [here](#)

For more on M1 Group, see our investigation [here](#)

Read our press release, [Telenor Group is aiding and abetting M1 Group to violate Myanmar sanctions](#)

Read our press release, [Telenor Group is violating sanctions through installation and imminent transfer of German lawful intercept gateway](#)

Read the memorandum on potential international law issues arising from the sale of Telenor Myanmar by Australian barristers Doctor Felicity Gerry QC and Daye Gang [here](#)

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