

For Immediate Release

Japan: Take Action Against Myanmar Coup

Join Targeted Economic Sanctions, Global Arms Embargo; Review Aid

(Tokyo, February 25, 2021) – The Japanese government should take urgent action to pressure the leaders of the military coup in Myanmar to restore the democratically elected government and respect human rights, Human Rights Now, Human Rights Watch, Japan International Volunteer Center, Justice For Myanmar, and Japan NGO Action Network for Civic Space said today.

In a letter to Japan Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi on February 25, 2021, the organizations urged the Japanese government to take joint action with other countries, including imposing targeted economic sanctions against the Myanmar military and companies that it controls, supporting a global arms embargo, and triggering human rights-based conditionals enshrined in Japan's Official Development Assistance programs and charter.

"As a major and influential donor, the Japanese government has a responsibility to take action to promote human rights in Myanmar," said Teppei Kasai, Asia program officer at Human Rights Watch. "It should urgently review and suspend any public aid that could benefit the Myanmar military."

The organizations also said in their letter that Japan should join other concerned governments in imposing targeted economic sanctions against the military-affiliated companies, including Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited (MEHL) and Myanmar Economic Corporation (MEC), while assisting Japanese companies with direct or indirect ties to the military to terminate their business relationships responsibly.

"There is clear and growing evidence that the Myanmar military uses business revenue to finance their widespread abuses," said Yadanar Maung, spokesperson for Justice For Myanmar. "The Japanese government and businesses should uphold their human rights responsibilities and cut ties with the Myanmar military."

For decades, Japan has been a major donor to Myanmar. Japan has provided more than a total of 1 trillion yen (US\$9.5 billion) in loan assistance, and more than 300 billion yen (US\$ 2.8 million) in grant aid, and 88 billion yen (US\$834,000) in technical assistance. By 2017, Japanese aid to Myanmar ranked first among member countries and institutions of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's development cooperation directorate. In November 2016, when Myanmar's de facto leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, visited Japan, Japan announced that its public and private sectors would contribute 800 billion yen (US\$7.6 billion) to Myanmar over a five-year period.

The organizations noted that, "Japan's private sector has also been increasingly investing in Myanmar, at times without adequately respecting the framework laid out in the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights including conducting human rights due diligence."

"The Japanese government should now realize that its efforts to enable Japanese companies to invest in Myanmar have backfired since they didn't adequately consider the risks associated with doing business with the military," said Akiko Sato, deputy secretary-general at Human Rights Now. "Going forward, the government should promote the UN Guiding Principles as well as human rights due diligence among the private sector in Japan in accordance with its October 2020 national action plan on business and human rights."

The organizations also called for the Japanese government to trigger human rights-based conditionals enshrined in its Official Development Assistance programs and charter, which states that "Japan will pay adequate attention to the situation in the recipient countries regarding the process of democratization, the rule of law and the protection of basic human rights, with a view to promoting the consolidation of democratization, the rule of law and the respect for basic human rights."

Humanitarian aid should be maintained and even increased where necessary. However, development aid should be reviewed to ensure it is not delivered via the Myanmar government. Japanese aid should be directed only toward basic human needs and where possible delivered through independent civil society organizations.

"The Japanese government should move in an effective manner to promote the return of democracy in Myanmar, including the release of those detained and the safety of protestors," said Ryota Kato, coordinator at Japan NGO Action Network for Civic Space.