

**Myanmar civil society organizations condemn UNODC's decision to invite brutal military representative, Lt-Gen Than Hlaing, to its 64th session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs**

*UN must immediately act to protect civilians, not legitimize the illegal Myanmar junta*

29 April, 2021

410 Myanmar civil society organizations and four individuals condemn the UN Office of Drugs and Crime's (UNODC) decision to allow Lieutenant-General Than Hlaing, who is sanctioned by Canada, US, UK and the EU, to represent Myanmar via video, at its 64th session of the Commission on Narcotics Drugs in April this year. The CSOs call for UNODC to immediately end all ties with the illegitimate military junta and recognize the National Unity Government as the legitimate governing body representing the people of Myanmar. Allowing the military to represent Myanmar at the UN conference held in Vienna, betrays the will of the people of Myanmar who continue to oppose the illegitimate and brutal military junta and further damages the confidence the people have in the UN to carry out its mandate enshrined in the UN Charter to promote and encourage "respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms".

The 64th meeting of the Narcotics Drugs Commission was held in Vienna, Austria, from 12 to 16 April, and was organized by the UNODC. The annual conference to review and analyze the global drug situation, which hosted UN Member States from around the world, opened with a speech by the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres. The UN has not only failed to act as the brutal military junta commits crimes against humanity, it is now acting to legitimize and offer a platform to those who are murdering innocent people by the hundreds, including children. It is disheartening to see such lack of respect for human rights displayed by the very institution that is mandated to protect and encourage respect for human rights. It is all the more shocking to see a UN institution with a mandate to prevent crime, corruption and terrorism feting an international criminal.

Worse yet, Vienna, Austria - where the conference was held - is part of the EU which sanctioned Lieutenant-General Than Hlaing as part of its restrictive measures (asset freeze and travel ban) on 22 March, 2021. He would have been prevented from entering Vienna had he not been allowed to join by video conference. This is a grave circumvention of the EU sanctions, weakening their very purpose.

On 2 February, the day after the coup, Lieutenant-General Than Hlaing was appointed Chief of the Myanmar Police Force and Deputy Home Affairs Minister by the illegitimate military junta. In his position as the Chief of the Myanmar Police Force, he commanded the commission of extreme brutality and acts of violence against peaceful protesters, members of the Civil Disobedience Movement, and other innocent individuals who have been killed, detained and tortured. 756 have been killed as of 28 April 2021 including at least 51 children. 3,449 people have been detained. 1,237 arrest warrants have been issued. Yet the people of Myanmar have opposed the military junta as it continues its brutal attempt at an already failing coup.

As well as the EU, the US, UK and Canada have also imposed sanctions against Than Hlaing, who the UNODC shamefully decided to allow the illegal military junta a platform to speak to the world as the representative of Myanmar at its conference.

This is not the first time that the UNODC has been criticized for legitimizing the Myanmar military's narrative. UNODC has a long and troubled history of turning a blind eye to the complicity of the Myanmar military and other state backed groups in Myanmar's profitable drug trade. In particular, UNODC's annual

opium survey which is published jointly with the Myanmar government, has come under heavy criticism for distorting the realities on the ground in favor of the Myanmar military and government. UNODC's Myanmar Opium Survey 2013 indicated that opium production levels in Kachin State were down by 10%, however the survey failed to include Chipwe, which was controlled by the Border Guard Force, under the command of the Myanmar military. In its Myanmar Opium Survey 2018, UNODC once again provided contentious and incorrect information in its reporting, stating that highest density of poppy cultivation had taken place under areas controlled by the ethnic armed organizations. Such statements, which were refuted by both civil society organizations and ethnic armed organizations, lent legitimacy to the Myanmar military and government's facade that they were enforcers of drug eradication rather than address the rampant corruption and their culpability in one of the most profitable trades in Myanmar.

UNODC has long failed to heed the calls from civil society organizations to accurately reflect the situation on the ground. Its invitation of a sanctioned military official who is responsible for the violence inflicted against the people of Myanmar to its annual conference is a part of a pattern indicating a systemic failure by the United Nations to ensure that all bodies of the UN reflect the human rights values enshrined in its Charter. Therefore, we call on:

- The UNODC to immediately end all ties with the illegitimate military junta and recognize and work with the National Unity Government, the legitimate governing body representing the people of Myanmar;
- The UN Secretary-General, the UN OHCHR and other bodies of the UN to ensure that UNODC act in compliance with the human rights principles enshrined in the UN Charter - the UN must ensure a coordinated approach that embodies the "do no harm" and conflict sensitivity principles;
- The UN bodies to stop recognizing and hosting the Myanmar military junta at events and meetings and instead invite representatives of the legitimate government, the National Unity Government, as the official representative of Myanmar.

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