

9 February, 2021

To: Member and Observer State of the United Nations Human Rights Council Regarding the Urgent Situation in Myanmar

Subject: Open Letter from Civil Society Organizations calling on the Council's immediate action to ensure the protection of demonstrators

Dear Excellencies,

We are writing to express our deep concern over the safety of the peaceful demonstrators in Myanmar and urge you to take immediate action to ensure their protection and their fundamental right to freedom of peaceful assembly, expression and information.

On 8 February, 2021 tens of thousands of people in towns and cities across Myanmar participated in a general strike. Led by students, workers, civil servants, activists and people from all of Myanmar's diverse ethnic and religious minorities, it was a day marked by peaceful assembly, expression, and determination to oppose the Myanmar military's illegitimate coup d'état. It was the biggest day of protest since the morning of the coup on 1 February.

However, we are deeply concerned that the military is planning to retaliate using violence, unlawful arrest, and intimidation. As the protests gained momentum, on 3 February, an internal memo was issued by the Mandalay District Police Commander's Office instructing police to shoot protesters using riot-control weapons. The police have made what appears to be excessive use of water cannons against peaceful protesters injuring several people, while rubber bullets have been fired in the capital city of Naypyidaw today.

As of 8 February, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, 170 people, including MPs, students, activists, artists, filmmakers, monks, and civil servants have been arbitrarily detained and some forcibly disappeared in relation to the coup. We are also concerned that military aligned actors might instigate violence to justify a crackdown. This has been a long-standing tactic used against demonstrations in Myanmar. Often dressed in the red garb of protesters, footages of these pro-military actors in conversation with riot police behind police lines have been recorded, while pro-military counter demonstrators have been trucked into downtown Yangon. Thus, while the police and military reaction has largely been restrained so far, signs are ominous.

This is compounded by the declarations of Martial Law in several townships in Yangon, Mandalay, and throughout parts of the country imposing a curfew between 8pm and 4am, and banning gatherings of over five people.

While the restoration of the Internet after the initial shutdown of Internet services, followed by restriction against Facebook, Messenger, Whatsapp, and other communication services as well as use of some VPN has allowed those from inside the country to communicate with the world, it is to be feared that the military might return Myanmar to darkness by imposing an Internet shutdown.

These restrictions on people's fundamental freedoms and the illegitimate coup d'état are being led by

a brutal military, headed by its Commander-in-Chief, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, who stands accused of committing grave international crimes, including war crimes, crimes against humanity and the crime of genocide. Lest not it be forgotten, the Myanmar military has violently cracked down upon every mass demonstration in the country's history. There is no reason to suggest that 2021 will be any different.

Thus, it is with great urgency, that we the undersigned organisations call on the Member and Observer States of the UN Human Rights Council in your upcoming 29th Special Session on the human rights implications of the crisis in Myanmar to pass a Resolution calling for:

- An urgent enhanced monitoring of the fast-unfolding human rights crisis in Myanmar, including by immediately sending a delegation to Myanmar to monitor the situation on the ground and report back to the Council and other relevant bodies;
- Enhanced and robust regular reporting on the situation of human rights in Myanmar to the Council and other relevant bodies;
- Increased resources for the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar to effectively document and report on urgent human rights developments;
- The establishment of a comprehensive response to ensure long-term federal democratic and human rights change in the country, including by ensuring support towards constitutional change that would bring the military under civilian control and ensure accountability for grave human rights violations.

In addition, we call for the Resolution to urge the Myanmar military regime to:

- Refrain from using violence, and arbitrary arrests against protesters and respect people's right to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly;
- Immediately and unconditionally release all those who have been arbitrarily detained;
- Allow unfettered Internet access, including on all mobile phone networks and lift all restrictions on access to media sites, social media platforms, VPN and refrain from imposing any further restrictions against use of Internet;
- Immediately allow all humanitarian aid and health support to resume their work unimpeded;
- End all violations of international humanitarian and human rights law in ethnic and ceasefire areas, and that all civilians are protected, including by lifting all barriers to humanitarian assistance and ensuring the non-interference of aid to ethnic areas.

We further call on UN Member States to consider imposition of strategic and targeted sanctions against the Myanmar military as an institution, including military-owned and controlled companies and their substantial business associates in accordance with the recommendations of the UN Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar.

Please accept the assurance of our highest consideration.

For more information, please contact:

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1. Action Committee for Democracy Development
2. Albany Karen Community
3. ALTSEAN-Burma
4. ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights
5. Asia-Pacific Solidarity Coalition (APSOC)
6. Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)
7. Australian Karen Organisation
8. Backpack Health Workers Team
9. Burma Campaign UK
10. Burma Human Rights Network
11. Burma Medical Association
12. Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK
13. Calgary Karen Community Association (CKCA)
14. Canadian Burma Ethnic Nationalities Organization (CBENO)
15. Center for social integrity
16. Chin Human Rights Organization
17. Civil Rights Defenders
18. Eastern Pennsylvania Karen Community
19. Edmonton Karen Community Youth Organization
20. Enlightened Myanmar Research Foundation (EMReF)
21. Equality Myanmar
22. European Karen Network
23. Freedom and Labor Action Group
24. Initiatives for International Dialogue (IID)
25. International Karen Organisation
26. Kachin Women's Association Thailand
27. Karen Affairs Committee
28. Karen Community London
29. Karen Community of Canada
30. Karen Community of Czech Republic
31. Karen Community of Finland
32. Karen Community of Hamilton
33. Karen Community of Ireland
34. Karen Community of Israel
35. Karen Community of Kitchener & Waterloo
36. Karen Community of Leamington
37. Karen Community of Lethbridge
38. Karen Community of North Carolina
39. Karen Community of Norway
40. Karen Community of Ottawa
41. Karen Community of Regina
42. Karen Community of Rochester
43. Karen Community of Saskatoon
44. Karen Community of Syracuse

45. Karen Community of Thunder Bay
46. Karen Community of Toronto
47. Karen Community of Windsor
48. Karen Community of Winnipeg
49. Karen Community Society of British Columbia
50. Karen Environmental and Social Action Network
51. Karen Human Rights Group
52. Karen Office of Relief and Development
53. Karen Organization of America
54. Karen Peace Support Network
55. Karen Refugee Committee
56. Karen Society of Buffalo
57. Karen Student Network Group
58. Karen Swedish Community
59. Karen Teacher Working Group
60. Karen Thai Group
61. Karen Women's Organization
62. Karen Youth of Norway
63. Karen Youth of Toronto
64. Karen Youth Organization
65. KNU Concerned Group
66. Korea Karen Organization
67. Korea Karen Youth Organization
68. Network for Human Rights Documentation Burma (ND-Burma)
69. Oversea Karen Organization Japan
70. Philia_mm Students Group, Australia
71. Progressive Voice
72. Rainfall Feminist Organization
73. Salween Peace Park
74. Swedish Burma Committee
75. US Campaign for Burma
76. Utica Karen Community
77. Women's Peace Network