

21/02/2025

## End Transnational Repression Alliance

### Press Release: Malaysia must lead by example to end the junta's violence across ASEAN borders

As ASEAN 2025 Chair, Malaysia must demonstrate its commitment to peace and human rights in the region by aligning its efforts to bring an end to the "atrocious" crisis in Burma. To do so, it must stop collaborating with the illegal Burmese junta on matters of immigration and guarantee the safety for all on Malaysian soil who have fled persecution in Burma.

On the 1st of February 2025, Burma entered four years since the illegal junta's failed attempted seizure of power. As their recent sham census shows, they have since lost the ability to count the people, let alone govern, in most areas in Burma. In a last-ditch effort to make up for its disastrous and repeated military failures, the leaders have attacked civilians at increasingly high rates. Recently compiled data shows that the Burmese junta carried out more airstrikes and drone attacks on civilians in 2024 than in 2021, 2022, and 2023 combined.<sup>1</sup> In the past two weeks of January alone, two junta airstrikes in Arakan State killed at least 72 civilians, including 28 family members and children of its own officials.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile, official junta figures show that it has forcibly conscripted more than 40,000 young people in 2024, nearly all of whom they have thrown to the front lines as cannon fodder.<sup>3</sup> On 23 Jan, the junta continued to tighten their dragnet on young people, announcing that all individuals eligible for conscription will be barred from leaving the country.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the irony is not lost on us when, despite its tenuous hold on power, the junta still seeks to bolster a non-existent mandate among the ASEAN and international community by holding a sham election.<sup>5</sup> ASEAN as a community - with Malaysia in the lead for 2025 - must be objective in its assessment of the peace process in Myanmar. It must reject the illegal military junta as a 'legitimate' party for dialogue and unmask its democratic veneer<sup>6</sup> and false claims to power.

As a just and compassionate neighbor, Malaysia Madani has a moral role to play in this conflict, not just in the peace process, but also at home. Since 2021, the junta's forced conscription, indiscriminate and brutal attacks, and travel bans has encouraged more people to flee, many via increasingly unsafe routes. Upon arrival in Malaysia, local conditions have only heightened the vulnerability of those fleeing junta violence. During January to August 2024, Malaysian immigration carried out 11,900 immigration raids.<sup>7</sup> This amounts to roughly 50 raids targeting undocumented workers a day. Once detained, refugees face horrible conditions in prisons, followed by forced deportation. For many Burmese, this has meant arrest, torture, rape, forced conscription, and murder at the hands of the military. Meanwhile, the junta continues to deny Rohingya citizenship, meaning Malaysia simply leaves thousands to languish in horrifying detention centre conditions indefinitely. While refugee cards offer some measure of safety to those who have them, UNHCR has been limited in its capacity to register increasing numbers of asylum seekers in recent years. Those still waiting for their UNHCR refugee status – many of whom for several years – are less fortunate and are at even higher risk of arrest, detention, and deportation.

This ASEAN chairmanship is an opportunity for Malaysia Madani to set its human rights records straight. It is already worrying that Prime Minister Anwar has recruited Thaksin Shinawatra and Hun Sen as his advisors during his term as ASEAN Chairman and is already seen to be 'facilitating transnational repression'<sup>8</sup>. However, we strongly believe that a progressive chairmanship under Prime Minister Anwar is still possible and urge the Madani government to act:

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1 <https://acleddata.com/data/#/dashboard>

2 <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-junta-airstrike-kills-28-detained-wives-children-of-regime-troops-aa.html>

3 <https://www.rfa.org/english/myanmar/2025/01/02/myanmar-snatch-recruit-conscription/>

4 <https://eng.mizzima.com/2025/01/26/18580>

5 <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/01/un-expert-urges-support-people-myanmar-they-heroically-oppose-military>

6 <https://thediplomat.com/2025/01/on-human-rights-malysias-asean-chairmanship-promises-more-of-the-same/>

7 <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/malaysia#:~:text=guidelines%20and%20oversight,-Refugees%2C%20Asylum%20Seekers%2C%20and%20Migrants,-Malaysia%20is%20not>

8 <https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/malaysia-government-stifles-expression-increases-online-controls-and-facilitates-transnational-repression/>

**The Malaysian government:**

- To make available MKN Directive 23 for the public and civil society and implement relevant legal frameworks for basic refugee rights, including protection needs and right to work.
- To put in a place a mechanism to screen refugees prior to deportation and allow access to justice for those who are arrested.
- To open up the National Legal Aid Fund (YBGK) to offer services to asylum seekers and refugees so they can access justice at all points during cases of arrest and detention.
- To immediately cease all deportations contravening the principle of non-refoulement and reinstate access for UNHCR into detention centers.
- To ratify the UNHCR 1951 Convention and the ICPPED to ensure basic standards of protection are in place for asylum seekers and human rights defenders in exile.

**For Malaysia's ASEAN Chairmanship:**

- To support Burmese community-led and cross-border humanitarian work and protect people from Burma in conflict-affected zones.
- To push ASEAN fellow member states to move beyond the non-interference principle and uphold their Responsibility to Protect asylum seekers, refugees, and citizens across the region.
- To urge fellow member states to halt support for the illegal military junta, especially to stop the flow of conscripts, weapons, and equipment that can be used to prolong conflict.

**Signed by:**

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| 1. Aliran                                  | 9. Myanmar Workers Organization |
| 2. ALTSEAN-Burma                           | 10. North-South Initiative      |
| 3. ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights | 11. Peace Rights Foundation     |
| 4. Asylum Access Malaysia                  | 12. Parti Socialis Malaysia     |
| 5. Beyond Borders                          | 13. Refugees in Malaysia        |
| 6. Coalition of Burma Ethnic in Malaysia   | 14. Rvwang Refugee Committee    |
| 7. Cross Cultural Foundation               | 15. SUARAM                      |
| 8. Greater Equitable Measures              |                                 |

Five anonymized refugee community members as well as the following individuals have also signed onto the press release:

1. Belle Razali
2. Beverly Joeman
3. Douglas Teoh
4. Megan Steven

**End Transnational Repression Alliance**

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