



Democracy in Myanmar will rise again

SocDem Asia Statement on the year anniversary of the military coup in Myanmar

A year has already passed since February 1, 2021 when the military establishment of Myanmar staged a coup to overthrow the legitimately elected government and members of parliament and plunged the country once again into military dictatorship. As a result of its takeover, mass arrests and human rights violations have again been perpetrated against its civilian population. An estimated 1,500 individuals have been killed in violent crackdowns perpetrated by the military junta. Thousands more continue to languish in jail. These along with the filing of spurious charges against leaders and activists of opposition organizations and political parties are intended to weaken the popular resistance against the regime and pacify the population. However, these measures are creating the opposite effect.

A year after the coup, the military junta continues to face a strong and determined resistance from the people. Civil disobedience to the junta started almost immediately after the coup and continues in many cities and towns across the country. So much so that the junta has threatened the arrest or imprisonment of civilians who participate in such acts of disobedience such as the banging of pots and pans and conducting massive silent protests. The National Unity Government (NUG), composed of the country's political parties, ethnic minority groups, politicians and civil society activists, and its call to resist the regime is gaining more and more supporters.

Internationally, civil society organizations have joined the clamor for the restoration of democracy and have succeeded in pressuring international and regional formations against providing legitimacy to the military junta. Last October, the Association of South East Asian Nations disinvited military junta leader Gen. Min Aung Hlaing from attending a regional summit. In the same month, The European Parliament passed a resolution to recognize the National Unity Government as the legitimate government of Myanmar to the detriment of the military junta. Solidarity from international groups have also succeeded in preventing the military junta to seat its representative as ambassador to the United Nations. Such efforts together with existing sanctions imposed on the leaders of the military junta are taking their toll on the regime.

As popular resistance to the junta continues, the people must also contend with a raging pandemic and economic crisis. The price of consumer goods and basic commodities such as food and fuel have skyrocketed while the country's currency plummets in value. Millions have already lost their jobs and are facing food insecurity and poverty. The ongoing fighting between the military junta and opposition groups has also led to the displacement of thousands. The military cannot be relied upon to provide

relief and assistance to the citizens of the country primarily because it is the main reason for such crises and because it continues to funnel the country's resources to maintain its grip on power.

Clearly, the military junta can no longer expect passivity on the part of the civilian population. Large swaths of the country continue with open disobedience while many areas held by ethnic armed groups are repelling the military junta's forces. The democratic (albeit limited) experiment from 2012-2021 has created opportunities for many citizens and created substantial economic growth. Its abrupt end at the hands of the military junta has shown the peoples of Myanmar a brief glimmer of hope that democratic and civilian rule is the only path towards economic prosperity and lasting peace. The coup last year has awoken the courage among the civilian population to resist the military junta.

With the mounting popular resistance in the cities, armed struggle in the rural areas and greater international pressure, the military junta has only two options: to order its forces to return to barracks, pursue a negotiated settlement with the NUG and all other opposition groups or continue with its violent campaign of repression. Either way, the only logical conclusion to this conflict is the end of its rule and the restoration of civilian rule and democratic government.

In this regard, we reiterate our call for the release of all political prisoners and the immediate end of the military junta's attack on civilian populations. We also urge the international community, to increase its pressure on the junta and ensure that the NUG including other pro-democracy groups are given representation in all future negotiations with the junta for a peaceful settlement of the conflict. In relation to this, we urge the ASEAN to continue and expand its earlier stance to prevent Gen. Min Aung Hlaing from attending its summits and high-level meetings by also including other leaders of the military junta under such prohibition. The international community should not turn a blind eye towards Myanmar and must extend all humanitarian assistance to those affected. The ongoing conflict and crisis in the country, if allowed to persist, risks creating a refugee crisis in the region. As such, the international community, especially governments, must ensure that refugees and their rights are protected and not subjected to deportation.

We also urge fellow progressives and social democrats to lend their voice in opposing the continued attacks of the military junta on the civilian population and call for the restoration of civilian rule. The military junta's rule serves as an inspiration to like minded autocrats in the region and a threat to our own movements for democracy. ###