



To: ASEAN Secretary General

CC: ASEAN Committee on Women (ACW)

ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC)

ASEAN Secretariat

Date – 22 August 2024

Dear Esteemed ASEAN Secretary General,

Subject: Urgent Objection to ASEAN's Decision to Host the Ministerial Meeting on Women and Other Meetings Related to Women and Children in Myanmar in October 2024

We, the undersigned, women's networks, gender equality networks, civil society organisations, community-based organisations, and women's collectives, and organisations present our strongest objection to the plans, as appeared in the ASEAN notional calendar 2024¹, to host the 5th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Women (AMMW), the 23rd ASEAN Committee on Women Meeting (23rd ACW), 16th ASEAN Committee on Women Plus Three Meeting (16th ACW+3), 11th Consultation Meeting ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children and ASEAN Committee on Women (11th ACWC-ACW Meeting), and the 29th ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (29th ACWC Meeting) in Myanmar in October 2024, a country currently under the grip of an unlawful junta

¹ <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/ASEAN-Notional-Calendar-2024-updated-as-of-23-Jan-2024.pdf>



attempting to seize control. This decision is deeply troubling and sends a disheartening message to women, girls, and gender minorities in Myanmar, as well as to the international community.

The military in Myanmar has been documented as committing severe and widespread atrocities and egregious gender-based crimes against civilians, including conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), particularly targeting ethnic communities including the Rohingya over decades. In 2017, the United Nations formally identified the Myanmar military elements of Myanmar Armed Forces, Tatmadaw as a perpetrator of sexual violence in conflict, and in 2018, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Pramila Patten, signed a Joint Communique between the Government of Myanmar and the United Nations to address conflict-related sexual violence in Myanmar. In the successive years of the United Nations Secretary-General Report on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence, the Myanmar military, the armed forces remain on the list of parties credibly suspected of committing or being responsible, for patterns of rape and other forms of sexual violence in situations of armed conflict, highlighting the gravity of the situation in Myanmar. These heinous acts have been, for decades, meticulously documented by ethnic women's organizations and corroborated by reports from the International Independent Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar, which published a thematic report “Sexual and gender-based violence in Myanmar and gendered aspects of its ethnic conflicts” in August 2019² revealed credible and consistent accounts of a pattern of sexual violence against men, women and girls.

² A comprehensive conference room paper on sexual and gender-based violence and the gendered impact of its ethnic conflicts encompassing trends and patterns in northern Myanmar since 2011. [A/HRC/42/CRP.4](#).



The severity and scope of these gender-based crimes have escalated since the military's attempted coup in 2021, to name a few, using sexual violence to interrogate women, men, and LGBTIQ+ political prisoners for their pro-democracy activities, sexual violence against civilian women and girls including boys, and arresting female political activists with small children, incarcerating these children with other inmates.

The decision to host such significant meetings in Myanmar, under the auspices of the junta responsible for these crimes, is not only disturbing but also dangerous. It risks legitimizing the junta's actions and undermines the credibility and integrity of ASEAN's commitments to human rights and gender equality. These commitments are outlined in several key documents, including the ASEAN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (DEVAW) of 2004, the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (ASEAN RPA on EVAW) adopted in 2015, and the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence Against Children (ASEAN RPA on EVAC). Additionally, the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on Women, Peace and Security (ASEAN RPA) adopted in 2022, along with the UN Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace, and Security, to which ASEAN is also committed, and international human rights conventions, that ASEAN Members ratified such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), reinforce these obligations.

We do not accept an ASEAN justification that having such meetings is not a matter of political engagement as long as the junta Chief is not being invited to the ASEAN Summits. Women's rights are inherently political, and the use of CRSV as a tactic of political repression and control cannot



be ignored or excused. Hosting these meetings in Myanmar would be a direct affront to the women and gender minorities who have suffered under this military dictatorship and would be perceived as ASEAN's tacit approval, or at least indifference to these egregious crimes. It is a matter of upholding the fundamental rights and dignity of all our women and children. ASEAN must commit to these principles and actions such as these planned meetings risk undermining the hard-won progress in advancing women's rights in the region.

We stand in solidarity with the women of Myanmar in demanding that ASEAN immediately cancel and relocate these meetings to another member state. We also call on ASEAN to adopt a firmer stance in rejecting any engagement with the junta that could be interpreted as legitimizing their control. The world is watching, and the women of Myanmar deserve nothing less than our full support and solidarity.

Signed by

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

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