



Press Release: Tanintharyi People's Voice holds press conference to release report titled “Myanmar Military’s Weaponization of COVID-19 in Tanintharyi Region”

Date: 4th May, 2022

After the Myanmar Military launched its attempted coup on 1 February 2021, the military junta’s weaponizing of the COVID-19 epidemic in Tanintharyi Region has been closely monitored by local civil society. During the four-month period from December 2021 to March 2022, a research initiative on the COVID-19 response in Tanintharyi Region was conducted by Tanintharyi People’s Voice – an umbrella network of 30 local civil society organizations working across various sectors in Tanintharyi Region. In each of Tanintharyi Region’s 10 townships members of the Tanintharyi People’s Voice network conducted interview surveys with 32 people, and a further 10 in-depth interviews were conducted with victims of human rights abuses perpetrated by the military junta. In total 260 people were interviewed for the report being released today by Tanintharyi People’s Voice.

The Tanintharyi People’s Voice research found that there have been eight key ways that the Myanmar military has weaponized COVID-19 in Tanintharyi Region:

- 1) COVID-19 used as an excuse for deaths of political prisoners in junta custody.
- 2) COVID-19 used as rationale for isolating political prisoners.
- 3) People feel insecure using, and fear arrest at, junta-run vaccination sites.
- 4) Poor health standards and discrimination at junta-run vaccination sites.
- 5) COVID-19 used as rationale for junta restrictions on freedom of movement.
- 6) Junta orders against mask-wearing violate COVID-19 prevention standards.
- 7) COVID-19 used a pretext for junta nighttime household inspection raids.
- 8) Community-led COVID-19 response initiatives disrupted by junta.

Tanintharyi People’s Voice expects that the findings presented in this briefer will contribute the growing body of evidence that the Myanmar military junta has undoubtedly made the COVID-19 situation worse and is not a reliable healthcare provider, and therefore should not be considered a trustworthy partner for international stakeholders wishing to provide COVID-19 humanitarian assistance to people in Myanmar.

Based on the findings outlined in this report, Tanintharyi People’s Voice makes the following recommendations to the UN and International Community:

- International humanitarian assistance is immediately required in all parts of Myanmar including Tanintharyi Region, but such assistance must not be delivered through or in cooperation with the military junta.
- The UN Secretary-General must lead a UN coordinated humanitarian emergency intervention to combat the catastrophic COVID-19 crisis in Myanmar.
- UN agencies and INGOs should work with and put trust in local CSOs, ethnic CSOs and ethnic health service providers, including through cross-border channels.

- International stakeholders delivering humanitarian assistance should maintain close and regular communication, consultation and collaboration with the National Unity Government, Ethnic Armed Organizations, National Unity Consultative Council, and the COVID-19 Task Force.
- The UN Security Council must adopt a resolution on Myanmar to end the military's violence by referring the situation of Myanmar to the ICC and imposing global arms embargo.

Please read the full report attached for the detailed research findings.

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