

Protecting Humanity: Enforcing the ICRC Mandate in Myanmar

An Open Letter to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

Date: 11 August 2026

To the Leadership and Representatives of the ICRC,

We, the undersigned **155** Myanmar, regional and international civil society organizations, write to you today with a profound sense of urgency and deep frustration regarding the 3 August 2026 meeting between your resident representative, Arnaud de Baecque, and Myanmar's State Counsellor, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

While any contact with the State Counsellor, who is being unlawfully imprisoned by the illegal military junta in Myanmar, is a matter of intense public interest, the sequence of events surrounding this visit illustrates our greatest fear: the ICRC's mandate is being actively exploited by the military junta. The meeting demonstrated how humanitarian engagement in Myanmar is increasingly vulnerable to political instrumentalization by the military junta, thereby aiding them to advance their political aims, and in turn prolonging the suffering of the Myanmar people and undermining their expressed democratic will and aspirations.

The junta first publicized the meeting, releasing carefully curated photographs of handshakes and a birthday cake to project an illusion of normalcy and cooperation to the international community as it desperately seeks legitimacy for its violently imposed rule. Only after this propaganda was disseminated did the ICRC issue a brief, reactionary confirmation.

In your [statement](#), you noted that the visit followed "established guidelines" and permitted a "private conversation," and you added that, per your standard procedures, all observations regarding her condition are kept strictly confidential and shared only with detaining authorities. You disclosed nothing regarding her health, her whereabouts, or the reality of her captivity.

A short, sanitized announcement is NOT enough. When the ICRC allows the military junta to exploit its presence as a credible international humanitarian organization for propaganda to advance its political agenda while remaining silent about the realities of the situation, the ICRC is no longer practicing neutrality. The ICRC is instead complicit in the military junta's theater and blatant violations of international humanitarian law.

We anticipate the ICRC's defence. We know it will rest upon the Fundamental Principles of the ICRC Movement, particularly neutrality, independence and confidentiality. We recognize that confidential dialogue is intended to secure humanitarian access and protect those deprived of their liberty. However, humanitarian engagement also carries a responsibility to safeguard its integrity from political exploitation.

The political instrumentalization of this visit was entirely foreseeable. The military junta has, for more than five years, consistently exploited humanitarian and diplomatic engagement to extract legitimacy and project an image of normalcy. Given this well-established pattern, the ICRC had a responsibility to anticipate and actively prevent such exploitation. The public dissemination of carefully staged photographs and messaging by the junta was not an unforeseeable consequence—it was an entirely predictable outcome.

Against this backdrop, we must ask: was the ICRC protecting its humanitarian mandate, or merely accommodating the military junta's need in turn to protect the ICRC? An honest examination of your own doctrine reveals that your current approach is failing the very principles you claim to uphold:

- **Humanity is the Supreme Principle; Neutrality is a Tool:** The first principle of your movement is to [prevent](#) and alleviate human suffering. Neutrality is not an end in itself. It exists to advance the principle of humanity by enabling access to those in need. When neutrality is repeatedly exploited to generate political legitimacy for violators of international law without extracting corresponding humanitarian gains from them, the relationship between means and ends deserves urgent reassessment.
- **The Premise of Confidential Dialogue has been Destroyed:** The ICRC's doctrine of confidentiality [assumes](#) good faith, that private dialogue with authorities will lead to tangible improvements for detainees. After more than five years of widespread arbitrary detention, torture, incommunicado detention and denial of independent monitoring, what measurable humanitarian improvements has confidential dialogue achieved for twenty thousand political detainees in Myanmar?
- **The Mandate Allows for Public Denunciation:** The ICRC's own guidelines [state](#) that confidentiality is not absolute. You reserve the right to publicly denounce violations when they are major and repeated, when confidential dialogue has failed, and when it is in the best interest of the affected populations. The situation in Myanmar unequivocally meets all three criteria.

The Call for Enforcement

If the ICRC can allow the military junta to exploit the ICRC's presence to parade Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in front of cameras in a deliberate staged show to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the world while over [twenty thousand](#) unnamed, un-profiled political prisoners endure unimaginable torture in the junta's prisons, the ICRC can no longer claim its silence is serving the victims.

The people of Myanmar are not asking the ICRC to step outside its humanitarian mandate, nor are we asking the ICRC to abandon its core mission. However, we are demanding the strict enforcement of ICRC's own operational guidelines and of international human rights standards. The ICRC should not allow itself to be used as a prop by those who slaughter civilians.

In addition, we urgently call upon the ICRC to enforce a principled position and prioritize the lives of Myanmar's people. The ICRC must immediately trigger its internal guidelines to publicly denounce the military junta's repeated violations of IHL, openly recognizing that confidential dialogue has completely failed.

Furthermore, the ICRC must [insist](#) on regular, independent and unimpeded access to all political prisoners and places of detention, free from the presence or interference of junta personnel. Any engagement with detainees, including State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, must be conducted solely for humanitarian purposes and must not be exploited for political theatre or public relations. The ICRC should prioritize facilitating meaningful family contact, including with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's son, Kim Aris, in accordance with its humanitarian mandate, while refusing participation in any military junta-staged photo opportunities or engagements that manufacture legitimacy for the junta.

History will not judge the ICRC by how strictly it adhered to its bylaws in a vacuum, but by whether it had the courage to recognize when those bylaws were being exploited and manipulated by the military junta. We urge the ICRC to reassess its purpose and strategy, to demand true,

unmanipulated access to all political prisoners, and to stop allowing its confidentiality to be extracted for the junta's legitimacy.

State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is the legitimate leader of Myanmar and continues to be recognized as such by the United Nations (UN). For the ICRC to allow itself to be used by the military junta for its political gain in response to ASEAN and world leaders demanding direct access to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the ICRC is participating in the exploitation of the democratically elected leader of the Myanmar people. This is entirely unacceptable. Human suffering in Myanmar is not a confidential matter. ICRC's response to it should not be either.

The people of Myanmar do not question the importance of humanitarian engagement. We question whether humanitarian engagement can continue to fulfil its purpose when it is exploited and manipulated to legitimize those responsible for widespread violations of international humanitarian law. The credibility of the ICRC depends not only on preserving access, but also on ensuring that such access does not come at the expense of the very people it pledges to protect.

The people of Myanmar deserve an answer: How will the ICRC hold itself accountable to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the people of Myanmar? What safeguards will the ICRC put in place to ensure that future humanitarian engagement cannot again be exploited as political propaganda by the illegal criminal junta?

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Signed by 155 civil society organizations, including 2 organizations that have chosen not to disclose their names:

1. 5/ Lapantang Strike Column
2. 5/ of Zaya State Strike Committee
3. A3Y (Area 3 Youths)
4. Action Committee for Democracy Development (ACDD)
5. All Arakan Students' & Youths' Congress (AASYC)
6. ALTSEAN-Burma
7. Anti-Junta Alliance Yangon – AJAY
8. Anti-junta Forces Coordination Committee - Mandalay (AFCC - Mandalay)
9. Anyar Pyit Taing Htaung Lay Myar Strike Committee
10. Arakan Youth Peace Network
11. Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)
12. Association of Human Rights Defenders and Promoters (HRDP)
13. Association of Spring Rainbow (ASR)
14. Athan – Freedom of Expression Activist Organization
15. Aung San Suu Kyi Park Norway
16. Ayadaw Strike Committee

17. Ayeyarwaddy West Development Organisation (AWDO), Magway
18. Ayeyarwaddy West Development Organisation (AWDO), Nagphe
19. Blood Money Campaign (BMC)
20. Board of Education Kyaukpadaung
21. Budalin Strike Force
22. Burmese Atheists
23. Burmese Women's Union (BWU)
24. Campaign for a New Myanmar
25. CDM Medical Network (CDMMN)
26. Center for Action Points (CAP)
27. Chin Community in Norway
28. Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO)
29. Chindwin Riverside Villages Strike Committee
30. Civil Information Network (CIN)
31. Creative Home (CH)
32. CRPH Support Group, Norway and members organizations
33. Dagon University Student's Union (DUSU)
34. Defend Myanmar Democracy (DMD)
35. Democratic Party for a New Society, Norway
36. Doh Atu – Ensemble pour le Myanmar
37. Educational Initiatives Myanmar
38. Equality Myanmar (EQMM)
39. Ethnic Youth General Strike Committee (Mandalay)
40. Federal Myanmar Tourism Committee
41. Federal Myanmar Tourism Union
42. Federation of Basic Education Worker Unions (FBEWU)
43. Free Burma Campaign (South Africa) (FBC(SA))
44. General Strike Collaboration Committee (GSCC)
45. General Strike Coordination Body – GSCB
46. Generation Wave (GW)
47. Hpakant Hmawlae Strike Force
48. Human Rights Educators' Network (HREN)
49. Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM)
50. India for Myanmar
51. Info Birmanie
52. International Campaign for the Rohingya
53. Justice & Equality Focus (JEF)
54. Justice For Myanmar (JFM)
55. K'cho Ethnic Association (Europe)
56. Kachin Association Norway
57. Kachin Human Rights Watch (KHRW)
58. Kachin Women's Association Thailand (KWAT)
59. Kalay Township People's Strike Steering Committee - KPSSC
60. Kani Township Strike Steering Committee
61. Kantbalu Township Strike Force

62. Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)
63. Karen Peace Support Network (KPSN)
64. Karen Women's Organization (KWO)
65. Karen Youth Organization – KYO
66. Karenni Human Rights Group (KnHRG)
67. Karenni National Women's Organization (KNWO)
68. Keng Tung Youth
69. Kyae Lak Myay
70. Kyauktada Strike Committee (KSC)
71. Latpadaung Anti-coup Strike Force
72. Latpadaung Region Strike Committee
73. LGBT Alliance Myanmar
74. Magway People's Revolution Committee
75. Magway Region Human Rights Network
76. Mandalay Medical Family (MFM)
77. Mandalay Regional Youth Association – Revolution Core Group (MRYA - RCG)
78. Mandalay Strike Force (MSF)
79. MayMyo Strike Force
80. Metta Campaign Mandalay
81. MilkTeaAlliance Calendar Team
82. Monywa People's Strike Steering Committee
83. Monywa-Amyint Road Strike Committee
84. Myanmar Accountability Project (MAP)
85. Myanmar Catholic Community In Norway
86. Myanmar Community in Norway
87. Myanmar Hindu Union
88. Myanmar Labour Alliance (MLA)
89. Myanmar People Alliance (Shan State)
90. Myanmar Women Peace and Security (M-WPS)
91. Myaung People Strike Steering Committee
92. MyaYar Knowledge Tree
93. Myingyan Civilian Movement Committee
94. Network for Human Rights Documentation-Burma (ND-Burma)
95. New Myanmar Foundation
96. New Rehmonnya Federated Force – NRFF
97. NLD Organization Committee (International) Norway
98. No Business With Genocide
99. Nonviolence International
100. Norway Matu Community
101. Norway Rvwang Community
102. OCTOPUS (Youth Organization)
103. Pakokku Youth Development Council (PYDC)
104. Pale People's Strike Steering Committee
105. People Movement Platform Myanmar
106. Progressive Voice (PV)

107. Queers of Burma Alternative (QBA)
108. Rohingya Community in Norway
109. Rohingya Maìyafuìnor Collaborative Network (RMCN)
110. RW Welfare society (RWWS)
111. Sagaing Forum Federation
112. SEA Junction
113. Shan MATA
114. Shwebo Strike Force
115. Sisters 2 Sisters
116. Sitt Nyein Pann Foundation (SNPF)
117. Southern Initiative (SI)
118. Southern Youth Development Organization
119. Spring Friends
120. Synergy – Social Harmony Organization
121. Thint Myat Lo Thu Myar Organization
122. University of Medicine Mandalay Student Union Revolutionary Front – UMMSURF
123. University Students' Unions Alumni Force
124. US Campaign for Burma
125. Volunteers in Myanmar
126. Wetlet Strike Committee
127. White Coat Society Yangon (WCSY)
128. Women Advocacy Coalition - Myanmar (WAC-M)
129. Women Alliance Burma (WAB)
130. Women Lead Resource Center
131. Women's League of Burma (WLB)
132. Women's Organization of Political Prisoners (WOPP)
133. Women's Peace Network
134. Yadanabon University Students' Union (YDNBUSU)
135. Yain Nweh Par (Rainbow Win The Storm - RIS)
136. Yangon Deaf Group
137. Yinmarbin-Sarlingyi All Villages People Strike Leading Committee
138. Youth Empowerment
139. Youth for Democratization of Myanmar (UDM)
140. Youth Resources Strike Committee - Chaung U Township
141. Zomi Christian Fellowship of Norway
142. Zomi Community Norway
143. ကမ်းလက်ကူ
144. ဂန့်ဂေါဖွံ့ဖြိုးတိုးတက်ရေးအဖွဲ့
145. တူမီးစာစဉ်အဖွဲ့
146. ပြည်သူ့သပိတ်အင်အားစု
147. ပွင့်ဖြူဖွံ့ဖြိုးတိုးတက်ရေးအဖွဲ့
148. ဖားကန့်မှော်လှည့်သပိတ်

149. မင်းဘူးတောင်သူများအစုအဖွဲ့။
150. မင်းလှတောင်သူများအစုအဖွဲ့။
151. မလိအင်မိုင်ဇွပ် အမျိုးသမီးအဖွဲ့
152. ရှမ်းမြောက် လီဆူအမျိုးသမီးများအဖွဲ့
153. သမိုင်းသယ်ဆောင်သူများ