



**“ YOU WILL NEVER GET
THE CHANCE TO RULE US! ”**

The Myanmar Military Junta’s Crumbling Sham Election Plan

Briefing Paper

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About Us

‘Progressive Voice,’ or in Burmese, ရှေးပြေးအသံအဖွဲ့ ‘Shay Pyay Athan,’ was born out of Burma Partnership, a network of organizations throughout the Asia-Pacific region, advocating for and mobilizing a movement for democracy and human rights in Myanmar that was established in 2006.

Progressive Voice is a participatory rights-based policy research and advocacy organization rooted in civil society, that maintains strong networks and relationships with grassroots organizations and community-based organizations throughout Myanmar. It acts as a bridge to the international community and international policymakers by amplifying voices from the ground, and advocating for rights-based engagement and policy on Myanmar.

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Introduction

The Myanmar military junta's nationwide terror campaign against the people of Myanmar has rapidly plunged the country into an unprecedented political, human rights, and humanitarian crisis following the military's coup attempt on 1 February 2021. Despite being targeted and terrorized by the military junta, the people's Spring Revolution, together with the Ethnic Resistance Organizations (EROs),¹ continues to gain momentum in its fight for federal democracy. As the junta's illegal failed coup approaches its fourth year, EROs and the people's resistance forces have not only vastly expanded their operational territory and inflicted severe damage to junta-controlled civil administration mechanisms, infrastructure, supply lines, and the morale of junta troops, but they have also established representative institutions and locally led civilian governance structures, administrations, and service provision in the country's liberated areas. On the other hand, in retaliation, the military junta – as it continues to lose territorial control and is unable to gain international recognition and legitimacy – has intensified its war crimes and crimes against humanity against Myanmar's people, more widely and systematically than ever before, as a form of collective punishment. As such, the military junta's sham election plan represents one of the junta's hallmark strategies to attempt to reverse its losses, appeal for legitimacy, regain control over the country, and once again clutch Myanmar's people in its grip.

This briefing paper seeks to analyze the military junta's road to seek legitimacy through a long-planned sham election, providing a holistic view of the junta's current groundwork amidst its rapid losses to the resistance movement. There are four main sections: the failed coup and the formation of the people's resistance movement; the military junta's groundwork for the sham election; the domestic rejection of, and foreign governments' mixed responses to, the junta's sham election plan; and the junta's failure to seize nationwide control of the country and the resistance movement's fast-growing operational tempo. The paper further proposes key recommendations to the international community to completely denounce the military junta's illegal and calculated sham election plan. Instead, the world must actively support the people of Myanmar in their quest for genuine federal democracy, sustainable peace, freedom, and justice.

The paper draws on desk research, including reports and statements by election observers, local humanitarian responders, local media, and civil society organizations from mid-2020 to January 2024.

Background

On 8 November 2020, 27.5 million people, more than 70 percent of the Myanmar's total eligible voters, cast their votes in the general election. The ink-stained purple pinkies, widely shared on social media, represented proof of the people's unwavering commitment for a democratic future. The landslide victory of the National League for Democracy (NLD) showed the people's anti-military sentiment across the country. The Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), the military's proxy party, received only 26 seats out of 330 in the

¹ Following the Myanmar military's attempted coup in 2021, the Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) that have joined the Spring Revolution and resisted the military junta are now called Ethnic Resistance Organizations (EROs).

Lower House and only seven seats out of 168 in the Upper House.² While some inconsistencies during the elections were found, domestic and international election observer groups stated that “the results of the elections were credible and reflected the will of the majority voters,” as confirmed by Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL).³

Regional and international governments also welcomed the election’s results and fully supported its outcomes. The then Prime Minister of Japan, Yoshihide Suga, stated that “Japan will cooperate with the next administration and continue to fully support the democratic nation building of Myanmar.”⁴ Prime Minister of Singapore, Lee Hsien Loong, in his congratulatory message said, “The results reflect the confidence and trust the people of Myanmar have placed in the NLD’s leadership and vision for the country.”⁵ Narendra Modi, the Prime Minister of India, stated, “The successful conduct of polls is another step in the ongoing democratic transition in Myanmar. I look forward to continuing to work with you to strengthen our traditional bonds of friendship.”⁶

Nevertheless, the Myanmar military and its proxy party, the USDP, alleged that the general election’s results were affected by fraud and irregularities in the voter lists, and therefore, the outcome was unfair.⁷ After suffering a heavy and nationwide loss, military leaders and USDP members began to discredit the incumbent NLD-led government and the election results. Between November 2020 and January 2021, a series of meetings, conferences, and pro-military rallies were held, accusing the Union Election Commission (UEC) of incompetence and blaming the UEC for allowing “voting malpractice” and irregularities.⁸ On 26 January 2021, when the military spokesperson Zaw Min Tun refused to rule out the possibility of a coup if the alleged election complaints were not addressed to the military’s satisfaction,⁹ armored military vehicles had already appeared in Yangon and other cities across Myanmar. Then, in the early morning of 1 February 2021, the military began staging its infamous coup attempt.

Within hours, the military plunged the country into a state of complete chaos: closing banks and ATMs, generating panic and long queues in the main cities; completely cutting off telephone connection to Naypyidaw; blocking access to the internet across the country; suspending all flights to and from Myanmar; and posting tanks and other military vehicles on the streets – all of which served to intimidate the people, stoking a sense of isolation and fear among the population. However, the junta’s coup attempt immediately faced unprecedented,

² “Official Results Show Another Election Landslide for Myanmar’s Ruling NLD,” *The Irrawaddy*, November 16, 2020, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/election-2020/official-results-show-another-election-landslide-myanmars-ruling-nld.html>.

³ “Joint Statement: Domestic Election Observer Groups Say 2020 Myanmar Polls Results Credible, Call Support For Peaceful Power Transition,” Asian Network for Free Elections, January 29, 2021, <https://anfrel.org/joint-statement-domestic-election-observer-groups-say-2020-myanmar-polls-results-credible-call-support-for-peaceful-power-transition/>.

⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *Congratulatory Messages from Prime Minister Suga and Foreign Minister Motegi to Myanmar State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi regarding the General Election in Myanmar*, November 10, 2020, https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press3e_000126.html.

⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Singapore, *Congratulatory Message from Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong to Chairperson of the National League for Democracy Daw Aung San Suu Kyi*, November 12, 2020, <https://www.mfa.gov.sg/Newsroom/Press-Statements-Transcripts-and-Photos/2020/11/20201112-PM-Letter-to-Daw-Aung-San-Suu-Kyi>.

⁶ “PM Modi congratulates Myanmar’s Aung San Suu Kyi over her party’s election win,” *The Times of India*, November 13, 2020, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/pm-modi-congratulates-myanmars-aung-san-suu-kyi-over-her-partys-election-win/articleshow/79199178.cms>.

⁷ Shoon Naing, “Myanmar opposition demands vote re-run as Suu Kyi’s NLD heads for victory,” *Reuters*, November 12, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN27ROUD/>.

⁸ Aung Shine Oo, “Myanmar military denies coup threats over vote fraud claims,” *AP News*, January 31, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/constitutions-myanmar-elections-asia-min-aung-hlaing-1d8af462424d818f96e88dc6ed115dc1>.

⁹ Chan Thar, “Tanks appear on city streets as fears of a possible coup continue,” *Myanmar Now*, January 29, 2021, <https://myanmar-now.org/en/news/tanks-appear-on-city-streets-as-fears-of-a-possible-coup-continue/>.

nationwide resistance from a brave and fearless, bottom-up movement. Within a few days, the peaceful Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) – one of the key pillars of the people’s Spring Revolution – emerged, as hundreds of thousands of public and private sector workers across the country refused to work under the military junta, paralyzing all administrative mechanisms and preventing the junta from governing the country.¹⁰

To the violence perpetrated by the military, the Myanmar people responded across Myanmar with waves of peaceful protests of their political defiance, repeatedly displaying their rejection of the illegal and illegitimate military junta. First, the multi-class and multi-ethnic people’s movement organized the “banging pots and pans” protests,¹¹ every day at 8 p.m., followed by coordinated strikes by health workers outside hospital facilities.¹² Soon, hundreds of thousands of people joined peaceful demonstrations in the streets, and chants such as “[You] will never get the chance to rule us!”¹³ were heard across the whole country. Since its formation, the highly intersectional nationwide people’s movement – the strongest and most diverse in Myanmar’s history – has seen women and LGBTQIA+ communities at the forefront, playing a key role in building a truly inclusive society. Furthermore, together with the CDMers,¹⁴ an extensive range of actors joined the anti-junta demonstrations, from members of multi-ethnic political parties and civil society organizations (CSOs) to students and trade unions. Since then, the movement’s ever-increasing strength has grown from its diversity and the daily, collective efforts of people across the country. For example, the highly effective campaign to boycott military-linked products and services¹⁵ has shown the people’s consistency and determination to eradicate the military institution, as well as the movement’s variety of strategies to resist the junta.

The people’s initial joyful expressions of freedom, in protesting against the junta’s illegal coup attempt, dramatically changed on 9 February 2021, when junta leader Min Aung Hlaing launched a brutal, nationwide campaign of systematic crackdowns – targeting peaceful, unarmed protesters, mostly youth.¹⁶ From there, the military’s non-stop lethal assaults on peaceful protesters, ruthless scorched-earth campaigns in rural areas, and cold-blooded attacks on civilians pushed thousands of people, especially young women and men, to move to territories controlled by EROs to undertake basic military training. Rapidly, hundreds of People’s Defense Forces (PDFs)¹⁷ – township- and village-level armed resistance units – were established across the country to protect and defend the people against the junta’s brutality. Most self-organized PDFs gradually aligned and joined the chain of command of the National

¹⁰ “Civil Disobedience Movement: A Foundation of Myanmar’s Spring Revolution and Force Behind Military’s Failed Coup,” Progressive Voice, May 25, 2023, <https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/2023/05/25/civil-disobedience-movement-a-foundation-of-myanmars-spring-revolution-and-force-behind-militarys-failed-coup/>.

¹¹ Lorcan Lovett, “The nights of pots and pans are back, on Myanmar’s fearful streets,” *The Guardian*, February 2, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/feb/02/the-nights-of-pots-and-pans-are-back-on-myanmar-fearful-streets>.

¹² Andrew Nachemson, “Medics in Myanmar on strike against military amid COVID-19 crisis,” *Al Jazeera*, February 3, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/3/medics-in-myanmar-on-strike-against-military-amid-covid-crisis>.

¹³ Min Han Htet (@MinhanHtetBurma), “လုံးဝအုပ်ချုပ်ခွင့်မရစေရ။ တကသများ - ရန်ကုန်,” X, December 8, 2021, <https://twitter.com/MinHanHtetBurma/status/1468524248423559171>.

¹⁴ Regarding terminology, as per common usage within Myanmar and beyond, participants in the CDM are usually called “CDMers.”

¹⁵ Progressive Voice, “Civil Disobedience Movement: A Foundation of Myanmar’s Spring Revolution and Force Behind Military’s Failed Coup.”

¹⁶ “First Myanmar Protester Death Galvanizes Anti-Coup Demonstrators,” *Radio Free Asia*, February 19, 2021, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/protester-death-02192021182555.html>.

¹⁷ Ye Myo Hein, “One Year On: The Momentum of Myanmar’s Armed Rebellion,” Wilson Center, May, 2022, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/uploads/documents/ASIA_220519_1YearOn-BRIEF_V1r2.pdf.

Unity Government (NUG),¹⁸ the legitimate interim government of Myanmar, while other resistance forces continue to operate independently.¹⁹ With the invaluable support of the EROs and their governance structures, the people's resistance movement, including PDFs across the country, has improved its strategy, increased its operational capacity, and successfully expanded its territorial control on the ground. Most of the rural and peri-urban areas are under the resistance forces' or EROs' control, and the junta's presence in the main cities is constantly challenged. As stated by NUG Acting President, Duwa Lashi La, "The revolution will succeed as it is a battle that all ethnic forces are fighting in unison."²⁰

In response to the newly formed resistance forces gaining momentum in coordination with the experienced EROs, the junta has expanded its infamous four-cuts strategy – known in Burmese as *Phyet-Lay-Phyet* – throughout the whole country. Although open to multiple interpretations, the four-cuts strategy generally aims to cut off "food and/or humanitarian aid, funds, intelligence (including internet and telephone reception), and recruits from a community in an effort to sever resources to EROs and PDFs."²¹ The junta's strategy is focused on inflicting collective punishment on civilians and dividing local communities from the resistance movement, rather than directly counterattacking the armed resistance forces. This collective punishment takes many forms: massacres, indiscriminate shelling and bombing, razing villages, arbitrary arrests and detention, torture, and sexual violence. Furthermore, the junta has systematically restricted basic freedoms and access to essential supplies, including much-needed humanitarian aid in conflict-affected areas.

During the last three years, the junta has killed at least 4,399 people, sentenced 162 political prisoners to death, and arrested 25,844 people, including 709 children.²² Furthermore, throughout its brutal and indiscriminate campaign of terror since the coup attempt, the junta had burned down over 78,737 homes across the country as of 31 December 2023.²³ According to conservative figures by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), 2.3 million people have been internally displaced across the country since February 2021.²⁴ However, the actual numbers reported by local responders with direct access to communities indicate much higher numbers of displaced persons.

¹⁸ The National Unity Government is the only legitimate government of Myanmar. It is functioning as an interim government that is working with ethnic councils and Ethnic Resistance Organizations to establish a genuine federal democracy in Myanmar. It was formed after the military coup attempt in 2021 by the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) "with the authority bestowed by the People's mandate of the all parties' democratic election held in 2020 in discussion with National Unity Consultative Council." For more information, see <https://gov.nugmyanmar.org/about-nug/>.

¹⁹ As explained by Ye Myo Hein, a visiting scholar at the U.S. Institute of Peace and a global fellow at the Wilson Center, "People's Defense Force is an umbrella term for three types of armed groups that have emerged since the [attempted] coup: PDFs, Local Defense Forces (LDFs) and People's Defense Teams (PaKhaPha/PDTs). The PDFs are generally larger armed units formed or recognized by the National Unity Government (NUG)...The LDFs are local militias operating autonomously at the local level, often pursuing their own missions separate from the NUG's. The PDTs are localized guerilla units formed for local defense and security purposes." For more information, see <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/11/understanding-peoples-defense-forces-myanmar>

²⁰ "Acting President: 2023 Will Mark Turning Point for Myanmar's Revolution," *The Irrawaddy*, January 2, 2023, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/acting-president-2023-will-mark-turning-point-for-myanmars-revolution.html>.

²¹ "Setting the Tinderbox Alight The Humanitarian Crisis in Myanmar's Dry Zone," *Progressive Voice*, August 31, 2022, <https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/2022/08/31/setting-the-tinderbox-alight-the-humanitarian-crisis-in-myanmars-dry-zone/>.

²² "Daily Briefing in Relation to the Military Coup," Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), January 19, 2024, <https://aappb.org/?p=27201>.

²³ "Burned Houses Data Public Version," Data for Myanmar, January 20, 2024, <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1BZNIjDqZxpwhBkWSnEm2I99RcwlLx2-vftU976d0YUULM/edit#gid=0>.

²⁴ "Myanmar Humanitarian Update No. 35 | 2023 Year in Review," UN the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, January 12, 2024, <https://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/myanmar-humanitarian-update-no-35-2023-year-review>.

The junta leader’s plan to gain control of Myanmar – by force or by election – has failed repeatedly, as the junta faces the strong resistance movement from the ground. In August 2023, Min Aung Hlaing extended the state of emergency for the fourth time.²⁵ These repeated extensions represent the junta’s clear admission of its total failure to control the country and its desperation for legitimacy.

The Junta’s Groundwork Towards Holding a Sham Election

Holding a sham election represents the junta’s premeditated and essential strategy to claim legitimacy and gain international recognition, as it works to develop an ever-threatening mass surveillance and authoritarian state. Following the coup attempt, the junta leader’s plan was to quickly take control over the country by force, and, after six months, hold a sham election and establish a new administrative body. In this vision, the junta’s original sham election plan was to bring Myanmar back to a state of junta-imposed “normalcy,” assuming it could once again force Myanmar’s people under its boots.

Although vital for the junta’s successful implementation of its plan, this sham election has been postponed four times due to the junta’s failure to seize control of the country. In its efforts to push its election plans forward, the junta has been trying to impose new draconian measures on the Myanmar population – from unlawful amendments and a population census to changes in the Political Parties Registration Law. All measures have been meant to increase the junta’s capacity to control, monitor, and repress any democratic activities, while utilizing all tools at its disposal to introduce maximum restrictions on the people’s freedoms and human rights across the country.

In spite of being an illegal entity itself, the junta has amended multiple laws and imposed unlawful measures to limit the freedoms of individuals, private entities, and civil society organizations. For example, the junta expanded its security forces’ authority, allowing them to arrest any person or search private premises without a warrant, and required telephone companies and data controllers to hand over citizens’ private data.²⁶ The junta unlawfully reinstated regulations that require residents to report overnight guests to the ward-tract and village-tract junta-linked administrators. Additionally, as described by ANFREL, the junta illegally “removed the legal aid services for people in pre-trial detention. Only individuals who have been formally charged or sentenced have the right to request legal aid,”²⁷ deliberately targeting thousands of people, especially youth, who the junta has detained after the failed coup.

As part of its preparation for a sham election, the junta has attempted to conduct a nationwide population census, beginning with pilot censuses in January and October 2023. From 9 to 31 January 2023, the junta-appointed Field Census Supervision Committee collected population data in Mawlamyine, Chaungzon, Mudon, Thanbyuzayat, Kyaik Hto, and Thaton Townships in

²⁵ “Myanmar’s military-led government extends state of emergency, forcing delay in promised election,” *AP News*, July 31, 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/myanmar-military-state-of-emergency-extend-c860a06985f42265088b53c0ea80029e>.

²⁶ “Freedom of the net 2023 Myanmar,” Freedom House, October 18, 2022, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/myanmar/freedom-net/2023>.

²⁷ “One Year of Junta Repression in Myanmar: Legal Amendments,” Asian Network for Free Elections, February 2, 2022, <https://anfrel.org/one-year-of-junta-repression-in-myanmar-legal-amendments/>.

Mon State.²⁸ In order to legitimize its census plan and successfully gather the population's data, the junta also deployed *Pyu Saw Htee*, its proxy militia comprised of military veterans and Buddhist ultranationalist pro-military supporters. Specifically, in Sagaing and Mandalay Regions, *Pyu Saw Htee* groups forced local communities to attend election campaign meetings to support the military proxy party, USDP. Despite these efforts, the January 2023 pilot census – which was meant to be nationwide, as reported by the junta-owned newspaper – failed entirely.²⁹

From 1 to 15 October 2023, the junta conducted a second pilot census in 20 of Myanmar's 330 townships. While this pilot census took place in multiple states and regions, such as Mawlamyine Township in Mon State, Loikaw Township in Karenni State, and Ayeyarwady and Sagaing Regions, the actual door-to-door implementation of the census was extremely limited, only covering specific sections of urban areas under the junta's control. As reported by a local journalist, in assessing the junta's actual capacity, it is relevant to highlight how in Monywa Township, Sagaing Region, the junta carried out the pilot census in only ten wards and four villages, and in Loikaw Township, Karenni State, the junta's representatives were only able to work in one ward and one village close to the city.³⁰ Commenting on the junta's pilot census, the spokesperson of resistance-led Karenni State Police Force stated, "Actually, the junta can't even collect data on the population of Karenni State because most of the towns are empty from people fleeing the war."³¹

In addition to the lack of both a legal mandate and any legitimacy among the people to conduct this population survey, the junta is rapidly losing territorial control. The number of urban areas under its influence is drastically decreasing. A clear example is the capital of Karenni State, Loikaw, where the junta completely lost control less than a month after junta-linked enumerators collected people's data through intimidating door-to-door interrogatories.³²

Going forward, in its preparation for a sham election, the junta will use the sensitive and private information collected in any population census it conducts to further restrict people's rights and better monitor its opponents. In this vein, an additional security concern is the junta's plan to implement an electronic identification (eID) system that will include "biographic data and the biometric data of citizens aged 10 years and above."³³ The eID system poses a direct security threat to all Myanmar people that have either joined or supported the CDM, the Spring Revolution, PDFs, or EROs, and in general, to every individual perceived by the junta as its enemy. Millions of civilians have already left home and taken refuge in other areas of the country to try to escape the junta's brutality and the cruel enforcement of its draconian laws. Along with other drastically limiting measures, the junta's census plan and the eID

²⁸ "Population and household statistics on the ground are collected in some villages of Mon State," *BNI*, January 24, 2023, <https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/population-and-household-statistics-ground-are-collected-some-villages-mon-state>.

²⁹ "YR to take ground population census from 9 Jan," *The Global New Light of Myanmar*, December 30, 2022, <https://www.gnlm.com.mm/yr-to-take-ground-population-census-from-9-jan/>.

³⁰ "Problematic pilot kicks off census countdown," *Frontier Myanmar*, November 1, 2023, <https://www.frontiermyanmar.net/en/problematic-pilot-kicks-off-census-countdown/>.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² "Ethnic Karenni forces control capital, key township in Myanmar's Kayah state," *Radio Free Asia*, December 12, 2023, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/loikaw-12112023170425.html>.

³³ "Myanmar junta asks China for help on new electronic ID system," *Frontier Myanmar*, September 20, 2023, <https://www.frontiermyanmar.net/en/myanmar-junta-asks-china-for-help-on-new-electronic-id-system/>.

system serve to increase the junta's capacity for mass surveillance to facilitate its sham election plans.

The junta is also blatantly pursuing its sham election by illegally enforcing a new Political Parties Registration Law to allow the military proxy party to run uncontested. Passed on 26 January 2023, the law requires all political parties to re-register within 60 days of the enactment and declared that pre-existing parties will be abolished if they fail to register. Since this unconstitutional law has been announced, the junta-appointed UEC has dissolved more than 40 political parties across the country, including the NLD. Most recently, in November 2023, the UEC dissolved the Mro National Party, based in Rakhine State, and the Shan State Kokang Democratic Party (SSKPD).³⁴ This new law aims to ensure a one-horse race for the military's leading proxy party, the Union Solidarity and Development Party.

Regarding this law, ANFREL stated, "The new law fails to meet international standards in respecting the rights of political parties to organize and run in elections by disproportionately limiting their freedoms of association."³⁵ The United States (US) also condemned the dissolution of the political parties: Secretary of State Antony Blinken stated that the junta's "decision to dissolve the political parties shows its continued contempt for the popular will of Burma's people and multi-party democracy....This action further demonstrates that the [junta's] plans for deeply flawed elections, if held, will not represent the will of Burma's voters."³⁶

As articulated by Charles Santiago, co-chair of ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR) and former Member of Parliament in Malaysia, "This law goes against all democratic principles not only because of its contents, specifically designed to make the military proxy USDP the only viable political party, but also because who has passed it. The junta led by Min Aung Hlaing has no legitimacy whatsoever to rule the country after an illegal coup d'état and two years of continuous atrocities against its own population, let alone to enact any law."³⁷ Therefore, absent any legitimacy, the junta's laws and other measures hold no value or moral authority for the Myanmar people.

While it remains appropriate to monitor the junta's actions, including enforcing law and its consequences, the fact remains that each and every measure carried out by the junta, from enacting laws to announcing sham election plan, is illegal and unconstitutional. Even by the military-drafted 2008 Constitution, the military junta holds no legitimacy to govern Myanmar or promulgate legislation. Likewise, over the past three years, the people of Myanmar, across all classes and ethnicities, have also consistently and completely denied any legitimacy to the junta.

Ultimately, every building block of the junta's sham election plan must be considered in the wider context of the junta's failure to take control of all Myanmar's territory and its relentless

³⁴ "Myanmar Election Body Dissolves Pro-Democracy Party in Kokang Region," *The Irrawaddy*, November 21, 2023, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/politics/myanmar-election-body-dissolves-pro-democracy-party-in-kokang-region.html>.

³⁵ "ANFREL Condemns Myanmar Junta's Dissolution of Political Parties," Asian Network for Free Elections, March 30, 2023, <https://anfrel.org/anfrel-condemns-myanmar-juntas-dissolution-of-political-parties/>.

³⁶ United States Secretary of State, *The Dissolution of Political Parties in Burma*, March 30, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/the-dissolution-of-political-parties-in-burma/>.

³⁷ "MPs from Southeast Asia condemn the Myanmar junta's parties registration law as an assault on democracy," ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights, January 31, 2023, <https://aseanmp.org/2023/01/31/mps-from-southeast-asia-condemn-the-myanmar-juntas-parties-registration-law-as-an-assault-on-democracy/>.

violence against the people – in parallel with its ongoing attempts to falsify popular support through a picture-perfect “return to democracy.”

Domestic Response to the Junta’s Illegal Election Plan

Despite the highly repressive environment created by the junta, Myanmar civil society, together with democratic political actors, have loudly denounced the illegal sham election plan. People have risked their lives to join demonstrations and flash mobs held across the country to reiterate their support for the democratic resistance movement, while rejecting the junta’s sham election plan. Furthermore, a comprehensive group of democratic political forces, including multiple political parties representing ethnic minorities, have released statements rejecting the junta’s illegal action. The people of Myanmar have unwaveringly shown their stance on the issue and asked the international community and neighboring countries to neither recognize nor support the junta’s sham election plan.

The domestic response to the junta’s plan has been clear, coordinated, and united, as the people of Myanmar have widely condemned the junta’s sham election plan. Protests and campaigns to raise public awareness have been held by a wide range of groups, including residents of cities and rural areas, strike committees, and student unions – such as in Yangon City; Hpakant Township in Kachin State; Ayardaw, Homalin, Monywa, Salingyi, Taze, and Yinmabin Townships in Sagaing Region; Myaing Township in Magway Region; and Launglon Township in Tanintharyi Region. As stated by Ko Nan Lin, co-founder of the University Students’ Union Alumni Force and spokesperson for the General Strike Coordination Body, “Our slogan is, ‘We’ll fight the illegitimate and sham election with the power of the people.’” Furthermore, Vivienne, spokesperson for the Yangon District People’s Brigade, affirmed, “The international community must know this is an illegitimate election. More than 50 million people oppose it. We only accept the outcome of the 2020 general election. Foreign countries should stand together with us.”³⁸

Political parties across the country – such as the NLD, Shan Nationalities League for Democracy, Arakan League for Democracy Party, Kha Mee National Development Party, Daingnet National Development Party, and Democratic Party for a New Society – rejected the junta’s Political Parties Registration Law.³⁹ Multiple EROs, including the Ta’ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), Karen National Union, and Kachin Independence Army (KIA), have also rejected the junta’s sham election plan and warned administrators not to take part in any activities that legitimize the junta’s strategy, including the census.⁴⁰

At the same time, the NUG and the National Unity Consultative Council,⁴¹ through its Anti-Sham Election Joint Working Committee, have strongly denounced the junta’s sham election

³⁸ Hein Htoo Zan, “Myanmar Unites in Opposition to Junta Election,” *The Irrawaddy*, February 2, 2023, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-unites-in-opposition-to-junta-election.html>.

³⁹ “စစ်ကောင်စီက မှတ်ပုံတင်ခြင်းမရှိသည့် နိုင်ငံရေးပါတီ ၄၀ကို ဖျက်သိမ်းသည်ဟု ကြေညာချက်ထုတ်ပြန်,” *Institute of Chin Affairs*, April 2, 2023, <https://chinaffairs.org/?p=3024>.

⁴⁰ “Myanmar Junta Census Collection Sparks Deadly Resistance Attacks,” *The Irrawaddy*, January 16, 2023, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-junta-census-collection-sparks-deadly-resistance-attacks.html>.

⁴¹ The National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) is an inclusive and overarching entity that directs the policy and strategic direction of the NUG. It includes representation from EROs, political parties, general strike committees, and civil society, including youth organizations and women organizations, among other groups.

plans.⁴² In a similar call to multiple EROs, the NUG's Ministry of Home Affairs and Immigration has urged people to refuse any form of cooperation with the junta.⁴³ The Strategic Initiative Forum – a coalition of ethnic resistance forces, political parties, general strike committees, and women organizations – also released a statement firmly rejecting the junta's sham election proposal.⁴⁴

The underlying reason for the total denouncement of the military junta's sham election plans is not merely its lack of legitimacy and authority to hold any semblance of election in Myanmar. More importantly, Myanmar already has a democratically elected government: the National Unity Government, which was formed as a legitimate interim government by the virtue of the votes cast by the Myanmar people nationwide in November 2020.

International Actors Lending Support to the Junta's Illegal Election Plan

Despite the clear and overwhelming rejection of the junta's sham election plan by Myanmar's people and their legitimate representatives, the international community has shown mixed responses to the Myanmar junta's illegal plan.

The US took a clear position against the military junta and its illegal election plan. In January 2023, Derek Chollet, a senior advisor on Myanmar to the US Secretary of State, stated, "These elections have no chance of being free and fair. It's a transparent attempt to try to legitimize what the junta has done and try to create an offramp somehow for its coup. Our view is very simple. There was general election that was deemed free and fair. It was in November of 2020. The junta did not like the outcome of that election, which is why they did what they did on February 1, 2021."⁴⁵

Furthermore, the United Kingdom and Canada have recently joined the US in condemning the junta's sham election plan. In September 2023, Marilyne Guevremont, a spokesperson for Global Affairs Canada – the Canadian Government's department overseeing foreign relations, international development, and humanitarian assistance – stated, "[The junta's] plans to administer elections are a clear attempt to formalize the military's illegal seizure of power and demonstrates the [junta]'s contempt for the unwavering democratic aspirations of the Myanmar people."⁴⁶ Similarly, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar (UN Special Rapporteur on Myanmar) has urged UN Member States to reject and

⁴² National Unity Consultative Council, "အမျိုးသားညီညွတ်ရေးအစဉ်ပင်ခံကောင်စီ နှင့် အမျိုးသားညီညွတ်ရေးအစိုးရ တရားမဝင် ရွေးကောက်ပွဲ ဆန့်ကျင်ရေးပူးပေါင်းလှုပ်ငန်းကော်မတီ," Facebook, April 3, 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/nucc.federal/posts/pfbid09J36aYXlsuZT8GsUTn1g5QV9dW184n9WqW8FrMauRQH8KCX7mKYZq2TQKKBWgsTI>.

⁴³ "National Unity Government (@NUGMyanmar), "အကြမ်းဖက်စစ်ကောင်စီ၏ တရားမဝင်အတုအယောင်ရွေးကောက်ပွဲတွင် ပူးပေါင်းပါဝင်ခြင်း မပြုရန် ကြေညာခြင်း ၂၀၂၃ ခုနှစ်၊ ဇန်နဝါရီလ (၉) ရက်," X, January 10, 2023, <https://twitter.com/NUGMyanmar/status/1612726609592868864>.

⁴⁴ "Strategic Initiative Forum criticises proposed Myanmar junta elections," *BNI*, January 20, 2023, <https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/strategic-initiative-forum-criticises-proposed-myanmar-junta-elections>.

⁴⁵ Khin Soe Win, "Q&A: US Sees No Chance of Fair Election Under Myanmar Junta," *Voice of America*, January 20, 2023, <https://www.voanews.com/a/q-a-us-sees-no-chance-of-fair-election-under-myanmar-junta-/6927384.html>.

⁴⁶ Thompson Chau, "UK, Canada, Taiwan criticise Myanmar as generals unleash 'corrective purge'," *Al Jazeera*, September 28, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/9/28/uk-canada-taiwan-criticise-myanmar-as-generals-unleash-corrective-purge>.

“explicitly denounce” the junta’s attempts to hold a sham election, which would be “a farcical exercise.”⁴⁷

On the other hand, multiple states have been directly engaging with the junta to actively support its sham election plan. China, for example, has played a leading role in legitimizing the junta’s plan. On 18 September 2023, a junta delegation led by the junta-appointed immigration minister, Myint Kyaing, visited Beijing to seek technical assistance for the census and related surveillance. The delegation visited Beijing Hisign Technology Co. Ltd, a national company specialized in multi-biometric technology, and met Xu Ganglu, deputy minister of the National Immigration Administration of China.⁴⁸ A month later, a political delegation from China led by the Head of Public Security department of Beijing, Wang Xiaohong, visited Naypyidaw and met Myint Kyaing to further strengthen bilateral cooperation on Myanmar’s census and eID system.⁴⁹

Junta delegations have also traveled to India and Russia to develop bilateral coordination and request assistance for the junta’s sham election plan. In July 2023, Indian officials welcomed Myint Kyaing to discuss election-related systems at the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) Technology Centre in Bengaluru.⁵⁰ In September 2023, junta-appointed UEC Chairman, Thein Soe, traveled to Moscow to sign a memorandum of understanding with Russia’s Central Election Commission. Regionally, Cambodia and Thailand have also shown signs of dialogue with the junta on planning for a forced vote.⁵¹

Given China’s and Russia’s high technological capacity in developing surveillance networks that systematically collect sensitive and private data to repress their citizens, their recent efforts to support the junta’s new monitoring systems that target the Myanmar population are extremely alarming. This is especially because the junta representatives involved have already been identified by the international community as perpetrators of serious human rights violations. Myint Kyaing, who is leading the junta’s negotiations with China and Russia, has been sanctioned by both US Department of Treasury and the European Union (EU) for being a member of the junta and for his active role in supporting the junta’s repressive policies against the population. According to the EU, “Myint Kyaing is, therefore, responsible for undermining democracy and the rule of law in Myanmar/Burma and for providing support for actions that threaten the peace, security and stability in Myanmar/Burma.”⁵²

The junta’s cooperation with China, Russia, and India for its sham election plan represents only the latest example of how the three countries have fueled the junta’s nationwide terror campaign against the people of Myanmar, and supported the junta’s authoritarian goals. As

⁴⁷ “Illegal and Illegitimate: Examining the Myanmar military’s claim as the Government of Myanmar and the international response,” Human Rights Council, January 27, 2023, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/countries/mm/2023-01-27/crp-sr-myanmar-2023-01-31.pdf>.

⁴⁸ “Myanmar Turns to China for Census and Surveillance Assistance,” *The Irrawaddy*, September 21, 2023, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/myanmars-crisis-the-world/myanmar-turns-to-china-for-census-and-surveillance-assistance.html>.

⁴⁹ Sebastian Strangio, “Chinese Public Security Minister Visits Myanmar Amid Northern Fighting,” *The Diplomat*, November 1, 2023, <https://thediplomat.com/2023/11/chinese-public-security-minister-visits-myanmar-amid-northern-fighting/>.

⁵⁰ Nirupama Subramanian, “Sanctioned Myanmar Minister Visited India to Study Aadhaar,” *The Wire*, August 11, 2023, <https://thewire.in/diplomacy/sanctioned-myanmar-ministers-visited-india-to-study-aadhaar>.

⁵¹ “Myanmar’s Election Czar Visits Cambodia to Observe ‘Sham Election,’” *The Irrawaddy*, July 24, 2023, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmars-election-czar-visits-cambodia-to-observe-sham-election.html>.

⁵² Council of the European Union, “Council Implementing Regulation (EU) 2023/1495,” *Official Journal of the European Union*, Volume 66: L 183 I/1, July 20, 2023, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L:2023:183I:FULL>.

highlighted in the May 2023 conference room paper, *Death Trade*, published by the UN Special Rapporteur on Myanmar, since 2021, entities within China, Russia, and India have sold the junta 724 million USD worth of arms, equipment, advanced weapons systems, and raw materials for the Myanmar military's domestic arms manufacturing industry, representing more than 70% of the total amount of weapons that the junta bought since the attempted coup to May 2023.⁵³

Junta's Failed Coup and Its Ever-Growing Loss of Territorial Control

Since the 2021 failed coup, the junta's brutal attempt to gain control over the country has been focused on campaigns of artillery shelling, airstrikes, mass arson, massacres, torture, rape and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence, and extrajudicial killings. Despite its mass atrocity crimes, the junta still lacks effective and administrative control of the majority of Myanmar, while the resistance movement has continued to gain more territory and build bottom-up, democratic governance.

The junta's systematic and widespread aerial attacks have deliberately targeted unarmed civilians, vulnerable minorities, displaced people, medical facilities, schools, and internally displaced persons (IDP) camps. In 2023, Nyan Lynn Thit Analytica, a local independent monitoring organization, reported a drastic increase in the junta's airstrikes across the country, which reached a new peak of at least 99 airstrikes in a single week, from 11 to 17 November 2023.⁵⁴

Organizations on the ground have also documented the junta's use of air-dropped cluster bombs in Chin, Karen, Karenni, and Shan States. In tandem, the junta's mass arson campaign has inflicted immense suffering on the Myanmar population. As recorded by Data for Myanmar, since the failed coup, the junta has burned down at least 78,737 houses as of 31 December 2023.⁵⁵ Lastly, the junta's deliberate obstruction of desperately needed humanitarian aid has placed hundreds of thousands of civilians on the brink of starvation. Due to the junta's campaign of terror, the country has rapidly descended into an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. According to UNOCHA,⁵⁶ approximately 2.6 million people are now internally displaced in Myanmar, 2.3 million of whom have been displaced since the coup attempt,⁵⁷ with countless makeshift settlements continually being established across the country.

Despite the intensifying use of violence by the junta, it cannot gain effective and administrative control of the majority of Myanmar, as confirmed by junta pilot, Major Khaing

⁵³ "The Billion Dollar Death Trade: The International Arms Networks That Enable Human Rights Violations in Myanmar," Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, May 17, 2023, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/countries/myanmar/crp-sr-myanmar-2023-05-17.pdf>.

⁵⁴ "Armed Clashes Monitor November 11- November 17," Nyan Lynn Thit Analytica, May 17, 2023, https://drive.google.com/file/d/1BAIwawiXpJeyfnVw4sI0lqnL006gPNkx/view?fbclid=IwAR1-2MpXDGJfp7NzxYA7_qEp1KsV3VqzA-t3n84-U58L3UHqIbXo7R67CNU.

⁵⁵ "Burned Houses Data Public Version," Data for Myanmar, January 20, 2024, <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1BZNjDqZxpwhBkWSnEm2l99RcwlX2-vftU976d0YUIM/edit>.

⁵⁶ Although UNOCHA recently estimated 2.6 million IDPs across Myanmar, reports from humanitarian responders on the ground with direct access to the affected populations indicate that the actual numbers are much higher.

⁵⁷ "Myanmar Humanitarian Update No. 35."

Thant Moe, who was recently arrested by the resistance forces.⁵⁸ The junta continues to fail not only to successfully defend its territory – let alone regain areas of which they have lost control – but also to slow down the fast-growing, nationwide advance of the resistance forces.

In this context, the people’s resistance forces continue to gain control on the ground. Over the last three years, the resistance forces, together with EROs, have constantly intensified their military operations; increased the territory under their control; and dismantled the junta’s administration in rural, peri-urban, and urban areas across Myanmar. The resistance forces’ tireless and courageous efforts – for which hundreds of people, especially young women and men, have sacrificed their lives – created the circumstances at the end of 2023 for the resistance forces to enter into a more structured and advanced phase and drastically accelerate their nationwide operational tempo. The now-famous Operation 1027⁵⁹ was launched on 27 October 2023 in northern Shan State by the Three Brotherhood Alliance (3BHA) – comprised of the Arakan Army (AA), the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), and the TNLA. Operation 1027 triggered a successful series of ongoing large-scale, multi-front revolutionary offensives across the country. Within a week, the 3BHA, in coordination with local PDFs, took over 100 junta outposts along the Myanmar-China border,⁶⁰ and reached Chinshwehaw, one of the most vital border trade gates to China. Meanwhile, in Sagaing and Magway Regions, local PDFs – together with KIA and AA – launched simultaneous attacks, seizing multiple towns and junta positions.⁶¹

Then, in Chin State, in November 2023, a coalition of the Chin National Army and local resistance forces liberated two towns along the India border, including the town of Rihkhawdar.⁶² The border town, well known for its heart-shaped lake, allows Chin resistance groups to facilitate cross-border humanitarian aid to IDP camps in conflict-affected areas. On consolidating their control along the border, the leader of the Chin National Front (CNF) stated, “Our tactic is from the village to the town to the capital.”⁶³

Moreover, on 13 November 2023, a new front was opened in Rakhine State. The AA, after a yearlong ceasefire with the junta, launched new operations targeting junta outposts and border guard police in Rakhine State. In addition, following Operation 1027, the Karenni forces, led by the Karenni Nationalities Defence Force, announced Operation 1111, aiming to take control of the Karenni State capital, Loikaw. Over a few days, the Karenni forces attacked several junta positions around the capital, captured the state police station, and managed to take control of Loikaw University, located in the city center.⁶⁴ The PDFs’ and EROs’ successful

⁵⁸ Interim Executive Council of Karenni State, “ကရင်နီတပ်ဖွဲ့တွေ ပြည်သူတွေရှိတဲ့အရပ်က ကျွန်တော့်အတွက် အသက်အန္တရာယ်ကင်းရှင်းတဲ့နေရာလို့ ကြိုယ့်ခံရင် ၊ (၈) ရက်လောက် အစာအဝတ်ခံပြီး တောထဲလျှောက်သွားနေမှာ မဟုတ်ဘူး။” Facebook, December 19, 2023,

https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid0LJNDbFqEUtZdUzCeSW62XYAvvD1AMMXf4SLnA82xNf9V3pY3X6Tc2uV13LnKXUcl&id=100092593235157.

⁵⁹ Zachary Abuza, “Operation 1027 poses rare challenge to Myanmar junta,” *Radio Free Asia*, November 10, 2023, <https://www.rfa.org/english/commentaries/myanmar-operation-1027-11102023122533.html>.

⁶⁰ Thura Maung, Kyaw Oo, “Anti-junta groups take over Kawlin after days of fighting,” *Myanmar Now*, November 7, 2023, <https://myanmar-now.org/en/news/anti-junta-groups-take-over-kawlin-after-days-of-fighting/>.

⁶¹ Aung Naing, “Operation 1027 expands into Sagaing Region as PDF launches attacks in central Myanmar,” *Myanmar Now*, October 31, 2023, <https://myanmar-now.org/en/news/operation-1027-expands-into-sagaing-region-as-pdf-launches-attacks-in-central-myanmar/>.

⁶² “Myanmar battlefield updates: November 15,” *Myanmar Now*, November 15, 2023, <https://myanmar-now.org/en/news/myanmar-battlefield-updates-november-15/>.

⁶³ “Myanmar rebels, battling junta, seek to control border with India,” *Reuters*, November 14, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/myanmar-junta-imposes-curfew-western-city-amid-surge-rebel-led-fighting-2023-11-14/>.

⁶⁴ “Junta surrenders base at Loikaw University to KNDF,” *Myanmar Now*, November 16, 2023, <https://myanmar-now.org/en/news/junta-surrenders-base-at-loikaw-university-to-kndf/>.

nationwide operations and targeted attacks have been made possible through years of negotiation, coordination, and trust-building processes among the NUG, EROs, and local resistance forces to develop a united front against the junta's decades-long divide-and-rule strategy.

While the junta's administration has collapsed in most areas outside the country's main cities and it has increased security measures in Naypyidaw, flags of resistance forces have been flying over cities across Myanmar – from Sagaing Region in Myanmar's heartland to Chin State on the India border and northern Shan State on the China border. During the three years since the failed coup, resistance forces, together with allied EROs, have vastly extended their operational territory and inflicted severe damage to the junta's vital economic assets, ground troops' morale, supply lines, and infrastructure. Their successful resistance has led to the formation of locally led governance systems, a clear example of the people's unwavering commitment to establishing an inclusive and sustainable federal democratic union.

On 12 June 2023, the Karenni State Consultative Council, the leading political body representing the people of Karenni State, announced the formation of Karenni State Interim Executive Council (IEC) – one of the first examples of people-led, bottom-up governance structures established after the 2021 failed coup.⁶⁵ The IEC's goals, as listed in its first public statement, are to carry out the executive functions of the interim state government through collective leadership; ensure checks and balances between the legislative, executive, and judicial branches; bring about peace and stability within Karenni State; and enhance closer, practical cooperation with different resistance forces located in Karenni State.⁶⁶ While operating in war-torn Karenni State, constantly subjected to the junta's indiscriminate aerial attacks, the IEC "aims to protect the lives and property of its people, to deliver public services and to fulfill the fundamental needs of the people including education, health, food and other basic necessities."⁶⁷ IEC Chairperson Khu Oo Reh clearly stated, "Rather than establishing a separate country, I would like to say that we are taking the position of participating as a member state of a federal democratic union."⁶⁸

In this vein, the Karenni State Interim Parliament (KSIP) was formed on 24 August 2023 as another step towards consolidating the democratic and federal governance structure of Karenni State. As a democratic legislature, the KSIP is constituted by the elected members from the 2020 general election, and it will enact laws and ensure a system of checks and balances between the new political bodies.⁶⁹

The democratic, bottom-up representative bodies established in Karenni State are only some examples of the people's efforts nationwide to build the foundation for a federal democratic system in Myanmar. At the same time, local communities, the NUG, and EROs have

⁶⁵ "Kayah Becomes First Myanmar State to Set Up Revolutionary Governing Body," *The Irrawaddy*, June 13, 2023, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/kayah-becomes-first-myanmar-state-to-set-up-revolutionary-governing-body.html>.

⁶⁶ Interim Executive Council of Karenni State, "A brief account of the establishment of the Interim Executive Council of Karenni State (IEC)," Facebook, June 12, 2023, <https://web.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=138579765905131&set=pb.100092593235157.-2207520000&type=3&rdc=1&rdi>.

⁶⁷ Interim Executive Council of Karenni State, "A brief account of the establishment of the Interim Executive Council of Karenni State (IEC)."

⁶⁸ Esther J, "Karenni governing council offers political alternative to junta control," *Myanmar Now*, August 17, 2023, <https://myanmar-now.org/en/news/karenni-governing-council-offers-political-alternative-to-junta-control/>.

⁶⁹ KSIP - Karenni State Interim Parliament, "Statement on the Formation of Karenni State Interim Parliament (KSIP)," Facebook, November 17, 2023, <https://web.facebook.com/photo?fbid=649782877327108&set=pcb.649783027327093&rdc=1&rdi>.

established hundreds of schools, clinics, and hospitals – often run by CDMers – throughout the country’s liberated areas. These examples show the people’s ability to foster social, political, and cultural cohesion across and among ethnic communities, societal sectors, and social classes. The genuine bottom-up, people-centric approach has also initiated, across Myanmar society, a historic multifaceted process of healing from decades of military-imposed conflict, division, and violence.

As described above, while the junta is losing control of most of the country, the people’s resistance movement has established people-centric, inclusive democratic systems in many of the country’s liberated areas. This bottom-up approach – which represents the foundations of a new federal democratic Myanmar – is the only realistic, long-term sustainable solution for Myanmar’s current multidimensional crisis. In sharp contrast to the people’s efforts to build local democratic governance, the illegitimate junta’s plan to hold a sham election – with no support from the people – will only prolong and exacerbate the intensifying, junta-caused crisis in Myanmar.

Conclusion

This briefing paper has elucidated the illegal junta’s plan to claim legitimacy through an illegitimate sham election; the junta’s related groundwork thus far, including its draconian efforts to further monitor, control, and repress Myanmar society; and the domestic rejection of, as well as the mixed international responses to, the junta’s sham election plan as its sole exit strategy. Furthermore, this paper has laid down the formation and evolution of the people’s resistance movement; its successful fast-growing operational tempo supported by multi-front advancements nationwide; and the consolidation of the democratic, bottom-up representative bodies established across Myanmar; and the emergence of a federal democratic system throughout the country’s liberated areas, adding to the existing and expanding administrations of EROs.

The junta’s unlawful plans to hold a sham election aim exclusively as a bid to seek legitimacy and gain international recognition. In the past three years, the entire scheme to hold a forced vote -- while building an ever-threatening mass surveillance state – has operated in parallel with the junta’s campaign of terror that has further exacerbated the current multidimensional crisis it caused, all in hopes to achieve its authoritarian vision for Myanmar by force and election. Importantly, the junta has never secured effective and administrative control of most of the country's territory, apart from a few main cities, making it impossible to conduct any large-scale activity, particularly a national election.

The military junta is an illegal, unconstitutional, and illegitimate body that has failed to capture both territorial control of the country and the popular support of the people, as firmly and persistently stated by the people of Myanmar. The Myanmar military, synonymous with the current military junta, has always been the root cause of the seven-decades-long conflict in the non-Bamar ethnic areas and the current, dire humanitarian and economic catastrophe, as well as the main obstacle to the formation of a peaceful federal democratic union. Furthermore, throughout its existence and still today, the military has committed and continues to commit mass atrocity crimes – including genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity – with complete impunity. Any step taken by the military junta to organize a

sham election has therefore been unequivocally denounced by the NUG, EROs, political parties, ethnic communities, and the Myanmar public.

Now, it is time for the international community – including regional governments, such as ASEAN and its Member States, and other foreign governments – to recognize and respect the Myanmar people’s will and aspirations; denounce the illegal junta’s plan to hold a sham election; and support the only realistic, long-term, and sustainable solution for the country’s crisis: the federal democratic system that the people of Myanmar are already building from the ground up.

Recommendations

To the International Community

- Unequivocally denounce the Myanmar military junta’s illegitimate sham election plan, and deny the junta any direct or indirect political, technical, financial, or other material support in relation to its sham election plans;
- Halt all activities that may be perceived as lending legitimacy to the Myanmar military junta, including but not limited to, formal and informal visits inside the country and inviting junta-affiliated delegations to bilateral meetings, conferences, and regional and international forums;
- Urgently provide political, technical, financial, and other material support to the people’s resistance movement, their legitimate representatives, and government structures; and
- Recognize and support the aspirations and will of the Myanmar people’s movement to build a federal democratic country.

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