

Myanmar: New Solidarities

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Myanmar's Spring Revolution is an inflection point in the country's history. The old forces of domination and repression are still present, but it is providing new fissures, solidarities and potential for progressive change.

The junta's military continues to [wage](#) war against the people of Myanmar, as seen in particular in Karenni and southern Shan State in recent weeks, maintaining the decades-long violent persecution that ethnic people in particular have always faced. Yet the turmoil and chaos that the attempted coup has plunged the country into, has created new opportunities for progressive change, reflected in the National Unity Government's [statement](#) that pledges to repeal the 1982 Citizenship Law and work together with the Rohingya for a new Myanmar.

Following on from the previous week, Karenni State has seen some of the worst violence of the junta's ongoing terror campaign so far. The junta [used](#) airstrikes and heavy artillery in the village of Kone Thar, Demoso Township in Karenni State on 31 May, to bombard locally formed people's defence forces. In Karenni State and neighboring Shan State, over 100,000 [people](#) have been displaced, and at least 23 civilians killed. Meanwhile, in Chin State and Sagaing Region, ongoing [attacks](#) against local people's defence forces continue, as the military struggles to maintain any semblance of control. In Mindat, which was under siege just a few weeks ago, over 10,000 people are still [displaced](#), sheltering in nearby forests and in desperate need of humanitarian aid as junta soldiers loot the town in revenge for Mindat's steely defiance in rejecting the junta. Additionally, reports of a massacre have emerged in Kyonpyaw Village in the Irrawaddy Delta, with an unknown number of fatalities so far, during a violent search for weapons by the junta's soldiers.

The military's unlawful power grab and indiscriminate brutal violence, such as the Kyonpyaw massacre, means that, despite the best [efforts](#) of ASEAN to bestow legitimacy on the military junta, the majority of Myanmar people see the National Unity Government (NUG) as the true, legitimate government of the country. Thus, its policy statement released on 3 June regarding the Rohingya represents an important move forward. The [statement](#) recognizes that horrific violence took place against the Rohingya, pledges to abolish two tools of exclusion – the 1982 Citizenship Law and the National Verification Cards (NVCs) – and pledges to seek justice and accountability, potentially at the International Criminal Court (ICC), and to enable a process of return for the hundreds of thousands who fled the genocidal violence committed by the Myanmar military in 2016 and especially in 2017. Many of these Rohingya are living in precarious conditions in Bangladesh, with some [forced](#) to move to the island of Bhasan Char without proper assessment of its suitability in terms of safety from adverse weather conditions. The Citizenship Law, NVCs, restrictions around freedom of movement, marriages, births and access to healthcare and education within Rakhine State, are all part of broader, long term structures of discrimination that need to be dismantled. The statement is not perfect, as it could recognize more explicitly that what happened to the Rohingya and what is still happening, is a genocide, and make a stronger commitment to the cases at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and ICC. Yet it is an important first step toward bringing the Rohingya home.

This is a far cry from the previous policy of the National League for Democracy (NLD), which actively defended the military's violence at the ICJ in the Hague in December 2019. Even mentioning and referring to the name Rohingya by the NUG, thus recognizing their identity as 'Rohingya,' is a step forward, albeit from a low starting point. It must be recognized, however, that this decision was not made in a vacuum. It is a result of tireless work of human rights defenders and civil society, both from the Rohingya community and others from Myanmar, who have always pushed the NLD to take the right stand on the Rohingya issue. Facing abuse and threats from many sectors of society, whether ultranationalist monks backed by the military or even other civil society actors with extreme views, the steadfast determination to stick to principles of human rights and equality paved the way for this statement by the NUG. While this was the foundation, it is the conditions of revolution that have provided the opportunity to take a step forward. On social media and on the streets, there has been greater solidarity and recognition of the Rohingya, and this is a hugely encouraging sign going forward. Dangers remain of course, and the fact that a [statement](#) sent to the NUG by 80 civil society organizations urging them to abolish the 1982 Citizenship Law, had to remain anonymous, reflects the toxicity that still lingers when working towards protection of Rohingya rights and equality within Myanmar.

Myanmar's Spring Revolution is an inflection point in the country's history. The old forces of domination and repression are still present, but it is providing new fissures, solidarities and potential for progressive change. The brutal military offensives, including the use of heavy artillery against ethnic minorities populations such as in Karenni, Kachin, Karen, Shan, and Chin States are not new. The description of these attacks and the civilian toll could be applied to any year of the NLD-government, the Thein Sein Government, or the darkest days of Than Shwe's brutal regime. Yet moments like the Spring Revolution force open cracks in the repressive machinery of the Bamar-dominated State. The NUG's statement that recognizes the Rohingya and pledges to work for justice and accountability is one such opening. The solidarity on the streets and in virtual spaces is another. These are rare moments in any country's history, and bring necessary momentum to the revolutionary forces of change. They must be seized upon, supported, and taken even further, not squared away as issues to be dealt with later. Thus, while the NUG may have its flaws and shortfalls, it is operating in a challenging political environment and facing military attacks. However, it is also a vehicle in which progressive forces can affect meaningful change. Recognizing the NUG, while pushing them to leave behind and dissociate from hierarchy, icon worship and elitist authoritarianism dressed as democracy that the NLD party operated under, and using it as a tool to build a new future based on inclusivity, equality and human rights, and the practice of democracy, at every level of society, is a real possibility in these tumultuous times.

*One year following the 1988 pro-democracy uprising, the former military junta changed the country's name from Burma to Myanmar overnight. Progressive Voice uses the term 'Myanmar' in acknowledgement that most people of the country use this term. However, the deception of inclusiveness and the historical process of coercion by the former State Peace and Development Council military regime into usage of 'Myanmar' rather than 'Burma' without the consent of the people is recognized and not forgotten. Thus, under certain circumstances, 'Burma' is used.

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