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182 Organizations for Women's Rights Call Upon United Nations (UN) Security Council to Hold Myanmar Military Accountable for Violence Against Women

During the UN Commission on the Status of Women's 65th Session and in response to the Myanmar military's coup on February 1, Women's Peace Network, and 181 local, regional, and international organizations championing women's rights across the world, urge the UN Security Council to adopt a resolution referring the situation of Myanmar to the International Criminal Court; dispatching a monitoring and mediating body to the country; imposing economic sanctions, and financial penalties and restrictions, on the junta leadership and military-owned and military-controlled businesses; imposing a comprehensive and global arms embargo on the country.

"The UN Security Council's lack of concrete action has intensified these violent attacks against the peaceful protesters," warns Wai Wai Nu, Founder and Executive Director of Women's Peace Network, "the Council's historical failure to take action against the Myanmar military for their crimes of genocide and crimes against humanity emboldened them to stage a coup, and now commit crimes against everyone in the country."

Nationwide, the Myanmar military and security forces are forcefully cracking down on the country's mass movement of nonviolent civil disobedience. Without restraint, the military junta is wielding water cannons, tear gas, stun grenades, rubber bullets, and live ammunition to brutally attack and arbitrarily detain thousands of people protesters – including hundreds of women exercising their fundamental freedoms. Failing to release these political prisoners, the military and security forces are threatening women protesters with rape and gang rape via social media platforms. Without being held accountable, the military regime is indiscriminately opening fire on civilians on the streets and in their homes – murdering at least 20 women since its coup. A student to a mother, an ethnic Chinese to a Rohingya, and in their teens to their seventies, these women reveal that this grassroots movement for democracy is diverse, inclusive, and representative of the country's populace.

"Our families are in fear, we are in fear," shares Zarni, a Burmese woman migrant domestic worker in Thailand, who is affiliated with the International Domestic Workers Federation, "We, as Burmese, will we be able to go back to our homeland? Will we be able to meet our families?"

The organizations asserts that the Myanmar military junta is acting in violation of the UN Charter, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the UN Security Council Resolution 1325, and other women's rights and international law and norms.

"The UN Security Council has a clear choice now – to stand with the extraordinary women Peacebuilders of Myanmar as they take on the responsibility to protect civilians under attack from the military," warns Sanam Naraghi Anderlini MBE, Founder and CEO of International Civil Society Action Network, "or to stay silent and thus complicit in the violence, including rape that is being perpetrated."

Emphasizing their urgency, the 182 human rights organizations stress the Myanmar military's history of torturing and killing the country's ethnic communities – and using sexual violence against their women – with total impunity.

“Given this military's record of using sexual violence as a weapon of war, we fear that the country's progress in enhancing the status of women is at risk now more than ever,” state these organizations combating gender-based violence. They refer to the UN Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar's 2019 report, which found that the Myanmar military had committed heinous crimes of sexual violence and genocide against the Rohingya during their multiyear “clearance operations.”

Madeleine Rees OBE, Secretary-General of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, asserts: “When the military came for the Rohingya, the international community wrung its collective hands and the Government of Myanmar did nothing. Now the military are again going after the people. The international community must not repeat its mistakes. Effective action is needed, and it is needed now!”

The organizations also urge the UN Security Council to take action to prevent the Myanmar military regime from committing further mass atrocities against the civilian population.

“The military must know that no one is above the law and everyone must be held accountable to their actions,” shares Naw K'nyaw Paw, the General Secretary of the Karen Women's Organization, “if no one is held accountable and the institution is not reformed, it is like we are encouraging them to continue abusing people to commit crimes – the abuses will be repeated again and again.”

Amplifying the people's call for justice, together, the 182 members of the global women's rights movement call upon the Security Council: “We are now asking you to take all necessary measures against the Myanmar military, in order to break the cycles of violence and abuse that have gone on for too long.”

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