

Myanmar civil society representatives welcome ASEAN's decision to exclude the Myanmar Junta from ASEAN Summits, but oppose its invitation to a 'non-political representative'

[18 October 2021] Southeast Asian Foreign Ministers, during the Emergency Foreign Ministers' Meeting on Friday, decided to exclude the Myanmar military junta from attending the upcoming ASEAN Summits. The decision is the first significant step that ASEAN has taken against the junta after almost nine months of the Myanmar military junta's campaign of terror in the wake of the 1 February 2021 coup d'état. It is also the first significant rebuke of the military junta by ASEAN, after nearly six months of blatant disregard for the Five-Point Consensus which was reached between leaders of ASEAN and the coup leader, Min Aung Hlaing, on 24 April.

The Statement by the Chair of the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting stressed the corrosive impact the situation in Myanmar was having on regional security, "as well as the unity, credibility and centrality of ASEAN."

Representatives of Myanmar civil society organizations welcome the decision but oppose ASEAN's invitation to a "non-political representative" at the ASEAN Summits, or future Summits.

Khin Ohmar of Progressive Voice states: "Regardless of whether the chosen representative is political or non-political, as long as they represent the military junta, we will continue to reject their presence at all ASEAN Summits. The junta is a terrorist organization and anyone appointed by them as delegates to the Summits do not represent the people of Myanmar. Furthermore, inviting a 'non-political' representative is an attempt to depoliticize an issue that is deeply political. Instead of further dithering in addressing the situation in Myanmar, ASEAN must immediately take steps to recognize the National Unity Government as the legitimate government of the people of Myanmar by extending to them a formal invitation to the ASEAN Summits."

Nai Aue Mon of Human Rights Foundation of Monland states: "We welcome this decisive move by ASEAN that denies the Myanmar military junta the legitimacy it craves. ASEAN waited too long to make this decision. The military has already killed 433 in cold blood and arrested 4,618 as of 16 October since the Five-Point Consensus. The decision by ASEAN should not be limited to Summits but must apply to other bodies and mechanisms within ASEAN, including the AICHR and ACWC, who must take this as a cue to immediately stop inviting the junta representatives to its platforms. The junta's woeful non-compliance with the Five-Point Consensus must be met with meaningful action."

Naw Htoo Htoo of Karen Human Rights Group states: "There have been commitments made to deliver humanitarian aid through the AHA Centre, but it is important to remember that it is the heinous actions of the military junta that is creating the human rights and humanitarian catastrophe. ASEAN must coordinate with the UN to address the Myanmar crisis and AHA Centre must provide aid through the National Unity Government, ethnic health organizations, local civil society and humanitarian organizations employing cross-border methods to reach the people in need of humanitarian assistance."

Min Aung Hlaing and the Myanmar military stands accused of committing genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. For the ASEAN to ensure that Myanmar military junta is not present at it's Summits is to preserve their own integrity, said the groups.

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See the open letter to ASEAN leaders urging them not to extend an invitation to Myanmar's military junta to the upcoming ASEAN Summit: <https://bit.ly/3vILHKE>

See the briefing paper outlining the deepening humanitarian crisis in Myanmar:
<https://bit.ly/3IL8oEL>

See the briefing paper outlining the dire humanitarian crisis and analyzing the role of the AHA Centre: <https://bit.ly/3FWUHus>