



MEDIA RELEASE

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Japan's exclusion of Myanmar military junta from ASEAN and G7 justice ministers' meetings must set precedent for future engagement

When Japan hosted ASEAN and the G7 justice ministers' meetings on July 6 and 7, the Myanmar military junta was not included. This is a step in the right direction, and it must serve as a precedent for future engagement.

Japan's official [summary](#) of the meetings confirms that Myanmar was not officially represented at the meetings. [Photographs](#) of the meetings in Japanese [news reports](#) also show that Myanmar's seat was notably left empty.

However, it remains unclear whether any military junta representatives participated as observers in the ASEAN and G7 meetings.

The military junta is an illegal and illegitimate body which currently occupies some institutions of national government in Myanmar and is not, by any definition, a government.

The military junta-appointed 'minister for legal affairs and union attorney general', Thida Oo, has been sanctioned by the United States, United Kingdom and Canada for undermining democracy and the rule of law. The junta's 'supreme court chief justice', Tun Tun Oo, has also been sanctioned by the United States and Canada for undermining democracy and the rule of law¹.

The exclusion of military junta representatives follows an [open letter](#) from 411 civil society groups calling on Japan's Minister for Justice, Ken Saitō, to exclude the junta from the meetings and, instead, affirm that the Myanmar people will be represented by their legitimate government, the National Unity Government.

Spokesperson for Defend Myanmar Democracy, Ko Ye, responds to the outcome: "Japan's exclusion of military junta representatives at these meetings is a step in the right direction, which will be welcomed by the people of Myanmar."

"This action provides recognition that the junta's attempts to pose as the government of Myanmar are illegitimate.

"This decision should be viewed as an example for future meetings and forums where representatives of the military junta must not be invited, included or consulted.

"Importantly, we strongly encourage Japan and other governments to take the next necessary step: invite Myanmar's democratically elected government to represent us in all regional and international meetings and forums, within ASEAN and elsewhere."

Chairperson of Progressive Voice, Khin Ohmar, states: "Japan's decision must set a precedent to reject all future bids to gain legitimacy by the junta – that the Myanmar people have categorically rejected, and bring about official engagement with legitimate stakeholders of Myanmar.

“As a key ASEAN dialogue partner and a major donor to Myanmar, Japan must no longer evade its responsibility to meaningfully respect the will and aspiration of the Myanmar people for justice and accountability in its actions.

“Japan must assume a greater leadership role at the UN Security Council to coordinate a new resolution under Chapter VII of the UN Charter to hold Myanmar military generals accountable for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes by a referral of the situation in Myanmar to the International Criminal Court.”

BACKGROUND

- The absence of military junta representatives at these meetings also follows decisions by ASEAN to exclude the junta from various meetings including at the summit and foreign ministers' levels. For example, after the military junta failed to implement ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus and refused to provide the ASEAN special envoy access to all parties in the Myanmar political crisis, ASEAN did not invite military junta representatives to its ASEAN-China Special Summit in late 2021.
- These decisions are a diversion from ASEAN's usual 'non-interference' approach that has enabled the military junta to represent Myanmar in other ASEAN meetings and forums, and have come after widespread criticism from the people of Myanmar over ASEAN's inaction in relation to the crisis, and pressure from civil society organizations and diverse political actors including the National Unity Government.
- Shockingly, military junta representatives currently lead ASEAN's air and navy chiefs' meetings and co-chair the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Experts' Working Group on Counter-Terrorism.-
- Japan is not the only country that has taken a stance on the military junta's participation in ASEAN affairs. Last year, the United States, New Zealand and Australia boycotted the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus Experts' Working Group on Counter-Terrorism that they would normally attend as dialogue partners of the bloc.
- The military junta is engaged in an ongoing campaign of extreme violence against the people of Myanmar in an attempt to suppress and control them. To date, the military has killed 3,793 people and imprisoned 19,495 moreⁱⁱ, including elected members of parliament, journalists, pro-democracy activists and others. The military has committed indiscriminate airstrikes, shelling, mass torture, sexual violence and forced 1.6 million people to flee their homes since the attempted coup began.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Under both international law and Myanmar national law, the military junta meets the criteria for a terrorist organization^{iv}.

Further comments and more information:

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ⁱ Aljazeera, *US, UK, Canada sanction top Myanmar justice officials*, 31 January 2022,

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/1/31/us-britain-canada-hit-top-myanmar-justice-officials-with-sanctions>

ⁱⁱ Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma), *Daily briefing*, 14 July 2023, <https://aappb.org/?p=25596>

ⁱⁱⁱ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Myanmar Humanitarian Update No. 31*, 15 July 2023, [https://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/myanmar-humanitarian-update-no-31-15-july-2023?](https://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/myanmar-humanitarian-update-no-31-15-july-2023?_gl=1*m6gzo1*_ga*NzAzODY5MTY2LjE2NzcxMzUxMzA.*_ga_E60ZNX2F68*MTY4OTgxNzE3OS4xMi4wLjE2ODk4MTcx)

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^{iv} Special Advisory Council Myanmar, *Briefing paper: The Myanmar military is a terrorist organisation under law*, 14 December 2021, <https://specialadvisorycouncil.org/2021/12/briefing-paper-the-myanmar-military-is-a-terrorist-organisation-under-law/>