



Myanmar: ASEAN's Humanitarian aid to Myanmar must not legitimize military junta

[Bangkok, 4 August 2021] The Association of the Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the rest of the international community must provide humanitarian assistance through the [COVID-19 Task Force](#) set up by the Ministry of Health under interim government of Myanmar – the National Unity Government (NUG) – and Ethnic Health Organizations, as well as through cross-border channels, local humanitarian networks, ethnic service providers, and community-based organizations, said Progressive Voice and the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) in a joint statement today.

One hundred days have passed since ASEAN leaders and Myanmar's junta chief Min Aung Hlaing reached the Five-Point Consensus on Myanmar during the ASEAN Leaders' Meeting on 24 April 2021, yet little progress has been made by ASEAN towards the realization of the consensus.

The consensus placed the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management (AHA Centre) as the main vehicle through which ASEAN shall provide humanitarian assistance to Myanmar. However, civil society are concerned about the capacity and independence of AHA Centre, as its Governing Board is currently represented by the Myanmar junta's delegation, which would allow the junta to dictate the terms under which AHA Centre operates. This adds to the on-going criticism on the AHA Centre's failures in regards the situation of Rohingya in Rakhine State after 2017. A solution beyond AHA Centre is needed.

"The AHA Centre's operations are marred by its response to the genocide against Rohingya in Rakhine State. The AHA Centre failed to acknowledge the atrocities committed by the Myanmar military and their negligence entrenched the apartheid conditions that Rohingya continue to suffer today," said Khin Ohmar of Progressive Voice.

"The AHA Centre do not have mandate nor capacity to deliver aid to the people of Myanmar in a way that does not lend tactical and political advantage to the junta. The people of Myanmar are in dire need of support from the regional and international community, but tackling the current crisis through the AHA Centre is to allow the military junta, perpetrator of this humanitarian crisis, to control funding and channel the assistance as they please to their political advantage."

In a new briefing paper *Great Expectations: Analysis of the ASEAN Coordinating Center for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management*, FORUM-ASIA and Progressive Voice examined the dire humanitarian crisis created by the Myanmar military since the coup on 1 February, and analyzed the role of the AHA Centre, exploring the humanitarian implications for ASEAN and the wider international community.

The paper found that not only is the AHA Centre ill-equipped to handle a so-called "man-made" disaster in Myanmar, its [Standard Operating Procedure](#) allows the Myanmar junta to "exercise the overall direction, control, coordination and supervision of the assistance within its territory." As ASEAN has continued to engage with the brutal and illegitimate junta, refusing to meet with other stakeholders in affront to its own Five Point Consensus, it is likely that ASEAN will work with the junta in provision of humanitarian aid as outlined by the AHA Centre's procedures.

According to the paper, providing humanitarian aid through the AHA Centre would risk strengthening the junta's position regionally and internationally and emboldening the junta that have so far killed at least 945 people, arrested 7,026, detained or sentenced 5,474 and displaced at least 230,000 ethnic minorities by aerial bombing and artillery shelling since 1 February.

The human rights and humanitarian disasters have been further compounded by the third wave of COVID-19 and recent flooding, incidences which have been weaponized by the junta for their own political gain, including by calling on the international community to support their relief efforts in a ploy to gain legitimacy. On the ground, the junta has continued to arrest healthcare workers, detain those with expertise on COVID-19 and vaccine rollout, and attack medical facilities.

"It is essential to ensure that the junta does not weaponize the access to humanitarian aid to seek legitimacy from the international community. Civil society, the international community, and particularly ASEAN must recognize and cooperate with NUG, and collectively ensure direct access to people in need without junta's intervention," said Shamini Darshni Kaliemuthu, Executive Director of FORUM-ASIA.

"ASEAN and the international community must recognize and engage with the NUG, and disengage with the junta in provision of humanitarian assistance to prevent them from weaponizing humanitarian aid. We also call on ASEAN to work with the UN and international community to ensure that independent humanitarian organizations and agencies can deliver medical and humanitarian assistance, especially much needed COVID-19 related health support including personal protective equipment, ventilators, oxygen concentrators, and vaccines doses," said the rights groups.

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- **The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)** is a 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. Its regional secretariat is in Bangkok, and it has sub-regional offices in Geneva, Jakarta, and Kathmandu. www.forum-asia.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

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