

March 1, 2024 | Myanmar

ASEAN deepening complicity with illegal and illegitimate Myanmar junta through its appointment as coordinator of Russia-ASEAN relations

ASEAN is appointing the illegal Myanmar military junta as the bloc's new coordinator of ASEAN's relations with the Russian regime, a position that is supposed to run until 2027.

ASEAN Country Coordinators are responsible for managing ASEAN relations with its Dialogue Partners. This involves co-chairing meetings, enhancing relationships, representing ASEAN in negotiations and promoting the bloc's interests internationally.

The move by ASEAN legitimises the junta as if it were the government of Myanmar and supports its deepening relationship with the Russian regime, which is the junta's biggest supplier of arms. According to a May 2023 report by the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Russia has transferred US\$406 million in arms and related materials to the junta since the military's coup attempt.

The junta is a criminal enterprise that is a major threat to regional security. It profits from cyber scams, human trafficking and the illegal trade of natural resources, which finance a war of terror that has caused a mass refugee crisis for Myanmar's neighbours.

ASEAN's move also encourages further Myanmar junta support for the Russian regime and its war of aggression against Ukraine. The junta has provided arms to Russia that it has used in Ukraine, and it recently joined the Financial Messaging System of the Bank of Russia (SPFS) that enables direct payments between the two countries, circumventing sanctions.

The appointment as ASEAN Country Coordinator for Russia is already paying off for the junta, who hosted Russia's deputy foreign minister Andrey Rudenko in Naypyidaw, Myanmar's capital last week, where he met with junta head and war criminal Min Aung Hlaing and the junta's foreign minister and deputy foreign minister.

According to Russian propaganda, a central purpose of the visit was to discuss Russia-ASEAN dialogue prospects. While in Myanmar, the Russian delegation also held discussions with the junta on expanding their military, economic and technological cooperation.

The discussions in Naypyidaw furthered plans to transfer nuclear technology that Russia claims is for peaceful purposes. This creates a proliferation risk in Southeast Asia, which is free of nuclear weapons, as the recipient of the technology in Myanmar is a military junta, and both the junta and Russia do not respect international law.

By placing the junta in this role, ASEAN is therefore directly enabling greater political, financial and military support between the junta and Russia for each other's ongoing war crimes and crimes against humanity, which include mass killings, indiscriminate airstrikes and shelling, rape, torture, arbitrary detention and mass forced displacement.

ASEAN's decision to empower Myanmar junta relations with the Russian regime flouts international law, threatens international peace and security and disregards the will of Myanmar

people who have courageously rejected the junta and prevented its coup attempt from succeeding for over three years.

ASEAN's appointment of the junta as Russia Country Coordinator undermines sanctions and export restrictions imposed on the Myanmar junta by ASEAN dialogue partners Australia, Canada, UK, EU, New Zealand and the USA, and sanctions and export restrictions imposed on Russia by the ASEAN member Singapore and ASEAN dialogue partners Australia, Canada, UK, EU, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, Japan and the USA.

The appointment also undermines the bloc's own commitments to resolve the crisis in Myanmar. Decisions to allow the junta to take part in ASEAN coordination efforts, meetings and activities have contributed to the failure of its Five Point Consensus.

In 2023, the Myanmar junta was rejected by the EU in assuming the role of coordinator for its relations with ASEAN on the basis that the EU does not recognise the junta. Instead of ending the junta's country coordinator role, ASEAN allowed the junta to swap coordination positions with Brunei, appointing it as the coordinator for Russia. In addition, from 2021 for a period of three years, the junta was the coordinator for relations with China, the second biggest provider of arms to the Myanmar military.

ASEAN's latest act of complicity comes after it brought the Myanmar and Russian militaries together as co-chairs of the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting (ADMM) Plus Experts' Working Group on Counter Terrorism from 2021-23, which culminated in a tabletop military simulation in Naypyidaw and field exercises in Russia last year that trained junta troops in skills directly transferrable to its attacks against Myanmar people.

ASEAN is further aiding the junta's air force and navy. Last year, the junta's air force chief chaired the ASEAN Air Chiefs' Conference, and this year the junta is set to lead the ASEAN Navy Chiefs' Conference.

Justice For Myanmar calls on ASEAN to immediately stop legitimising the junta and to ban it from all ASEAN meetings and activities.

Justice For Myanmar spokesperson Yadanar Maung says: "ASEAN is not ineffective or useless in responding to the crisis in Myanmar. It is actually far worse than that as it is complicit in the junta's atrocities by providing direct and indirect support for its terror campaign.

"The Russian regime has long been one of the military's main supplier of arms and provides political backing and business that aids and abets the military's crimes of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

"The junta repays the favour and is aiding Russia's commission of international crimes in Ukraine.

"The criminal partnership between the junta and Russian regime is sponsored by ASEAN.

"Despite ASEAN's mounting complicity, the international community continues to hide behind the bloc, which impedes effective global action against the junta.

"It's time ASEAN stop actively worsening the Myanmar crisis and instead support international action to block the junta's access to funds, arms, equipment and jet fuel.

"Governments, including Australia, which is about to host ASEAN leaders in a Special Summit, should advocate for ASEAN to at a minimum stop aiding and abetting war crimes and crimes

against humanity in Myanmar, and take their own action against the junta and its business and arms procurement networks.”

More information:

Read more about ASEAN’s complicity in the Myanmar military’s international crimes [here](#)

Read about the Myanmar military’s Russian arms suppliers [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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