



## **Public Statement: Women's Organizations Condemn Junta's Forced Conscription Law in Myanmar**

Date: 8.3.2024

We, the undersigned women's organizations and advocates for human rights, equality, justice, and democracy, strongly condemn the recent announcement by the Junta in Myanmar (also known as the State Administration Council) regarding the implementation of the People's Military Service Law.

In 2010, the military regime, the State Peace, and Development Council, enacted the People's Military Service Law, mandating state-led conscription for men aged 18 to -35 and women aged 18 to 27, with the age limit extended to 45 for men and 35 for women with specialized skills. The illegal State Administration Council (SAC), which had already launched an unlawful coup, taken over the country's judicial and legal system, and destroyed any remnant of its rule of law, enforced this law into effect on February 10, 2024. This unlawful enforcement has led to widespread chaos, endangering over 13 million people to forced conscription. The illegal SAC has since used the forced conscription law as grounds to abduct young people, children, and internally displaced persons, and reinforce such acts through this law.

The illegal SAC is using this merciless and wicked law to perpetrate more atrocities, thereby prolonging the ongoing cycle of violence, repression, and militarization in Myanmar. The Burmese military has for over thirty years committed mass atrocities – crimes against humanity, war crimes, and genocide – against ethnic and religious minorities, and for over three years against the entire population in Myanmar. This law will only embolden the military to expand its brutal control over the country's people, as well as use them as human shields and pawns in its commission of further acts in violation of international humanitarian and human rights law.

As women's organizations, we are deeply concerned about the gendered impact of forced conscription on women and girls, who are often subject to gender-based violence, exploitation, and discrimination, and the ways in which this law will perpetuate the culture of impunity in Myanmar. The Burmese military has for decades used rape as a weapon of war in its attacks against ethnic and religious minority women and wielded such a weapon in prisons and conflict areas nationwide since its attempted coup. Women who will be forcibly recruited will be exposed to rape, gang rape, sexual slavery, and other brutal forms of sexual violence, as well as conflict-related sexual violence, that the military has long perpetrated.

The forced recruitment law, and the military's implementation of it, will exacerbate the already dire humanitarian crisis in the country. Many more women will have no choice but to flee the country, forcing them to rely on precarious means of escape such as trafficking and other forms of exploitation. Since there are few options to escape forced recruitment, parents and families are resorting to extreme measures including arranging marriages for their underage teenage daughters and sending them overseas through unscrupulous agents or brokers exposing them

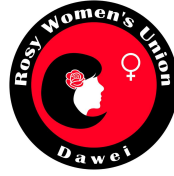


to various forms of sexual violence and exploitations, including organ harvesting in the worst-case scenarios. The LGBTQI community faces similar risks, including being trafficked into forced labour and sexual exploitation.

At the same time, with men being largely conscripted, women will be left to handle household duties and care for the elderly, the sick, and children on their own, reinforcing traditional gender roles and stereotypes. Reports indicate a notable increase in the marriage of young women around 17 years of age, particularly in rural areas, to avoid being forcibly conscripted; the law provides exemptions to “married women” by calling them “housewives,” making those who fall into non-exempt categories, such as widows, divorcees, and singles, at a high risk of being conscripted into forced labour. Although married women are exempted from conscription according to the law, many are opting to leave with their husbands and children for safer locations, abandoning their professional careers in Myanmar and seeking low-paid jobs in neighbouring countries.

Since the 2021 coup attempt, nearly all women have experienced insecurity and psychological violence at the hands of the junta. Mothers and sisters are increasingly worried about their sons, brothers, husbands, and male relatives being forced into military service and compelled to serve as frontline fighters in an exacerbating civil war, and against the people’s will. To prevent further vulnerabilities and risk of atrocities, including sexual violence, against women of Myanmar, we make the following demands.

1. We call on all parties involved to refrain from exploiting youth for political purposes. It’s imperative that choices be made voluntarily.
2. We urge the neighbouring countries and the broader international community to act in a gender-sensitive manner and uphold principles under international refugee law, particularly the principle of non-refoulement, to ensure safety and protection of people fleeing Myanmar, including by securing their legal status and facilitating visa access for young people to study or work abroad and pathways for third-country resettlement.
3. We urge the provision of direct and flexible support to ethnic minority and women’s organizations who are working with and providing emergency assistance to displaced populations, women prisoners, women CDMers, women activists, women from revolutionary forces, and other marginalized groups in Myanmar and its border areas.
4. We urge international organizations to pledge funding to establish Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps with access to adequate living conditions, vocational training and livelihood opportunities for young people including those who choose not to join armed resistance.
5. We recommend the urgent establishment of an emergency and relocation fund to support those affected by forced conscription.



6. We urge the international community to support efforts in bringing this case to the International Criminal Court (ICC) for investigation and to issue an arrest warrant for Min Aung Hlaing and other members of the military junta for international crimes including war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide, as well as conflict-related sexual violence.
7. Last but not the least, we would like to highlight that the Myanmar military junta lacks any legitimacy in the country to authorize and implement state-sponsored recruitment. The people recognize the National Unity Government (NUG) as the legitimate governing body of the country, and formal recognition of the NUG is essential. We call for international stakeholders to cooperate with the NUG and its allied ethnic revolutionary/ resistance organizations (to immediately stop the mass atrocities committed by the junta, and to protect the people of Myanmar).

#### Signed Organizations

1. Politics for Women Myanmar
2. Rosy Women's Union – Dawei
3. Sisters 2 Sisters
4. Spouses of People's Soldiers
5. Women Advocacy Coalition – Myanmar
6. Women Alliance Burma
7. Women's League of Burma
8. Women Peace Network