

Opinion – Myanmar Needs Actions, Not Words

Written by Khaing Sandi Win Min

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KHAING SANDI WIN MIN, APR 27 2021

The people of Myanmar urgently need the international community's help to save Myanmar from the crimes against humanity being committed by its military and security forces. International condemnation of the military coup since 1st February 2021 and its consequent inhumane acts and atrocities has not prevented the military from murdering the people at will. Myanmar immediately requires the strongest possible actions from the United Nations (UN), the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and the international community, to extend protection and humanitarian assistances to the people in need by all means and to end military atrocities.

In particular, using the international norm of Protection of Civilians (POC) or upholding the pillar III of Responsibility to Protect (R2P), it is now time for the UN and UNSC to intervene and protect the Myanmar people from violence and atrocities. The state's military and security forces are inhumanely killing and torturing its own people, and will likely do so until they are unopposed. In this light, the international community and other states with influence should take cooperative and coordinated efforts to support the UN and UNSC to take immediate and concrete actions for Myanmar.

Citing baseless claims of voter fraud, the military group conducted a coup and detained the democratically-elected state leaders on 1st February 2021 on the eve of convening a new parliament with MPs elected freely and fairly in November 2020. Anti-coup demonstrations initially emerged in the form of a Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) led by medical doctors in the government service and other civil servants, paralysing government functions. In parallel, people from all walks of life and from all generations participated in nationwide peaceful protests, risking their lives.

The military took brutal actions against the protestors, using tear gas bombs, rubber bullets, snipers and live ammunition. As the protests against the coup linger on in various innovative ways, the military has intensified its uses of lethal weapons against the protestors. In many cases, there is evidence of security forces utilizing battlefield weaponry such as Rocket Propelled Grenades (RPGs) and hand grenades to massacre the protestors.

Myanmar military and security forces have committed countless atrocities not only against the peaceful protestors, but also against those living peacefully in their residences. Hundreds of people have been killed, and thousands have been inhumanely tortured and arbitrarily arrested. Having abandoned their constitutional duty to protect the people, the military has been indiscriminately shooting people at will in the streets, raiding residential neighbourhoods at night, looting private properties, detaining those who stand against military, torturing during detention, and returning the dead bodies with bruises and injuries to terrorize families. Altogether, the military and security forces have killed more than 730 people, and arrested, charged and sentenced more than 3300 people. The death toll is increasing daily.

Children are losing their parents. Fathers and mothers will never see their children again. Women are waiting for husbands who may never return home. Families are facing horrible fatalities. Countless people are being traumatized by inhumane military actions. The people, including the country's youth, are on the street to protest and fight for democracy, justice and freedom, though they are defenceless, helpless, and hopeless.

For the time being, the people of Myanmar are desperately hoping for help from the international community to immediately end the military dictatorship and its atrocities. The international response has so far come in the form of

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targeted sanctions from the European Council (EC) and the United States (US), approximately 50 days after the coup. Furthermore, other states – United Kingdom (UK), US, Japan, Switzerland – have imposed targeted sanctions on the military officials, military-controlled businesses, military-linked companies, bilateral trade agreement, and technological aids.

In response to the bloodiest and deadliest events on the Myanmar Armed Forces Day on 27 March 2021, the military received international condemnation. This consisted of messages from the UN Secretary General, and UN Country Teams, as well as the statement of condemnation by the UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide and the UN High Commissioner and the joint statement from the defense Ministers from 12 countries. The subsequent repression of the military and security forces against the Myanmar people has been responded with the additional sanctions of European Union (EU) and the U.S.

The ASEAN Leaders' meeting, which was recently held on 24 April 2021, has reached to a consensus on five points – “ending violence, a constructive dialog among all parties, a special ASEAN envoy to facilitate the dialog, acceptance of aid and a visit by the envoy to Myanmar”, yet it is inadequate to halt the military atrocities and violence against the people of Myanmar.

Despite the targeted sanctions and international condemnation, the security forces are continuing to perpetrate inhumane and vicious acts against the people of Myanmar. People are still being killed, tortured and detained. The worse the situation becomes, the higher the expectation of the people of Myanmar for the UN, the international community, and the influential states to intervene to save Myanmar. Helpless and defenceless protesters in Myanmar have cried out for help on the social media, including Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, despite the mobile internet blackout in the country.

Due to the ongoing devastating and disheartening situations in Myanmar, the time is now for the UN and the UNSC to take the strongest actions, in particular to apply the mandate of Protection of Civilians (POC) to deploy the peacekeeping missions and military troops, or to uphold the pillar III of Responsibility to Protect (R2P) to take ‘timely and decisive’ collective actions by the UNSC, or to use any possible actions by all means.

As the Myanmar military has abandoned its duty and responsibility to protect its own people, and is instead inhumanely killing, attacking and torturing civilians, the international community has the moral duty to step in and go beyond statements of condemnation and sanctions. On behalf of the people of Myanmar, we urge the UN, the UNSC, the international community and the other states with influence to take strongest actions now for the lives of the people of Myanmar, through coordinated and collective efforts. Myanmar needs actions, not words.

About the author:

Khaing Sandi Win Min is the First Secretary at Myanmar Permanent Mission in Geneva. Following the Military coup in Myanmar, she joined the Civil Disobedience Movement to defy the military coup and refuse to represent the military group at the international level. She holds a Master's of International Relations and Master's of Diplomacy from the Australian National University.