MEDIA RELEASE



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ASEAN proceeding with military training exercise that aids Myanmar junta atrocities

Justice For Myanmar condemns ASEAN's move to organise a military exercise in Russia, cochaired by the Myanmar military junta.

The exercise will provide the junta with improved military capabilities as it wages a campaign of terror against the people with indiscriminate airstrikes and shelling, murder, rape, torture, arbitrary detention, and the deliberate torching of homes, villages and crops.

The military exercise will take place from September 25-30 in Ussuriysk and Vladivostok, according to a recent update to <u>ASEAN's defence calendar</u>.

Ussuriysk and Vladivostok are under Russia's Eastern Military District, which is engaged in Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine. Vladivostok is the headquarters of Russia's Pacific Fleet and Ussuriysk is the headquarters of the 5th Combined Arms Army.

The military exercise is part of the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus Experts' Working Group on Counter Terrorism, which the Russian regime and illegal Myanmar junta are leading.

The ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting platform is chaired by Indonesia's defence minister, Prabowo Subianto.

Justice For Myanmar and other Myanmar and international civil society organisations have repeatedly called on ASEAN to bar the junta from ADMM, and for member states and dialogue partners to boycott ADMM activities that include the junta.

If it goes ahead, the upcoming field training in Russia will deepen ASEAN's complicity in the junta's ongoing commission of war crimes and crimes against humanity against the people of Myanmar.

ASEAN tabletop military exercise fuels junta violence

In August, the junta hosted an ASEAN tabletop military exercise in Naypyidaw, which provided direct military support to junta troops as they slaughter Myanmar people.

In <u>propaganda</u> published after the tabletop exercise, the junta confirmed that ASEAN's tabletop exercise supports operations against the legitimate National Unity Government of Myanmar (NUG) and People's Defence Forces (PDF), which it has illegally designated as terrorist groups, stating that "Myanmar, where the attacks of NUG/PDF terrorists occur in recent political development, has gained invaluable experiences from the opportunity to work closely together with international community in the counter terrorism measures."

In fact, the military junta is itself a <u>terrorist organisation</u> under Myanmar law and as defined in international law.

The tabletop exercise involved the junta's Special Operations Task Force (SOTF), elite troops trained for urban warfare. Unverified reports suggest SOTF was involved in the junta's bloody and

brutal crackdown of peaceful protesters following the military's illegal coup attempt. The ASEAN tabletop exercise featured a demonstration by SOTF, and the junta reported that the international participants "recognized the physical strength and mental toughness of male and female SOTF members who are well-disciplined and well-trained."

Justice For Myanmar welcomes the decision of Australia, Japan, New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea and the USA to not attend the tabletop exercise, and condemns ASEAN, and countries that participated, which included all remaining ASEAN members and the dialogue partners China and India. The junta responded that refusal to attend the military exercise "infers the meaning of supporting terrorism and terrorist acts."

The tabletop exercise was opened by the junta's Chief of General Staff for the army, navy and air force, General Maung Maung Aye, who is <u>sanctioned by the EU</u>.

The EU noted that in addition to Maung Maung Aye's direct responsibility for numerous human rights violations, he is involved in the purchase of Russian arms and "helps to strengthen the Myanmar Armed Forces international positioning through meetings with counterparts from other countries".

Justice For Myanmar spokesperson Yadanar Maung says: "ASEAN's decision to provide training for junta troops in counter terrorism tactics is abhorrent and untenable.

"ASEAN, its member states and dialogue partners know full well that the junta commits atrocities with total impunity, and that military training emboldens it and aids and abets its international crimes.

"ASEAN is not only failing to resolve the crisis in Myanmar through its Five Point Consensus but is actively undermining its own commitment to the consensus by backing the junta with military support and legitimacy, while also impeding international action.

"Indonesia as the Chair of the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting must immediately cancel the exercise and ban the junta from all activities.

"ASEAN members and dialogue partners should boycott the exercise if it goes ahead and refuse to attend all other ADMM activities that include the illegal junta.

"ASEAN's military training clearly shows that claims of 'ASEAN centrality' is a cover for business as usual with the terrorist junta, at the expense of the lives of Myanmar people.

"The UN Security Council and governments need to urgently step up and take concrete steps to block the junta's access to funds, arms, equipment and jet fuel, and refer the situation in Myanmar to the International Criminal Court."

More information:

Read our investigation into ADMM here

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<u>Justice For Myanmar</u>, 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.