

November 24, 2022 | Myanmar

Germany's support for capacity building of Myanmar junta may breach EU sanctions

The German Federal Foreign Office is funding the training of Myanmar military junta personnel through a Max Planck Foundation for International Peace and the Rule of Law project for the promotion of maritime peace and security in Southeast Asia, in potential violation of EU sanctions.

As part of the program, the Max Planck Foundation has invited the junta to nominate three representatives for a workshop to be held in Singapore from November 28 to December 2, 2022 on maritime security and the law of the sea, confirmed by a Justice For Myanmar source.

Topics to be covered in the workshop include military operations at sea, maritime terrorism, and ways to respond to unilateral sanctions.

The German government is paying the travel and accommodation costs for senior and mid-level junta personnel, including from the junta's defence ministry. The Myanmar participants are under the control of and serve the State Administration Council (SAC), which is the illegal junta's executive body.

Earlier this month, the EU sanctioned SAC, and it has previously sanctioned the junta's leader, Min Aung Hlaing, the junta's defence minister, Mya Tun Oo, and other junta ministers.

The EU's recent designation states that "SAC is engaged in actions that threaten the peace, security and stability of Myanmar/Burma".

Similarly, the war criminals Min Aung Hlaing and Mya Tun Oo have both been sanctioned for "[having] been directly involved in and responsible for decision-making concerning state functions and [are] therefore responsible for undermining democracy and the rule of law in Myanmar/Burma", and for "[being] directly responsible for [SAC's] repressive decisions and for serious human rights violations".

The Max Planck Foundation project supports SAC and at least two EU-sanctioned individuals through the financing of international travel that rewards loyal personnel under their control and equips them with knowledge and skills that assists the junta's illegal coup attempt.

The benefits of the junta's participation in the Max Planck Foundation project is all the more strategically important to the sanctioned entity and individuals as the junta only has stable control of 17 per cent of Myanmar territory, meaning capacity-building is of assistance in increasing its control, as the junta intensifies its war of terror against the people. The Max Planck Foundation project provides specific skills to assist the junta's illegal attempt to take control of Myanmar's coastline and maritime borders.

Participation in the Max Planck Foundation project also legitimises the junta as the government of Myanmar, an outcome the people of Myanmar have been courageously rejecting for the past 22 months, effectively preventing the junta's illegal power grab.

By the enablement of such benefits to a sanctioned entity and sanctioned individuals through the provision of funds, the German Federal Foreign Office and the Max Planck Foundation may be in breach of Article 4a(2) of EU sanctions.

The upcoming Singapore workshop is the fifth in a series of six planned activities. Two in-person workshops have been held since the military's illegal coup attempt, one in Vietnam in September 2022 and one in the Philippines in July 2022.

Junta representatives were funded by the German government to attend the workshop in Vietnam, according to a post by the Max Planck Foundation, which stated that "all ASEAN Member States nominated their representatives, with 26 engaged participants from all 10 ASEAN Member States being able to participate."

Representatives from nine ASEAN states attended the Philippines workshop and Justice For Myanmar cannot confirm if junta representatives were included.

The Max Planck Foundation maritime peace and security project started in October 2020, before the Myanmar military's illegal attempted coup, with the objective "to strengthen preventive diplomacy and regional cooperation in SEA to improve maritime peace and security".

Max Planck Foundation continues to list the program on its website under "current projects in Myanmar".

Germany has repeatedly spoken out for human rights and democracy in Myanmar through UN General Assembly and Human Rights Council resolutions.

German support for the Myanmar military junta through the Max Planck Foundation is inconsistent with its public positions on the crisis in Myanmar and its international human rights obligations.

The German Federal Foreign Office and the Max Planck Foundation for International Peace and the Rule of Law did not reply to Justice For Myanmar's requests for a response.

Justice For Myanmar spokesperson Yadanar Maung says: "By providing support and legitimacy to the Myanmar military junta, the German government and the Max Planck Foundation are emboldening its atrocity crimes, undermining democracy and potentially breaching EU sanctions.

"The junta is the cause of war and human insecurity in Myanmar. It is deplorable that the German government sees it as appropriate to use public funds to financially support the junta's participation in a program that purportedly aims to promote peace and security.

"The provision of these funds enable a sanctioned entity and persons and personnel under their control to reward loyalty, gain legitimacy and acquire skills and knowledge that supports the junta's illegal attempted coup.

"In launching its coup attempt, the junta has killed more than 2,500 and arrested over 16,000 people, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners.

"The Myanmar military uses its navy to commit atrocity crimes and other human rights abuses, including the regular interception and arbitrary arrest of Rohingya trying to flee the junta's ongoing campaign of genocide.

"It is junta officials involved in abuses at sea or people under junta control that are being rewarded with all expenses paid international travel.

“We call on the German government and the Max Planck Foundation to immediately exclude the junta from remaining activities in the “Promoting Maritime Peace and Security in Southeast Asia” program and all other programs, meetings and events.

“We call on the German parliament to urgently investigate why taxpayer money has been used to support members of the Myanmar military junta, and whether such acts constitute breaches of EU sanctions.

“We call on the European Union to further impose targeted sanctions on the junta and its businesses, including a complete ban on the supply of aviation fuel to Myanmar.”

More information:

Justice For Myanmar, a group of covert activists campaigning for justice and accountability for the people of Myanmar, is calling for an end to military business and for federal democracy and a sustainable peace.

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