

[Statement] Myanmar: ASEAN must stop assisting Myanmar's military in enhancing its capabilities

(Bangkok, 4 August 2023) - The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) calls on the ASEAN to exclude the Myanmar junta from military exercises.

We urge the Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM+) Experts Working Group on Counter Terrorism to exclude Myanmar military junta members from all its meetings and activities.

If the ADMM+ does not exclude the Myanmar military from its activities, we call on all ASEAN Member States and Dialogue Partners to publicly refuse to attend such events where the Myanmar military is present.

FORUM-ASIA is deeply concerned about the drills organised by ADMM+ Experts' Working Group on Counter-Terrorism—as co-chaired by Myanmar and Russia—since such trainings are meant to build mutual relations, trust, and friendship among militaries in the ASEAN and partner nations while also enhancing anti-terrorism measures within the region. The tabletop exercise is in progress from 2 to 4 August 2023 in Nay Pyi Taw in Myanmar,¹ while a field training exercise is to be held in Russia in September.²

'These military exercises would give the junta further legitimacy as well as capabilities and intelligence to carry out its campaign of terror against the people of Myanmar. Hence, such training could enable the Myanmar junta to continue to commit deliberate killings, arbitrary arrests, indiscriminate airstrikes and shelling, rape, enforced disappearances, and torture with impunity - all while using counter-terrorism as a pretext,' said Mary Aileen Diez-Bacalso, Executive Director of FORUM-ASIA.

The People's Defense Forces, the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, and the National Unity Government were all labelled as 'terrorist groups' by the junta in December 2021. Since then, Min Aung Hlaing's propaganda campaign became more hostile, urging the military and the government to take action against those labelled as 'terrorist groups'.³

Since the failed coup on 21 February 2021, military crackdowns on pro-democracy activists and civilians have resulted in more than 3,850 deaths, according to the latest data published by the Assistance Association to Political Prisoners.

¹ https://cdn.myanmarseo.com/file/client-cdn/2023/08/3_Aug_23_gnlm.pdf

² <https://www.justiceformyanmar.org/press-releases/aseans-planned-military-exercises-led-by-myanmar-junta-and-russian-regime-will-deepen-its-complicity-in-the-juntas-international-crimes>

³ <https://apnews.com/article/myanmar-military-min-aung-hlaing-e05b18ad38b1ce29a78579abbfc224a6>

In addition, 24,100 people have been detained, 19,710 of whom are currently in detention and 6,976 are serving sentences.⁴

The Myanmar junta continued to show its iron fist and on 1 August 2023, they extended for the 4th time the state of emergency in Myanmar, for an additional six months, delaying the elections they had vowed to hold when they took over.⁵ Additionally, on 2 August 2023, the military pardoned Aung San Suu Kyi in five of 19 charges brought against her by the military, which will reduce her 33-year jail sentence by six years. A tactic that appears to be an effort to revive stalled diplomacy efforts while she should not be in not charged of any of the charges in the first place.⁶

Call to Action

ASEAN's practical assistance and support for the training of Myanmar junta troops through the ADMM+ Experts' Working Group on Counter Terrorism is an insult to those who have been selflessly and peacefully seeking justice and accountability for the people of Myanmar.

'It is shocking that the Myanmar military junta, the perpetrator of gross human rights violations, is in charge of counterterrorism exercises. The ASEAN should declare the junta military as a terrorist organisation since its actions fall under the definition of terrorism as stated in the United Nations Security Council [Resolution 1566](#) (2004) on threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts⁷ as well as in international counterterrorism treaties⁸,' said Bacalso.

If the ASEAN allows the Myanmar junta to join its military exercises the public may perceive the ASEAN to be explicitly supporting the junta's massive killings and reign of terror against the people of Myanmar.

FORUM-ASIA urges the ASEAN and ADMM+ Experts' Working Group on Counter Terrorism to exclude the Myanmar military junta from all its military exercises and activities. If this is not possible, we call on all ASEAN Member States and Dialogue Partners to publicly boycott the training in the same way that Australia, the United States, and New Zealand have done.⁹

⁴ <https://aappb.org/?p=25715>

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jul/31/myanmar-junta-extends-state-of-emergency-forcing-delay-to-elections>

⁶ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-66357403>

⁷ <https://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/blog/document/security-council-resolution-1566-2004-on-threats-to-international-peace-and-security-caused-by-terrorist-acts/>

⁸ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-terrorism/international-standards-promotion-and-protection-human-rights-and-fundamental-freedoms-while>

⁹ <https://myanmar-now.org/en/news/us-withdraws-from-asean-counter-terrorism-meeting/>

About FORUM-ASIA:

The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) is a network of 85 member organisations across 23 countries, mainly in Asia. Founded in 1991, FORUM-ASIA works to strengthen movements for human rights and sustainable development through research, advocacy, capacity development and solidarity actions in Asia and beyond. It has consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, and consultative relationship with the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights. The FORUM-ASIA Secretariat is based in Bangkok, with offices in Jakarta, Geneva and Kathmandu. www.forum-asia.org

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