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ASEAN must not allow the Myanmar junta to host its environment meetings

Today, 123 groups called on the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to prevent the Myanmar junta from hosting the 37th Meeting of ASEAN Senior Officials on Environment (ASOEN) and the related cluster of meetings scheduled to take place in Myanmar from 4–7 August 2026.

In an open letter to the Philippines, the current chair of ASEAN and ASOEN, the groups urged that the cluster of seven climate, biodiversity, and environment meetings be relocated to the Philippines or held virtually. The letter, which also addressed to ASOEN members and dialogue partners (the EU, USA, Japan and Republic of Korea), calls for the junta to be excluded from all future ASOEN meetings and activities.

The letter comes days after ASEAN's Foreign Ministers met the junta's "foreign minister" at an informal meeting hosted by Thailand on 12 July. The groups reject any attempt to normalize relations with the junta, including through its environment platforms.

“The Myanmar military junta are not the legitimate representative of the people of Myanmar. The junta is plundering forests, rivers, and mineral resources to bankroll its international crimes and must not be allowed to host ASEAN's environment meetings,” said Mike of Defend Myanmar Democracy. “Hosting the ASOEN would only reward the junta, which is driving Myanmar's environmental destruction, handing them a platform they desperately seek to greenwash their atrocities and manufacture legitimacy.”

The letter warns that the meetings would likely be hosted by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation (MONREC), which is illegally controlled by the junta and governs the extraction and trade of Myanmar's gemstones, pearls, minerals, and timber. Its five state-owned enterprises have been targeted by Western sanctions for their critical role in helping to fund the junta's international crimes.

The United States has sanctioned all key state-owned enterprises under MONREC, and the European Union has sanctioned all but one, for their role in financing the junta. Yet both are currently scheduled to hold their environment and climate dialogues at junta-hosted meetings right after the ASOEN meeting. Deepening these concerns, MONREC's junta-appointed minister, Hsan Oo, is a former director of the military conglomerate Myanma Economic Holdings Limited (MEHL), which has also been sanctioned. The open letter highlights the incoherence of the EU and the USA attending meetings hosted by the junta ministry that they have sanctioned. Similarly, the letter urges dialogue partners, including Japan and the Republic of Korea, to publicly refuse to attend any meetings hosted by the military junta.

For over five years, the people of Myanmar have overwhelmingly rejected the military's coup attempt and its sham elections, demonstrating their unwavering determination to pursue a federal democratic future.

Since 2021, more than 3.8 million people have been displaced, while the junta plunders forests and minerals to fund its war, pushes to revive the widely opposed Myitsone dam, weaponizes climate disasters like Cyclone Mocha by blocking and diverting relief, and bombs conservation areas stewarded by Indigenous communities. Illegal mining now pollutes water sources relied on across the region.

In 2023, UN experts urged the international community to avoid official engagement with the junta, warning it would exploit any interaction for propaganda. The true stewards of Myanmar's environment are the Indigenous communities and grassroots defenders who risk their lives to protect the forests and rivers; however, these meetings would shamefully marginalize them.

The groups call on the Philippines and ASOEN members to relocate the meetings and exclude the junta from all future ASOEN activities; on dialogue partners to publicly refuse to send delegations to any junta-hosted meeting; and on all participants to ensure no funding, technical assistance or support reaches the junta or MONREC. The groups also warn that the ASEAN Joint Statement on Climate Change, which is ASEAN's collective voice to the annual UN climate summit (COP31), must not be shaped at a junta-hosted meeting.

Read the full letter and list of signatories here:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ed8OXfKl1837v9g5TnUS5bUv5qvG8zmW/view?usp=sharing>

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