



## Myanmar: Three years on, the Myanmar people courageously push back against the junta

Through a Solidarity Panel Discussion, human rights organisations celebrate the resilience of the Myanmar people's resistance movement while also urging ASEAN to take concrete actions against the junta.

"There should not be a fourth year where the junta's failed coup still exists. We stand in solidarity with the people of Myanmar," this sentiment echoed Myanmar people's aspirations at ***Solidarity Panel Discussion on the 3rd Anniversary of the Military Junta's Failed Coup***, on 29 January 2024, organised by Alternative ASEAN Network on Burma (ALTSEAN-Burma), Asia Justice and Rights (AJAR), the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA), IID), the Commission for Disappeared (KontraS), and Progressive Voice.

In the past three years, the military junta has unleashed at least 29,770 attacks including 1,333 targeted [airstrikes](#) on civilians and civilian properties, killing over 7,900 civilians and [displacing](#) 2.3 million people in Myanmar. The junta has [also arrested](#) close to 26,000 people with over 19,900 individuals currently still in detention. The violence and instability caused by the junta have driven Myanmar to the brink of economic collapse.

Every day, the Myanmar people are struggling for their livelihoods while also persisting with their collective resistance to dismantle military tyranny.

In response to this multifaceted crisis, several international community actors have taken actions in an attempt to halt the ongoing atrocities in Myanmar. The likes of China, India, and Russia, however, have continued to provide political and material support to the junta including funnelling weapons to fuel its atrocities.

Within the Southeast Asian region, ASEAN continues to reaffirm its position to retain the Five-Point Consensus (5PC) as its main reference despite its [continued failure](#) to provide a transparent, concrete, and measurable implementation plan and assessment. It must also be noted how the junta continues to undermine ASEAN's efforts in the 5PC without any consequences. Several ASEAN member states—including Indonesia, and Singapore, and Thailand—have even continued bilateral engagements with the junta despite the regional bloc's decision to bar the junta's political representative from the Summit-level meetings, thereby falsely lending legitimacy to the illegal and unconstitutional body.

### On Federal Democracy and the Inclusion of Rohingya

Despite such a distressing situation, the people of Myanmar are courageously pushing back.

Key developments in the resistance movement include the success of the Three Brotherhood Alliance under Operation 1027, other Ethnic Resistance Organisations (EROs), and the People's Defence Forces (PDFs) in [taking control](#) over hundreds of the military junta's bases across over 35 towns. This has cemented the approaching success of the revolution. Nevertheless, challenges remain towards the establishment of a federal democratic government. There is also a need to ensure inclusivity of the Rohingya

including the restoration of their citizenship as well as their safe, voluntary, dignified, and sustainable return to Myanmar.

During the Solidarity Panel Discussion, Deputy Minister of Human Rights of the National Unity Government (NUG), Aung Kyaw Moe, highlighted the stances of the NUG, asserting that in achieving its top priority to establish a federal democracy, the NUG adopts an inclusive policy and ensures that representatives in its government consist of ethnic and religious minorities. The NUG supports the unified effort of the resistance forces to dismantle the junta and affirms that the cycle of impunity for decades of the Myanmar military's genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity must end.

Likewise, the NUG recognises 'Solidarity for the Rohingya' as a priority as the NUG withdrew the initial objection of the Rohingya genocide case before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) brought by The Gambia. The Deputy Minister also highlighted the immediate need for life saving humanitarian assistance in places of refuge for the Myanmar people including the Rohingya.

Since 2017, almost one million Rohingya refugees have been forced to flee from the Myanmar military's genocide. They are [living](#) in squalid conditions in Bangladesh, with drastically decreasing assistance. Thousands risk their lives as they [attempt](#) fatal sea crossings to seek refuge in the Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal. Their plight is compounded by misinformation and hate campaigns across supposed places of refuge, particularly in Indonesia's Aceh province. At the same time, over 650,000 Rohingyas are continuously [facing](#) systematic discrimination and violence inside Myanmar, living with statelessness and bound within prison-like internment camps.

"The struggle of the Rohingya had started long before the 2021 coup," stressed Hafsar Tameesuddin, Co-Secretary General of the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network and Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at the Rohingya Maïyafuïnor Collaborative Network. The Rohingya's systematic exclusion is evident beyond Myanmar, particularly in refugee camps and within the ASEAN itself as evidenced by the absence of Rohingya in the 5PC.

In the short term, refuge, humanitarian aid, and access to livelihoods must be provided for the Rohingyas, particularly those seeking refuge in Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Malaysia.

Meanwhile, Zue Padonmar—Secretary 1 of the Karenni State Interim Executive Council (IEC)—emphasised the resilience of the Karenni people in resisting the junta. Through the prioritisation of human rights and democracy within its establishments, the IEC Karenni built a successful democratic governance from the ground up. Zue stressed the need to strengthen the Karenni State interim authorities' awareness of and capacities in human rights values and accountability. To prevent the dictatorial tendencies, Zue advocated for collective leadership representing various ethnicities, age, and genders. "Collaboration with the NUG and EROs and civil society organisations—is crucial in the establishment of a federal democracy in Myanmar," said Zue.

### **The roles of youth, ASEAN, and international community**

"Youth revolutionaries contribute to eradicating dictatorship in Myanmar by establishing strong justice and democratic mechanisms," said Elena, a member of the General Strike Committee of Nationalities and Milk Tea Alliance-Myanmar.

Elena also stated that the people of Myanmar already abolished the 2008 military-drafted Constitution and called for a new federal constitution that provides more self-determination and equal rights for the people. As this process goes on, the international community must strengthen its solidarity with the Myanmar people. Governments in Asia and beyond must cease any and all engagements with the junta. The failure to do so only

lends false legitimacy to the junta's illegal status and exacerbates the ongoing mass atrocity crimes.

### **ASEAN's Ineffectiveness and the Role of Thailand**

Laddawan Tantivitayapitak, Chairperson of Thai Action Committee for Democracy in Burma (TACDB) and Board Member of ALTSEAN-Burma, reiterated the ineffectiveness of ASEAN in handling the Myanmar crises. "With the influx of Myanmar refugees and migrants, ASEAN and border countries such as Thailand must provide ways for migrants and refugees to be able to attain work and develop their capacities, as well as ensure the much-needed humanitarian assistance reaches these vulnerable communities" explained Laddawan.

The Charter specified that ASEAN also functions to maintain peace and security in the region. Hence, it should publicly recognise the military junta as the root cause of the ongoing crisis. At the same time, ASEAN must recognise and officially engage representatives from the NUG as the legitimate government of Myanmar.

The Thai government has been implementing problematic policies in relation to the Myanmar crisis, according to Dr. Naruemon Thabchumpon, Associate Professor at the Chulalongkorn University. "Despite the junta's atrocities, diplomatic ties have not been cut off as Thailand is still profiting from trade with the military junta and also from Myanmar labour along the border," said Naruemon.

Furthermore, the Thai government does not distinguish between economic migrants and refugees, therefore creating exacerbated vulnerabilities for those who flee conflict to border areas. In considering humanitarian aid within border areas, the Thai government has been holding discussions with the junta instead of the EROs who have control over the areas, understand the needs of the people, and have their trust. This is widely perceived as lending the junta false legitimacy.

ASEAN is evidently reluctant to solve the Myanmar crisis even during Indonesia chairship, which was expected to be when ASEAN would take a stronger stance. Under the Laos chairship, ASEAN's effectiveness in solving the Myanmar crisis remains elusive. "At the very least, the 5PC must be implemented by conducting official engagements with the NUG and the NUCC," Naruemon argued.

The Thai government must prioritise a human security approach that recognises the junta as the perpetrators of the ongoing human rights and humanitarian crisis in Myanmar that endangers human security. With this approach, Thailand must fulfil its international and moral obligations to provide refuge and life-saving assistance to those fleeing the junta's atrocities, and must redirect its current approach to work with the NUG and EROs for emergency humanitarian aid instead of with the junta.

### **Call to Action**

The military junta's systematic and widespread violence endured by all of Myanmar's population including the Rohingya is intensifying. The military junta's war crimes and crimes against humanity have led to the immense suffering of the people of Myanmar. These acts can never be justified, and the military junta must be held to account through justice and accountability mechanisms.

For Myanmar's federal democratic future, the bottom-up resistance movement, across all ethnic and religious lines – which is establishing local governance, including education,

health and medical services – must be prioritised and supported by the international community through political, financial, technological and material means.

To solve the humanitarian crisis in Myanmar, ASEAN must move beyond the 5PC and take tangible steps to address the intensifying crisis and the suffering of Myanmar people across the country.

Humanitarian aid must be delivered through border-based organisations. Aid must not be delivered with the involvement or oversight of the junta. Tangible support from the international community must be directed to frontline humanitarian aid responders who have been effectively sustaining the livelihoods of displaced communities for the past three years.

Likewise, the United Nations Security Council must no longer defer the responsibility of maintaining peace and stability in the region to ASEAN. It must take leadership in solving the worsening crisis in Myanmar through a Chapter VII resolution with a comprehensive global arms embargo, including jet fuel and dual-use goods, and a referral of the situation in Myanmar to the International Criminal Court, among other measures.

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