

August 31, 2023 | Myanmar

JFM demands ASEAN cancel air force conference to be chaired by Myanmar war criminal in September

ASEAN is planning to hold a conference of air force chiefs in Naypyidaw from September 12-15, chaired by the commander-in-chief of the illegal Myanmar junta's air force, according to a Justice For Myanmar source.

Justice For Myanmar demands ASEAN cancel the conference and strongly condemns the bloc's continued and direct support for the Myanmar junta's air force, army and navy as it wages a campaign of terror against the people, committing ongoing war crimes and crimes against humanity with total impunity.

The ASEAN Air Chiefs Conference (AACC) is currently chaired by the junta's air force head, General Htun Aung, a war criminal who has commanded indiscriminate air strikes across Myanmar since his appointment in January 2022.

Evidence of Htun Aung's direct commission of war crimes and crimes against humanity is extensive.

Data from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) shows that there were 930 airstrikes between January 10, 2022 and July 31, 2023, under Htun Aung's command, killing close to 1,000 people.

Through an indiscriminate campaign of aerial terror, Htun Aung has commanded the slaughter of men, women and children, and destroyed homes, schools, places of worship and whole communities.

Htun Aung was in command for the aerial massacre on April 11, 2023 against a civilian gathering in Pazigy village, Sagaing Region, murdering at least 168 people, including 40 children.

And in command for the aerial massacre on October 24, 2022 against those gathered for a concert in Hpakant, Kachin State, killing more than 80.

And in command for the aerial massacre on September 16, 2022 against a school in Let Yet Kone village, Sagaing Region, killing at least 12 people.

The ASEAN Chair issued a statement strongly condemning the junta's Pazigy massacre. Yet it is now honouring one of the main perpetrators.

Htun Aung is currently sanctioned by the US, UK, EU and Canada.

ASEAN's decision to appoint Htun Aung as the chair of AACC on November 4, 2022, and to allow him to convene a meeting of ASEAN air force commanders, is further evidence of the bloc knowingly supporting the junta's international crimes.

ASEAN's planned air force chiefs' conference is part of its extensive program of defence and security cooperation in which the illegitimate junta plays a leading role. The junta currently heads ASEAN air force, navy, military counter terrorism and police cooperation.

In August, ASEAN held a counter terrorism military training exercise in Naypyidaw, and is now planning to hold a counter terrorism field training exercise in Russia from September 25-30, both co-chaired by the military junta.

In May, ASEAN appointed the junta's navy head to chair the ASEAN Navy Chiefs Meeting, and the junta is set to host a conference of ASEAN navy chiefs in 2024.

In March 2022, Myanmar junta police brigadier general Zaw Lin Tun was appointed executive director of the police cooperation body, ASEANPOL.

Myanmar and international civil society organisations have repeatedly denounced ASEAN's defence cooperation with the illegal military junta, called for the junta's exclusion from ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) activities, and urged countries to boycott ADMM activities that include the junta.

In an oral update to the UN Human Rights Council in July 2023, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar slammed ASEAN's appointment of Htun Aung as AACC chair, stating that "those responsible for these atrocities should not be serving in leadership positions in ASEAN. They should be serving sentences for their crimes."

Justice For Myanmar spokesperson Yadanar Maung says: "By proceeding with this air force conference and other military and police engagement with the junta, ASEAN and its member states are showing a callous disregard for the lives of Myanmar people and actively undermining its own commitments to resolve the crisis in Myanmar through the Five Point Consensus.

"ASEAN has tried to excuse military engagement with the junta by claiming it is technical and not political. This is insulting to the people of Myanmar who are victims of the junta's daily attacks. It is an untenable position that in no way can excuse ASEAN's support for the terrorist junta and complicity in its international crimes.

"There is no denying that ASEAN is legitimising and emboldening war criminals through its defence and security cooperation, endangering the lives of Myanmar people and worsening the crisis.

"Indonesia as the Chair of the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting must immediately cancel the air chief's meeting, the counter terrorism field training exercise and ban the junta from all activities.

"ASEAN members should boycott the air chiefs' meeting if it goes ahead and refuse to attend all other ADMM activities that include the illegal junta."

More information:

Read our press release on ASEAN's counter terrorism military training exercise [here](#)

Read our investigation into ADMM [here](#)

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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