

Press Statement: Myanmar civil society calls for ASEAN to move beyond the Five-Point Consensus and end all engagements with the illegal military junta

Ahead of the 44th and 45th Summits of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in Vientiane, Laos, the Myanmar National Organizing Committee (Myanmar NOC) for ACSC/APF, comprising 15 civil society organizations, as well as partner organizations and network, participated in the ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN People's Forum (ACSC/APF) 2024 held on 19 – 21 September 2024 in Dili, Timor-Leste. This year, the delegation of Myanmar NOC and partner organizations and network was most inclusive than ever before, with the participation of Rohingya and LGBTQIA+ representatives.

The conference, hosted by the Timor-Leste National Organizing Committee for ACSC/APF and Forum ONG Timor-Leste (FONGTIL), was attended by over 500 delegates and participants from civil society and people's movements from across Southeast Asia. Four plenary sessions, 24 convergence space workshops and 11 side events were held.

On 19 September, during the opening session, the Myanmar NOC reported to the conference the dire human rights and humanitarian crisis in Myanmar caused and exacerbated by the military junta, as well as the people's resolute resistance against the military and building of a new federal democratic Myanmar from the bottom up, despite the junta's widespread and systematic attacks.

Myanmar in the Plenaries

On 19 September, Yasmin Ullah, Executive Director of Rohingya Maiyafuinor Collaborative Network (RMCN), a member organization of the Myanmar NOC, spoke on *Plenary II: Critical Overview for ASEAN Mechanism*. She discussed the failure of ASEAN, especially to protect vulnerable minority communities including the Rohingya, and ASEAN's ongoing red-carpet treatment of the Myanmar military junta. She further highlighted ASEAN's failure to coordinate sanctions against the supply chain of aviation fuel, which has continued to embolden the military junta to conduct frequent targeted airstrikes and massacring of civilians.

On 20 September, Zue Padonmar, Secretary 1 of the Interim Executive Council of Karenni State (IEC), and Nurhayati Ali, Director of Health and Human Services at RMCN, spoke on *Plenary IV: People and Planet First: Toward a Liberating Southeast Asia*. Zue Padonmar discussed the building of bottom-up federal democracy in Karenni State, including the establishment of the people-led Karenni Interim Government, its provision of public services, and its ongoing efforts to encourage public participation in its governance structures. Nurhayati Ali discussed the struggle of the Rohingya, emphasizing that "there will be no liberation in Southeast Asia without the liberation of Rohingya." She also described the efforts of the Rohingya to reclaim their belonging in their ancestral homeland of Myanmar and in ASEAN, including by reengaging with Rohingya culture and sharing their traditions with the international community.

Myanmar in the Convergence Spaces

On 19 September, Myanmar NOC representatives from Women's League of Burma (WLB) and Women Advocacy Coalition – Myanmar (WAC-M) convened a workshop entitled *An Arduous but Yearning Endeavor: Access to Justice for the Survivors of Conflict-Related Gender-Based Crimes*. This workshop was co-organized with Initiatives for International Dialogue and the People's Empowerment Foundation. Panelists included a representative of WLB and Owen of WAC-M. During the workshop, the Myanmar NOC representatives emphasized that the Myanmar military is the main root cause of conflict-related gender-based crime in Myanmar, and that the existing regional and international Women, Peace, and Security frameworks are insufficient to address the ongoing sexual and gender-based violence in Myanmar.

Also on 19 September, Khin Ohmar, Chairperson of the Myanmar NOC member Progressive Voice, joined the *Grassroots Democracy and People's Vision for Alternative Regionalism* workshop as a panelist. She highlighted the Myanmar people's tireless efforts and sacrifices to build new, inclusive, democratic governance structures, sharply contrasting the people's incredible successes with ASEAN's complete failure to address Myanmar's multi-faceted crisis.

On 20 September, the Myanmar NOC convened the *Triumph over Military Tyranny: ASEAN's Role in Rebuilding Myanmar* workshop under the theme of State Violence, Militarism, National Liberation, and Democracy. This workshop was co-organized with International Peace Bureau – Philippines, Thai Action Committee for Democracy in Burma, ALTSEAN-Burma, and the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA).

During the workshop, representatives of the Myanmar NOC discussed the ongoing progress of the Myanmar people's revolution, ASEAN's role in fueling the military junta's false legitimacy, and the regional bloc's need to recognize the people's revolution and their efforts to build a new Myanmar. The democratic principles driving the Spring Revolution, particularly inclusion and equality—as well as the invaluable role of the Civil Disobedience Movement, students, youth, women, the LGBTQIA+ community at the revolution's forefront—were highlighted. The workshop also highlighted the Rohingya people's historical involvement in and contributions to Myanmar's democratic movements, including the 8888 nationwide pro-democracy uprising and the present Spring Revolution.

The workshop emphasized that the Myanmar military junta has shown blatant disregard for ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus (5PC), only escalating its violence against civilians countrywide. ASEAN's disjointed approach to Myanmar's crisis has not only completely failed, but has also lent false legitimacy to the illegal, illegitimate junta and further emboldened it to intensify atrocity crimes.

Also on 20 September, Myanmar NOC members Blood Money Campaign (BMC), Generations' Solidarity Coalition of Nationalities, Network for Human Rights Documentation – Burma, and Equality Myanmar convened a workshop entitled *People to People for Justice: Challenging the Norms of Human Security, Peace, Gender Equality, and Accountability in ASEAN*. This workshop was co-organized with Stop the War Coalition Philippines and the Asian Cultural Forum on Development Foundation.

The workshop included Mulan, a human rights defender from BMC; Ma Aye Saung, Adviser at WAC-M; and a representative of Justice and Equality Focus (JEF). They emphasized the Myanmar military's decades-long impunity and ASEAN's complete lack of political will to address the Myanmar crisis. The workshop, with a panelist from Indonesia, also highlighted the importance of people-to-people solidarity across ASEAN in ensuring human security and peace.

Also on 20 September, Yasmin Ullah of RMCN spoke as a panelist during a workshop entitled *When Hate Speech Leads to Genocide: The Rohingya Case and What We Must Do to Resist*. She highlighted how misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech against the Rohingya are tools to further divide the ASEAN region to become oblivious to the plight of Rohingya in Myanmar's Rakhine State as well as to foster a culture of impunity where victims are blamed. She underlined the urgent need to hold the Myanmar military and other actors complicit in the hate speech against Rohingya accountable including those in the ASEAN region.

Separately, on 19 September, the Alliance Against CRSV–Myanmar co-organized a workshop entitled *Strategies to Address CRSV in the Region*. Moderated by Zin of WAC-M, a member of the Myanmar NOC, the workshop included Yasmin Ullah of RMCN and two members of the Alliance who highlighted the severity of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) against women and girls from different ethnic communities as well as the LGBTQIA+ community.

Myanmar Side Events

Throughout the ACSC/APF, the Myanmar NOC hosted the Burma/Myanmar Revolution Corner – a side event with photo exhibitions and film screening about the situation of internally displaced persons and airstrikes, and handicrafts by the Spring Revolution. RMCN also hosted an artwork and history exhibition to share Rohingya stories and culture. The Alliance Against CRSV–Myanmar further organized an exhibition and photo booth in support of CRSV survivors of Myanmar, where solidarity photos were collected for the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence campaign later this year. All side events received tremendous support and solidarity from the ACSC/APF participants.

Reflections and aspirations of the Myanmar NOC

The Myanmar NOC and partner organizations and network would like to extend our sincerest gratitude to the people and the Government of Timor-Leste for their wholehearted and overwhelming support for and solidarity with Myanmar people and our revolution. The liberation, freedom, and democracy that the people of Timor-Leste have as an independent sovereign nation is something Myanmar people are longing for, are fighting for, and are determined to achieve soon.

The Myanmar NOC and partner organizations and network would also like to sincerely thank the ACSC/APF 2024, the Timor-Leste National Organizing Committee for ACSC/APF, regional solidarity networks, and all participants for their steadfast support of the Myanmar people's revolution and aspirations for inclusive federal democracy and human rights for all.

The Myanmar NOC, with our platform of convening independent civil society organizations and networks, stand firm on non-discrimination and other human rights and democratic principles. As such, the Myanmar NOC will continue to do our part to ensure the ACSC/APF remains a people's space protected based on these principles.

Recommendations to ASEAN

Once again, ASEAN's complete silence on the Myanmar military junta's latest airstrikes over the past week in northern Shan State proves its utter failure to address the dire human rights and humanitarian crisis in Myanmar. It is clear that ASEAN's approach, including the failed 5PC, is not working in any capacity. Thus, ASEAN must change course immediately.

We demand ASEAN to respond to and take concrete actions in accordance with the following recommendations at the upcoming ASEAN Summits:

1. ASEAN must end all engagement with the Myanmar military junta, including all business ties with the junta and any support for the military junta's sham election plan.
2. ASEAN must exclude all representatives of the military junta, both political and non-political, from its platforms at all levels.
3. ASEAN must engage with and provide political support to the Myanmar people's legitimate representatives and governance bodies, including the National Unity Government, the National Unity Consultative Council, and ethnic resistance organizations.
4. ASEAN must collaborate with locally led civil society and community-based organizations, including networks of Civil Disobedience Movement professionals, and people-led governance structures.
5. ASEAN and its Member States must end the involvement of the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (AHA Centre) and any channels involving the military junta or its proxies, and instead cooperate with revolutionary groups to facilitate humanitarian aid through border channels.
6. ASEAN must support Myanmar people's efforts for transitional justice process and coordinate with existing justice mechanisms to hold the Myanmar military accountable for genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. In particular, the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children must take immediate action to hold the military junta accountable for sexual and gender-based crimes.

For more information, please contact:

- Sampson Hlaing, Executive Director, Equality Myanmar; ed.eqmm@protonmail.com
- Yasmin Ullah, Executive Director, Rohingya Maiyafuinor Collaborative Network; u.m.yasmin8@gmail.com
- Khin Ohmar, Chairperson, Progressive Voice; infor@progressive-voice.org

Members of the Myanmar NOC:

1. Action Committee for Democracy Development (ACDD)
2. Association of Human Rights Defenders and Promoters (HRDP)
3. Blood Money Campaign (BMC)
4. Creative Home (CH)
5. Equality Myanmar (EQMM)
6. Generation Wave (GW)
7. Generations' Solidarity Coalition of Nationalities (GSCN)
8. Kyae Lak Myay
9. Network for Human Rights Documentation – Burma (ND-Burma)
10. Progressive Voice (PV)
11. Queers of Burma Alternative (QBA)
12. Rohingya Maiyafuinor Collaborative Network (RMCN)
13. Women Advocacy Coalition – Myanmar (WAC-M)
14. Women's League of Burma (WLB)
15. Yangon Medical Network (YMN)

Partner Organizations and Network:

- Alliance Against CRSV–Myanmar
- Burmese Women's Union (BWU)
- Justice and Equality Focus (JEF)
- Nyan Lynn Thit Analytica (NLTA)