

May 26, 2023 | Myanmar

ASEAN-Japan Centre supporting Myanmar junta's trade and tourism plans, as it wages terror campaign

According to leaked documents and public sources, the Tokyo-based ASEAN-Japan Centre on Trade, Investment and Tourism provided a grant to the junta's investment and foreign economic relations ministry for a capacity building program on reforms required to implement international investment agreements.

The grant was awarded for the 2022-23 fiscal year, and financed at least one event held in March 2023, opened by EU-sanctioned junta minister Kan Zaw.

The ASEAN-Japan Centre has refused to disclose to Justice For Myanmar the amount of funds provided to the junta, stating that the information is only available to board members.

The ASEAN-Japan Centre is an intergovernmental organisation made up of the Japanese government and the governments of each ASEAN member state, including Myanmar.

The Centre is governed by a council, which consists of 11 representatives appointed by each member country.

Myanmar is wrongly represented on the council by Soe Han, the junta's ambassador to Japan, and this legitimises the junta and facilitates continued support, emboldening the junta's terror campaign.

Japan is represented on the council by Yutaka Arima, an assistant minister of foreign affairs.

The capacity building grant is one of several ASEAN-Japan Centre initiatives with junta ministries, legitimising the junta, encouraging business engagement and building the capacity of junta staff.

The centre has an active partnership with the junta's hotels and tourism ministry, supporting the junta's attempts to promote tourism, which provides it with legitimacy and a source of foreign revenue.

Since late 2021, as the junta's violent attacks against the people intensified, the junta tourism ministry organised regular trainings and seminars supported by the ASEAN-Japan Centre. These involved the participation of junta minister Htay Aung and Japanese ASEAN-Japan Centre senior members, aimed at promoting Japanese tourism in Myanmar.

In January 2022, the ASEAN-Japan Centre supported the junta to run a Japanese culinary skills training, opened by Htay Aung and ASEAN-Japan Centre Secretary General Kunihiko Hirabayashi.

In late 2022 and early 2023, Htay Aung opened seminars for service providers of Japanese tourists in Bagan and Kalaw with ASEAN-Japan Centre officials, which were featured in junta propaganda.

The ASEAN-Japan Centre has also supported the junta to provide Japanese language training for tour guides.

The ASEAN-Japan Centre is now promoting tourism to Myanmar as part of the fiftieth anniversary or ASEAN-Japan “friendship and cooperation”, and has launched a website in Japanese. In consultation with the junta, the site includes [five ideas](#) for Japanese tourists to visit Myanmar, misleading the Japanese public that it is a safe and ethical destination for a holiday.

That comes despite the clear call from the legitimate National Unity Government (NUG) against tourism to Myanmar. In November 2021, Minister of Planning, Finance and Investment Tin Tun Naing told the [Straits Times](#), “The people of Myanmar are being killed, raped, detained and their houses and possessions seized or destroyed. This is not a time for sightseeing”.

A third junta ministry the ASEAN-Japan Centre works with is commerce, supporting it to promote market access in Japan. Under that program, a [workshop](#) was held in January in Naypyidaw and again touted in junta propaganda. The workshop was opened by the permanent secretary of the junta’s commerce ministry, Min Min, and Yuka Kubota, an ASEAN-Japan Centre senior executive.

The ASEAN-Japan Centre’s actions to include the junta on its council representing Myanmar, to fund junta ministries, to provide capacity building and to promote business links embolden the junta to continue its campaign of terror against the people of Myanmar with total impunity.

Justice For Myanmar urges the ASEAN-Japan Centre and all other organisations to immediately remove the junta from its council and end all support. As the number of people killed by the junta rises daily, lives literally depend on the international community urgently taking action. Japan has a particular responsibility to end the junta’s killings as a democracy and Asian neighbour with a long historical relationship with the Myanmar military.

Justice For Myanmar spokesperson Yadanar Maung says: “ASEAN and Japan are now celebrating 50 years of friendship and cooperation.

“Yet this anniversary has so far shown that ASEAN and Japan’s friendship in Myanmar is with the illegitimate military junta, not the people who are being slaughtered in the junta’s relentless attacks.

“The ASEAN-Japan Centre’s activities with the military junta support its illegal and failed attempt to gain control of Myanmar and embolden its ongoing war crimes and crimes against humanity.

“Without an immediate end to ASEAN and Japan’s support for the junta, the fiftieth anniversary of ASEAN-Japan relations will be forever tarnished with the blood of Myanmar people.

“It’s time ASEAN and Japan end its complicity in the junta’s international crimes.”

More information:

Read our report, [Developing a Dictatorship](#), which details over 60 foreign governments, intergovernmental organisations, foreign financial institutions and other international organisations providing support for the military junta

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[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.