

9 April 2021

To: ICRC, IFRC and Partners of Myanmar Red Cross Society

Subject: Open Letter from Myanmar CSOs Regarding the Myanmar Red Cross Society's Attendance at the Murderous Junta's Armed Forces Day Celebration Violating Principles of ICRC and IFRC

Dear ICRC Members, IFRC Members and International Partner Countries,

We, 407 Myanmar civil society organizations, condemn the Myanmar Red Cross Society's (MRCS) attendance at the Armed Forces Day reception, which violates the fundamental principles of neutrality and conflict sensitivity, leading to a serious loss of confidence among Myanmar civil society and the public at large. We call on the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), and other partners of MRCS to ensure that the MRCS's leadership upholds the principles of neutrality, ethical conduct and do no harm or otherwise face disciplinary action, including severing all financial and technical support. MRCS and its partners must be fully committed to their duty to promote and respect international humanitarian law and not legitimize the illegitimate military junta.

Those in attendance at the lavish celebrations at the Armed Forces Day on 27 March, 2021 lend much sought after legitimacy to the brutal Myanmar military and is a shameful act of tacit endorsement for a military that has inflicted untold suffering and daily attacks on the people of Myanmar since the attempted and unlawful coup on 1 February. Two months have passed, and the regime has engaged in the targeted [killings](#) of over 641 people, while nearly 3,000 people are currently detained, or sentenced in relation to the brutal coup by the military. Tragically, the number of fatalities above includes at least 47 children, killed in deliberate attacks against Myanmar's most vulnerable population.

Simultaneously, the Myanmar military is continuing its decades-long civil war in the ethnic borderlands of Myanmar, most recently against Kachin and Karen people, exacerbating dire humanitarian conditions through ground attacks, shelling and air strikes deliberately targeting civilians and other non-military targets, such as villages, clinics, schools and an open gold mine, in breach of the Geneva Convention and other principles of international humanitarian law. In Karen State, there is an estimated 20,000 civilians newly displaced by conflict since December 2020, in desperate need of food, water, shelter, and healthcare. At least 2,000 Karen people have sought refuge and protection in Thailand but have been pushed back.

While the MRCS's leadership attended celebrations with fireworks, dinner and a parade on March 27, the host of the celebrations killed at least 169 people, including children. They were systematically killed in the single most bloody day since the 1 February. These barbaric acts by the Myanmar military have recently been [called](#) "actions of a terrorist group" by the Special Advisory Council for Myanmar (SAC-M), composed of international experts on Myanmar. A more considerable and concerted humanitarian response is required. The focus of MRCS's efforts should be concentrated on maximizing the on-the-ground response to the junta's inhumane and murderous acts, and while work is being done, it pales in comparison to ferocity of the junta.

The acts of the MRCS's leadership fundamentally violate the core principles the ICRC movement proports to uphold, in particular the principle of neutrality. In Myanmar, many vulnerable people trust in the Red Cross symbol as a sign of hope, assistance and protection but the actions of the MRCS's leadership

attending the Armed Forces Day have betrayed this trust and confidence. Additionally, attending an event celebrating the accomplishments of a military that has perpetrated genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity – including sexual and gender-based crimes, torture and destruction of homes and property is a disgraceful display of disloyalty to the tireless efforts of MRCS volunteers and healthcare workers working on the ground. Many of these volunteers and healthcare workers are undertaking dangerous and life-threatening activities, applying First Aid and Ambulance Services to victims of the military’s brutality in the streets of Myanmar’s major cities. Some MRCS first aiders and medics have been even [subjected](#) to arbitrarily arrests, intimidation and injury at the hands of the junta.

The [role](#) of the MRCS, with the support of the IFRC and ICRC, is to “provide humanitarian services to vulnerable people in Myanmar” without “engaging at any time in controversies of a political...nature.” It is essential to the independence and neutrality of the Red Cross and Red Crescent that MRCS is not aligned nor is seen to be aligned with the Myanmar military junta.

Therefore, we call on the ICRC and IFRC, and other International Partners to:

- Ensure that the MRCS’s leadership upholds the principles of neutrality, ethical conduct and do no harm or otherwise face disciplinary action, including severing all financial and technical support, thereby restoring confidence;
- Urge the MRCS to rescind any real or perceived support for the illegitimate Myanmar military junta; and
- Rally in a principled, coordinated effort to ensure the protection of vulnerable communities, healthcare workers and volunteers who are being terrorized by this junta in Myanmar.

At this fragile and crucial time in Myanmar, the IFRC, ICRC and their international partners must alleviate the suffering, and assist the people of Myanmar, not the illegitimate and murderous military regime.

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