



Immediate Release

UN and ASEAN Risk Complicity in Myanmar junta's weaponization of Aid and atrocity crimes *UN OCHA and AHA Centre must pause the humanitarian assessment and delivery programs*

[31 May 2022] The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and ASEAN's humanitarian body is at risk of becoming complicit in the Myanmar military's weaponization of humanitarian aid while whitewashing its grave crimes, said civil society organizations today.

The UN OCHA and ASEAN's intergovernmental humanitarian wing, the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management (AHA Centre) are beginning its assessment of humanitarian aid delivery following the [outcome](#) of the 6 May Consultative Meeting on the ASEAN Humanitarian Assistance to Myanmar.

The AHA Centre is to work closely with the Myanmar military junta's Task Force for the implementation of delivery assistance. The AHA Centre effectively allows the Myanmar junta, perpetrator of grave atrocity crimes and the root cause of the humanitarian crisis, to take control of aid delivery.

The assessment and delivery programs that are being conducted by OCHA and AHA Centre will allow the junta access to the areas it has launched scorched-earth attacks, where communities have stood strongest against its ongoing campaign of terror which has led to the current crisis, the groups said.

On Monday, the National Unity Government's (NUG) Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management and three longstanding ethnic armed revolutionary organizations from Karen, Karenni and Chin States issued a [joint statement](#) objecting to the lack of consultation in the designing and planning of the assessment for humanitarian aid delivery programs.

The areas controlled by the three ethnic revolutionary organizations – Karen National Union, Karenni National Progressive Party, and Chin National Front – who issued the joint statement with Myanmar's legitimate government, NUG, has seen fierce aerial and ground attacks by the Myanmar military since the failed coup of February 2021.

Naw Wakushee of Karen Peace Support Network said: "To distribute aid without inclusion of local stakeholders in decision making and implementation, undermines the efficacy of aid provision and denies agency to local actors – representing a continued colonization of aid in

Myanmar. The Myanmar military have conducted fierce airstrikes and shelling that have killed children, displaced the elderly, and burnt down entire villages that has led to the current crisis that OCHA and AHA Centre are claiming to address. The military junta is the root cause of human suffering in Myanmar and thus cannot be a partner in distribution of aid.”

Salai Za Uk Ling of Chin Human Rights Organization said: “Distributing aid through the military junta will only serve to embolden the junta to continue their scorched earth campaign – in direct violation of the ‘do no harm’ principle. The junta, historically and throughout the attempted coup, deliberately weaponizes aid for their own political and strategic benefit – cutting off most vulnerable communities who are in dire need of aid. UN agencies have been repeatedly denied access to ethnic areas including in Chin State and central regions where the junta has been committing war crimes and crimes against humanity with impunity.”

Ko Nee of Karenni Civil Society Network said: “The military junta has no respect for human life. They block, confiscate, destroy and burn humanitarian aid and attack humanitarian actors. All the while continuing to raid villages and indiscriminately target civilians with airstrikes, such as in January of this year when the junta has conducted airstrikes targeting an IDP camp in Pruso Karenni State, mercilessly killing two girls and one man. OCHA and AHA Centre must pause this assessment and delivery program and immediately convene an inclusive and meaningful consultative meeting with the NUG, ethnic revolutionary organizations and local humanitarian and civil society organizations. It is our people and our communities suffering from the attacks of the military junta and we are the ones who have been delivering much needed urgent aid to those vulnerable populations. Without our participation, this is yet another mission by the UN and ASEAN doomed to fail. The UN and ASEAN must stop gambling with our people's lives by further legitimizing and emboldening the junta to commit atrocity crimes against our people.”

Khin Ohmar of Progressive Voice said: “It is a farce to profess principles of neutrality or impartiality when OCHA and AHA Centre is failing to work with all stakeholders and instead working with the junta which is the root cause of the humanitarian crisis, and perpetrator of atrocity crimes. This assessment and delivery program jointly undertaken with the junta’s Task Force legitimizes war criminals. OCHA and AHA Centre must listen to the peoples of Myanmar and immediately pause this assessment and delivery program, and convene inclusive and meaningful consultations with local actors at the center. Otherwise, OCHA and AHA Centre risk becoming complicit in Myanmar military’s weaponization of aid and atrocity crimes, and violations of international law.”

Debbie Stothard of ALTSEAN-Burma said: “The AHA Centre is an organization that is not equipped to handle humanitarian crises that result from political violence. During the Rohingya genocide in 2017, the distribution of AHA Centre aid was controlled and manipulated to serve the aims of the military to further persecute the Rohingya. ASEAN must NOT allow aid to be weaponized by the junta to justify its crimes against humanity and war crimes and further threaten regional human security. History is doomed to repeat itself unless aid is distributed through local humanitarian groups, including cross-border channels.”

765 civil society organizations recently [expressed](#) grave concerns at the decision reached during a Consultative Meeting on ASEAN Humanitarian Assistance to Myanmar, led by Cambodia as the Chair of ASEAN, that placed the delivery of humanitarian aid in the hands of the Myanmar military junta. The groups called for the international community to prioritize the provision of cross-border humanitarian aid through local civil society and humanitarian organizations without the junta's intervention.

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