



Press Statement: Will Malaysia permit Myanmar's illegal junta to operate here?

Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall - 23 Feb 2024

Since the Myanmar military's attempted coup, the junta's violence against civilians has begun to threaten the Burmese community in Malaysia. Over the more than three years since Feb 2021, the junta has killed thousands of civilians and arbitrarily detained yet more in Myanmar. Concerningly, the junta's efforts to repress the broad opposition against them have only spread and grown stronger with time.

As people opposing their attempted seizure of power have fled Myanmar in search of asylum, the resistance has moved abroad. Political and human rights activists and those involved in the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) have continued to face risks, even while they are outside of their country. These risks often take the form of Transnational Repression (TNR): the targeting of dissidents abroad by the Myanmar junta.

The 4 Jul 2023 abduction of well-known activist Thuzar Maung and her family from her home in Kuala Lumpur by masked men, is a blood-curdling example of TNR. The attack on Thuzar, who openly opposed the military regime, showed the potential risks posed by the far-reaching tentacles of the Myanmar military.

On 18 Jul 2023, police launched an investigation into Thuzar Maung's disappearance. On 25 Jul 2023, Burmese diaspora community members requested information about Thuzar and her family to Mr. Muhammad Zakwan Mustafa Kamal, the press secretary of Home Minister Saifuddin Nasution. To date, police have not provided any further updates on the case either to the public at large or to members of the Burmese diaspora community. As advocate James Bawi states, "As activists, we feel vulnerable and unsupported. We live in fear that any one of us could face a similar fate as Thuzar."

The military has also recently issued a conscription order, known as the People's Military Service Law, to call up 60,000 women and men annually into mandatory service. From mid-April 2024, individuals working or studying abroad will not have their visas renewed to ensure their return for military service. This order further raises concerns that incidents of TNR could increase dramatically and force activists and those opposed to the military to face serious threats to their lives.

It is illegal for the military to stalk, target, kidnap, murder, force victims to return to Myanmar, and intimidate family members. TNR under the Myanmar junta is a normal and institutionalised practice and its efforts to strike down opposition may expand as it continues to lose control of power.

Although Malaysia has not ratified the Refugee Convention, it has obligations to protect refugees under customary international law and under the international conventions and treaties to which it has signed on to. We appeal for a dialogue with key stakeholders in the Malaysian government to establish a clear definition of TNR and to ensure that safety mechanisms can be put in place for activists and dissidents who are opposed to the ruthless military junta.

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