

Burma/Myanmar Civil Society Urges US Congress Not to Deepen Military-to-Military Ties

Yangon, 12 September, 2017 – 85 Burma/Myanmar civil society and human rights organizations in an open letter today call on the United States Congress not to approve an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) that would fully normalize military relations between the US and Burma/Myanmar.

“The Burma/Myanmar Army is the biggest obstacle to the establishment of democracy and the fulfilment of human rights in our country,” said Aung Khaing Min, Executive Director of Progressive Voice. “By rewarding them with full cooperation rather than a stern rebuke, the US Government would risk undoing its reputation as a firm supporter of the democratic struggle in Burma/Myanmar. This risks losing confidence from the people, especially from the ethnic nationality communities who have had to endure the consequences of the military’s aggressive operations which have gone on for decades.”

The US Senate’s current draft of the NDAA would allow deeper ties between the two militaries, thus enabling the US military to provide technical assistance to its Burma/Myanmar counterparts. For many ethnic minority communities who have suffered at the hands of the country’s military, this would be a legitimization of an institution that has persecuted them for decades and continues to commit human rights violations against civilians to this day. “If full military-to-military relations were established between the two countries, this will only give the abusive and unaccountable Myanmar Army – led by its Commander-in-Chief, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing – more legitimacy and embolden them to continue committing human rights violations against ethnic and religious minorities,” said Moon Nay Li, General Secretary of the Kachin Women’s Association – Thailand (KWAT).

For many years, human rights violations committed by the Burma/Myanmar Army have been documented by local and international organizations including arbitrary arrest, forced labor, torture, sexual violence, and extrajudicial killing. “The Burma/Myanmar Army knows full well that its institutionalized and systematic use of rape and sexual violence as a weapon of war is wrong. It does not need the US military to give a training on how not to do it. Rather, the perpetrators need to be held accountable,” said Lway Poe Ngeal, General Secretary of the Women’s League of Burma (WLB).

The letter urges the US Congress not to pass any proposed amendments and to maintain its support for the democratic forces of Burma/Myanmar that are working towards peace and human rights.

Notes to Editors: Due to the security concern and possible reprisal targeted at the signatories to the open letter, names of the 85 organizations are withheld.

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