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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by Human Rights Now, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[29 May 2023]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



Human Rights Now Condemns the Violations in Myanmar Since the Junta Extended its Illegal Rule in February

Human Rights Now (HRN) continues to condemn the systematic human rights abuses and violence perpetrated by the Myanmar junta since its coup in February 2021, including since it extended its rule last February, as well as by the Tatmadaw, Myanmar's military, in its continuing airstrikes, raids of villages and complete disregard for human life. We also express deep concern over Myanmar's ongoing humanitarian crisis. We call on states and businesses to end any dealings that may support the junta or Tatmadaw and on the junta to end the state violence, restore the democratically elected government, and hold perpetrators of human rights violations accountable.

I. Junta Violations

In February 2023 Myanmar's junta extended its illegal rule for an additional six months with devastating consequences that demonstrate the human costs resulting from continuing military control.[1] Since the extension an additional 641 people, including pro-democracy activists and civilians, have been killed through crackdowns, with a total of over 3,580 people since the coup, and another 5,138 people have been arrested since February 2023, with a total of over 22,730 since the coup. In March the junta officially dissolved dozens of opposition parties, including Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy.[2] Furthermore, since the coup, there have been at least 156 people sentenced to death.[3]

II. Military Violations

The widespread violence by Myanmar's military continues to escalate with the Tatmadaw's relentless campaign of airstrikes being particularly concerning. In April 2023 the Tatmadaw bombed a crowd in the Sagaing Region killing at least 100 people, including 30 children and a later strike targeting people collecting the dead, making it the deadliest attack since the beginning of the coup.[4] The military confirmed the village was targeted because it was holding an opening ceremony for its local volunteer defense force's office, a symbolic strike without military purpose, part of a pattern of symbolic airstrikes that have destroyed schools, clinics, and entire villages.[5] In May 2023, the Tatmadaw also bombed a Ye-U township school of 300 students in the resistance stronghold of Sagaing.[6]

In March 2023 the military killed at least 22 civilians, including three monks, who took refuge inside a monastery from troops shelling Nan Naint village.[7] On 10 May 2023, fighting broke out between military forces and a People's Defence Force coalition in Htantabin Township, incinerating 18 people, including at least five children.[8] After the attacks, military forces raided nearby Nyaung Pin Thar village and tortured anyone they found according to residents.[9] Additionally, around 25,000 civilians were forced to flee Tatmadaw raids in the Sagaing and Magway Regions amidst the heavy flooding from Cyclone Mocha which hit Myanmar on May 14, exacerbating an already dire humanitarian crisis.[11] Finally, Human Rights Now (HRN) denounces the illegal targeting of hospitals and other civilian healthcare centers by the Tatmadaw, including the razing of a Japanese-funded hospital at Magyi Kan village on 18 April 2023.[11]

III. Humanitarian Crisis

Over 1.8 million people remain internally displaced within Myanmar as a result of the junta's violence.[12] The situation is worsened by the lack of support for those displaced. In February 2023 the United Nations cut food rations for Rohingya refugees by 17% amid dwindling international donations. Additionally, general aid continues to dwindle; the aid sought by the UN is only 29% funded.[13] Furthermore, in March 2023 thousands of people were left without shelter after a fire broke out in a crowded Rohingya refugee camp in southeastern Bangladesh.[14] The humanitarian crisis has also been exacerbated by Cyclone Mocha which hit Myanmar and Bangladesh in May 2023. Several people died and hundreds

of thousands of Rohingya refugees were left homeless or stranded as strong winds and rain tore through camps along Bangladesh's coastline.[15]

IV. Global Response

A. International Community

It has been reported that Chinese and Russian entities have sent more than US\$660 million in weaponry and arms-related equipment to Myanmar's military since the coup, along with US\$400 million in arms-related trade from other states, despite virtually certain knowledge of their likely use for attacks on civilians.[16]

Despite the good intentions of international officials entering dialog with junta leadership aimed towards reducing the level of violence in Myanmar, including the Track 1.5 dialogues by government officials from Thailand and other regional states[17] and recent discussions between former UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and junta leadership,[18] Human Rights Now (HRN) warns against engagements with the illegitimate junta regime, which has attempted to rely on international recognition of its government in order to provide it with a veneer of legitimacy, while continuing to commit massive human rights and humanitarian violations and obstruct the holding of democratic elections.[19]

Human Rights Now (HRN) commends the countries hosting refugees from Myanmar and offering them shelter and support. However, these refugees are afforded few legal protections in many of these countries and thus face the risk of unequal treatment.[20] Higher income countries in particular have failed to offer adequate support in terms of resettlement quotas and contributions to relief programs. The 2023 Myanmar Humanitarian Response Plan was only 2% funded by the end of February (in 2022 it was only 35% funded).[21]

B. Japan

Japan has not conducted thorough due diligence in assessing the human rights impacts of its Official Development Assistance (ODA) projects in Myanmar. For example it was reported that Japan's payment to the Myanmar Economic Corporation (MEC) for the Bago Bridge Project resulted in funding to the military.[22] Human Rights Now (HRN) joins the Special Rapporteur, following his recent visit to Japan, in urging the Japanese government to end projects that have an adverse impact on human rights, or take steps to mitigate such impacts to the greatest extent possible, and to use its influence to promote an end to state violence and the restoration of democracy in Myanmar.[23]

V. Recommendations

Human Rights Now (HRN) strongly condemns the widespread violence against civilians by Myanmar's junta and armed forces, as well as the torture, arbitrary arrests, and persecution of civil society, protestors, and political actors, and we make the following recommendations.

- We call on the junta to end the arbitrary arrests, death sentences, and torture of protesters and members of the political opposition and release those unjustly detained, as well as to restore the democratically elected government.
- We urge the international community to impose targeted economic sanctions against the junta, implement an arms embargo and end existing embargo loopholes, and greatly increase contributions to humanitarian efforts in Myanmar. We also urge support for the resettlement of displaced people, including Rohingya refugees only when conditions are guaranteed safe and their rights respected.
- We urge states to require transnational businesses to conduct rigorous due diligence in assessing the human rights impacts of their projects and end any business in Myanmar that could support the junta or armed forces in Myanmar.
- We finally request the Council and its members to support a resolution and take effective measures that facilitate accountability for violence against civilians and other violations by the junta and military.

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