

Press Release: CSOs call for UN Secretary-General to spearhead a UN coordinated humanitarian intervention to combat the catastrophic COVID-19 crisis in Myanmar

[10 August 2021] 443 Myanmar civil society organizations (CSOs) call for the UN Secretary-General to immediately intervene to address the latest catastrophic wave of COVID-19 in Myanmar in accordance with the UN Security Council Resolution 2532 calling for a global response to combat the pandemic, with the “United Nations playing a key coordinating role.”¹ On 23 July, 2021, 443 Myanmar CSOs sent an urgent [letter](#) to the UN Secretary-General, calling for immediate action as the COVID-19 crisis and the spread of Delta variant worsened throughout Myanmar.

“The military is deliberately exacerbating the current COVID-19 crisis for its own political and strategic gain, while collectively punishing the public for rejecting the coup,” the letter stated.

The letter to the UN Secretary-General is being made public following the appointment of Brunei’s Deputy Foreign Minister, Erywan Yusof, as ASEAN’s special envoy to Myanmar. After over three months of inaction, the special envoy has stated that ASEAN was moving “immediately” to provide humanitarian assistance and medical equipment to Myanmar. However, in a separate [briefing paper](#), CSOs have raised serious concerns about the potential of ASEAN and its humanitarian arm, the AHA Centre, lending political legitimacy to the junta.

“This crisis requires nothing less than an urgent intervention by the UN to stop the spread of COVID-19 in Myanmar in a concerted, immediate and unified manner, including by demanding an immediate cessation of hostilities and international monitoring that will allow for a scale-up and access to all parts of the country. The UN must stop dithering in its responses,” said Khin Ohmar of Progressive Voice.

The military junta has continued to weaponize the COVID-19 pandemic for its own political gain – hugely exacerbating the loss of life. According to figures from the junta-run Ministry of Health (MoH), In July alone, 6,000 people have died from COVID-19, which constitutes 58 percent of Myanmar’s official coronavirus deaths and 46 percent of infections. However, test positivity rates have consistently stayed well over 30%, suggesting that testing remains significantly limited, and that the number of infections and deaths is likely far higher than what has been reported by the junta-run MoH. Meanwhile, the military has targeted medical workers and facilities and have used vaccines as a bargaining tool to persuade medical workers to abandon the steadfast anti-junta Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM).

“The UN, donors, humanitarian aid organizations and the international community must work in partnership with and provide assistance through ethnic health providers, civil society and community-based organizations, health workers and National Unity Government and Ethnic Health Organizations’ COVID-19 Task Force, who are best placed to assist communities. Agency over the humanitarian response must be in the hands of these groups working on the ground,” said Saw Alex of Karen Peace Support Network.

The third wave of COVID-19 that is ravaging communities is not only a threat to the people of Myanmar, but to regional and global health security. As the humanitarian and human rights crisis in Myanmar created by the Myanmar military continued to deteriorate since February, the international community

¹ S/RES/2532 (2020), 1 July 2020

deferred to ASEAN to lead the response to the crisis in Myanmar. However, ASEAN's humanitarian arm, the AHA Centre, remains ill-equipped to handle "man-made" disaster in Myanmar, while also lacking the independence as ASEAN operational procedures would allow the military junta to dictate the terms in which the AHA Centre operates inside Myanmar.

"The military junta is no partner in the distribution of aid or in providing medical assistance, as they have time and again weaponized aid for their own ends," said Moon Nay Li of Kachin Women's Association Thailand.

The third wave of COVID-19 crisis is destroying communities while the military junta continues brutal killings, torture, arbitrary arrests, detentions, and persecution of medical staff for joining the CDM since their coup d'état attempt on 1 February, 2021. The military junta has [murdered](#) 962 people, arrested 7,084 and displaced over 230,000 people since the coup by conducting fierce aerial attacks and artillery shelling against civilians, villages and religious buildings.

"The UN, UN Security Council and international community must immediately assist the people of Myanmar to combat this crisis in a way that does not further embolden the military junta, which is the root cause of the health, human rights, and humanitarian catastrophes currently unfolding in Myanmar," said Myanmar CSOs. "The UN and the international community must ensure that it upholds the principles of 'do no harm'."

Note to Editors:

- See the letter of urgent appeal by 443 Myanmar CSOs to the UN Secretary-General here: <https://bit.ly/3fQyDq2>
- See more on the analysis of the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management (AHA Centre) by Progressive Voice and The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) here: <https://bit.ly/3xur4Ly>
- On 6 August, 413 Myanmar CSOs resolutely rejected the appointment of Brunei's Deputy Foreign Minister, Erywan Yusof, as ASEAN's special envoy to Myanmar. See the joint statement here: <https://bit.ly/3INy6UF>

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