

BURMA: Letter to ASEAN Concerning Ethnic Minorities

April 22, 2021

Re: Joint Letter from Burma's Ethnic Community Organizations Urging ASEAN Member States to Take Decisive Action to Resolve the Crisis in Burma/Myanmar

Your Excellencies,

We, representing 92 Burma/Myanmar ethnic community organizations, urge ASEAN Member States to take decisive action to restore democracy and respect for human rights in Burma/Myanmar, in accordance with ASEAN's stated mission to support "the principles of democracy, the rule of law and good governance, respect for and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms." In particular, we request that ASEAN Member States clarify that they stand with the people of Burma/Myanmar, not with the military junta, which has usurped the authority of a democratically-elected government and executed a brutal campaign of repression and violence against the people of Burma/Myanmar.

Specifically, we ask that the military junta not be recognized as the legitimate representative of the people of Burma/Myanmar at the ASEAN Special Summit on Burma/Myanmar (the Summit) to be held on April 24, 2021. The will of the people of Burma/Myanmar is represented by a National Unity Government (NUG), which was formed with support from numerous ethnic political parties, ethnic armed resistance organizations, and mass protest movements, and represents 76% of elected MPs. Therefore, ASEAN and its Member States must establish relations with, communicate with, and support the NUG. In addition, since the NUG is the only legitimate representative of the will and desires of the people, any discussion of Burma/Myanmar's future, including at the Summit, must include NUG representatives.

Moreover, any discussion with the Burma/Myanmar military must seek accountability for its heinous and violent campaign against its own people, including murder, torture, assault, and rape as a weapon of war, which amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. In the more than two months since the February 1 coup, the military has used indiscriminate force to brutally kill over 739 [peaceful protesters](#) and [arbitrarily arrest](#) over 3,370 civilians throughout the country.

In Burma/Myanmar's ethnic states, the military's widespread and systematic campaign has worsened an already dire situation. Despite announcing a one-month ceasefire, the military has [launched airstrikes](#) in Karen state's civilian-populated areas, killing scores, causing civilians to [flee their homes](#), displacing over 20,000 villagers, and forcing the Karen National Union to abandon its base in Mon state. In Shan state, the military has begun [indiscriminately firing](#) into the homes of villagers. The military [has launched airstrikes in Kachin state](#) near the Chinese border as its armed conflict with the Kachin Independence Army intensifies, forcing hundreds to flee their homes in Hpakant township. The military's campaign of violence and suppression has driven protestors to seek refuge in ethnic areas, with reports estimating [1,000 protestors](#) joining the 200 protestors already hiding along the southeast border. Many [civilians and police have defected](#) along the northwest border with India, bringing stories of military brutality and repression. The military's violent campaign is being waged in cities and villages, with victims young and old and from all walks of life, leading to death, injury, chaos and deprivation throughout the country.

ASEAN Member States cannot treat the crisis as Burma/Myanmar's own internal affair. The military's violent campaign has caused a humanitarian and refugee crisis, devastated Burma/Myanmar's economy, and brought Burma/Myanmar perilously close to a nationwide civil war and "failed state" status, all of which have obvious implications for peace and security in the region. ASEAN Member States must use the Summit to address the devastation caused by the military and take decisive action rather than continue to offer weak consensus statements. ASEAN must adopt a multi-pronged strategy that prioritizes the safety and security of the people, fosters long-lasting peace and stability, and prioritizes human rights and the restoration of democracy and the rule of law. Accordingly, we urge ASEAN to exercise leadership and to take, collectively and individually, the following actions:

1. Recognize, support, and negotiate with the NUG as the legitimate government of Burma/Myanmar and legitimate representative to ASEAN, including at the Summit;
2. Provide immediate cross-border humanitarian, financial and other assistance, directly to local civil society organizations and non-restricted humanitarian access to all internally-displaced persons;
3. Suspend all political and financial support and engagement with the military regime, including with military-owned business ventures;
4. Fully support the initiative of the international community to impose a global arms embargo;
5. Coordinate with the UN Security Council and UN Human Rights Council to send a joint delegation to monitor the situation and stop the violence across Burma/Myanmar;
6. Engage with the military not as a representative of Burma/Myanmar but only for the purpose of ensuring that it:
 - Immediately and unilaterally ends its brutal and violent repression of democracy protests and protesters and is held responsible and accountable for its actions;
 - Ceases offensives and airstrikes throughout the country, pulls back troops and demilitarizes ethnic areas;
 - Immediately and unconditionally releases all arbitrarily detained protesters and political prisoners, including those who won seats in the November election;
 - Immediately restores full and continuous access to the Internet and all forms of communications;
 - Immediately rescinds all repressive actions limiting human rights, including amendments to existing laws, such as Section 505(a);
 - Does not block the restoration of a civilian government that represents the will of the people of Burma/Myanmar.

As the regional bloc accorded responsibility for peace and security in Southeast Asia, ASEAN must act to ensure a swift and decisive restoration of peace and democracy in Burma/Myanmar. Failure to do so will have devastating consequences for the people of Burma/Myanmar, and for the safety and security of the region and the world.

Sincerely,

Below are the undersigned organizations:

1. Action Corps, USA
2. Albany Karen Community, USA
3. American Baptist Churches USA

4. Arakan American Community, USA
5. Arakan Institute for Peace and Development (AiPAD), Huston, TX, USA
6. Arakan Rohingya Union, USA
7. Australia Karen Organisation, Australia
8. Backpack Health Workers' Team, Thailand
9. Baptist World Alliance, USA
10. Burma Canadian Network, Canada
11. Burma Medical Association, Thailand
12. Burmese Women's Union, Thailand
13. Calgary Karen Community Association (CKCA)
14. California Karen Youth Forum, USA
15. California Shan Society, CA, USA
16. Canadian Rohingya Development Initiative, Canada
17. Chin Association of Maryland, Eikridge, MD, USA
18. Chin Community of Indiana, IN, USA
19. Chin Community of USA
20. DEEKU, the Karenni Community, USA
21. Edmonton Karen Community Youth Organization, Canada
22. European Karen Network
23. Finland Karen Culture Association
24. Human Rights Foundation of Monland
25. International Karen Organisation, Australia
26. Kachin National Organization USA
27. Kansas Karenni community, KS, USA
28. Karen American Association of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, WI, USA
29. Karen Association of Huron, SD, USA
30. Karen Community in Netherlands
31. Karen Community in Norway
32. Karen Community of Akron, OH, USA
33. Karen Community of Canada (KCC)
34. Karen Community of Czech Republic
35. Karen Community of Finland
36. Karen Community of Hamilton, Canada
37. Karen Community of Iowa, IA, USA
38. Karen Community of Ireland
39. Karen Community of Israel
40. Karen Community of Kansas City, KS & MO, USA
41. Karen Community of Kitchener & Waterloo, Canada
42. Karen Community of Leamington, Canada
43. Karen Community of Lethbridge, Canada
44. Karen Community of London, Canada
45. Karen Community of Minnesota, MN, USA
46. Karen Community of North Carolina, NC, USA
47. Karen Community of Ottawa, Canada
48. Karen Community of Regina, Canada

49. Karen community of Rochester, USA
50. Karen Community of Rock Island, IL, USA
51. Karen Community of Saskatoon, Canada
52. Karen Community of Syracuse, USA
53. Karen Community of Thunderbay, Canada
54. Karen Community of Toronto, Canada
55. Karen Community of Windsor, Canada
56. Karen Community of Winnipeg, Canada
57. Karen Community Society of British Columbia, Canada
58. Karen Organization of America, USA
59. Karen Organization of San Diego, USA
60. Karen society of Nebraska, NE, USA
61. Karen Student Association at UNO, NE, USA
62. Karen Swedish Community (KSC), Sweden
63. Karen Thai Group, Thailand
64. Karen Youth Education Pathways, Washington, DC, USA
65. Karen Youth Networks
66. Karen Youth of Norway
67. Karen Youth of Toronto, Canada
68. Karen Youth Organization, Thailand
69. Karenni American Association, St. Paul, MN, USA
70. Karenni Community of Bowling Green, KY, USA
71. Karenni community of Des Moines, IA, USA
72. Karenni Community of Georgia, GA, USA
73. Karenni community of Indianapolis, IN, USA
74. Karenni Community of Massachusetts, MA, USA
75. Karenni community of Minnesota, MN, USA
76. Karenni Community of Missouri, MO, USA
77. Karenni Community of New York, NY, USA
78. Karenni Community of North Carolina, NC, USA
79. Karenni Community of Portland, OR, USA
80. Karenni Community of Taxes, TX, USA
81. Karenni Community of Wisconsin, WI, USA
82. Karenni Society of Minnesota, MN, USA
83. Korea Karen Organization
84. Korea Karen Youth Organization
85. Oversea Karen Organization Japan
86. Rohingya American Society (RAS), Milwaukee, WI, USA
87. Rohingya Cultural Center of Chicago, IL, USA
88. Rohingya Society of Greater Nashua, NH, USA
89. The Burmese Rohingya Association of North America, USA
90. Utica Karen Community, USA
91. World Rohingya Organization, Jackson Height, NY, USA
92. Zomi Association of USA