



ASEAN: Stop enabling Myanmar's military junta, support global arms embargo

(3 June 2021, Bangkok) – The nine ASEAN Member States that seek to block a UN General Assembly draft resolution calling for a global arms embargo on Myanmar's military junta are betraying the regional bloc's commitment to the cessation of violence in Myanmar, said the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development, Progressive Voice and ALTSEAN-Burma.

Their position further emboldens the junta to continue perpetrating atrocities in the country, the organisations said.

In a joint letter dated 19 May to Liechtenstein as the penholder of the resolution, all ASEAN Member States excluding Myanmar made it clear that they seek to block a draft UN resolution on global arms embargo to Myanmar.¹ The letter requested a water down of the calls for 'an immediate suspension of the direct and indirect supply, sale or transfer of all weapons and munitions' to Myanmar, in the supposed interest of consensus building and fostering engagement with the countries most affected by the resolution.

'Cutting the resources that help the military junta sustain its tyranny, including military supply, is essential to putting an end to this crisis. Civil society organisations have documented how the junta has utilised arms supplied by the international community to tighten its claws on the country. The ASEAN Member States' decision to go against an arms embargo will enable further human rights violations against peaceful protesters, participants of the Civil Disobedience Movement, journalists and civilians in Myanmar,' said Khin Ohmar, Founder and Chairperson of Progressive Voice.

The groups also called on ASEAN to meet with the National Unity Government (NUG) Government – formed in accordance with the outcomes of the November 2020 elections – as well as the Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) during their planned visit to Myanmar. According to reports, the chair and secretary-general of ASEAN are scheduled to visit Myanmar this week and are slated to meet with the leaders of the military junta.

Civil society organisations have repeatedly called on ASEAN to hold the junta accountable, support a global arms embargo and collaborate with the UN to address the crisis. However, these calls have not been taken up by the regional bloc.² Civil society organisations have also urged ASEAN to meet with the NUG and provide them with due recognition as the legitimate representatives of the people of Myanmar.

'The move by ASEAN Member States to weaken the draft resolution would further delay the cessation of violence in Myanmar. It reveals the regional bloc's lack of political will to provide immediate measures that would halt the violence and human rights abuses in Myanmar,' said Shamini Darshni Kaliemuthu, Executive Director of FORUM-ASIA.

More than a month after the ASEAN Leaders' Meeting on 24 April, the regional bloc has failed to make any tangible progress towards the implementation of the five-point consensus between ASEAN and

¹ <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/southeast-asian-nations-oppose-arms-embargo-myanmar-report-2021-05-28/>

² <http://l.forum-asia.org/CSOLetterASEANsummit>

the junta, which includes the cessation of violence in Myanmar and the deployment of an ASEAN Special Envoy.³

Meanwhile, the death toll, violence and arbitrary arrests continue to escalate in Myanmar. In May alone, security forces killed at least 125 civilians and displaced over 150,000 people. There were 530 violent attacks, including scores of airstrikes, that either targeted or failed to protect civilians in the first three weeks of May.⁴ Since the attempted coup on 1 February, at least 840 have been killed and 5,529 arrested by the junta.⁵

FORUM-ASIA, Progressive Voice and ALTSEAN-Burma are gravely concerned over the position of ASEAN Member States on the draft resolution.

ASEAN Member States' attempts to block the draft resolution for a global arms embargo blatantly contradicts its five-point consensus; the first point being, 'there shall be immediate cessation of violence in Myanmar and all parties shall exercise utmost restraint'.

The rights groups call on the ASEAN Member States to immediately revert its position on the global arms embargo and support the efforts by the international community to hold the junta accountable. The military junta must be held to account for its flagrant disregard of ASEAN's five-point consensus, which also lacks time-bound actions.

'We call on the members of the UN General Assembly to reject the motion made by the ASEAN Member States and ensure the adoption of a resolution that calls for an immediate global arms embargo on Myanmar military junta effectively and immediately,' said Debbie Stothard, Founder and Coordinator of ALTSEAN-Burma.

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The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) is a Bangkok-based regional network of 81 member organisations across 21 Asian countries, with consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, and consultative relationship with the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights. Founded in 1991, FORUM-ASIA works to strengthen movements for human rights and sustainable development through research, advocacy, capacity-development and solidarity actions in Asia and beyond. It has sub-regional offices in Geneva, Jakarta, and Kathmandu. www.forum-asia.org

ALTSEAN Burma (Alternative ASEAN Network on Burma) is an NGO working to support national and grassroots movements of Burma/Myanmar working for human rights and democracy. We were formed in October 1996 by a diverse network of ASEAN-based organizations and individuals at the Alternative ASEAN Meeting on Burma held in Bangkok to strengthen connections and solidarity between activists from Burma and those struggling against repressive regimes in ASEAN. www.altsean.org

Progressive Voice (PV) is a participatory rights-based policy research and advocacy organization rooted in civil society, that maintains strong networks and relationships with grassroots organizations and community-based organizations throughout Myanmar. It acts as a bridge to the international community and international policymakers by amplifying voices from the ground, and advocating for a rights-based policy narrative. www.progressivevoicemyanmar.org

³ <http://l.forum-asia.org/ALM1month>

⁴ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Yog0xq8nDnVcfe90zKz-85KNmEtYirk2/view>

⁵ <https://aappb.org/?p=15432>

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