

Myanmar: ASEAN, The Junta, And 'Non-Political Representation'

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"While giving the junta a platform is immoral and an insult to the legitimate democratic government of Myanmar - the National Unity Government (NUG) - and the brave people fighting against tyranny in Myanmar's Spring Revolution, it is also a wrong political choice and goes against democratic principles."

In a surprise [move](#), the Foreign Ministers at the ASEAN Ministerial meeting agreed to invite a 'non-political' representative of Myanmar to the upcoming ASEAN summit rather than agree to invite a 'political representative' of the junta. This is the first time that ASEAN as a bloc has demonstrated even an inclination towards diplomatic sanction against the Myanmar junta. While this statement has been broadly welcomed by stakeholders in and outside Myanmar, it is imperative that the 'non-political representative' of Myanmar does not represent the junta, otherwise, any semblance that ASEAN is willing to take substantive action, would be lacking sincerity.

In a [statement](#) released after the emergency meeting of ASEAN foreign ministers held on 15 October, they announced that "there was no consensus reached for a political representative from Myanmar to attend the 38th and 39th ASEAN Summits and Related Summits in October 2021." Lack of progress on the five-point consensus agreed between ASEAN and the Myanmar junta in April, and unwillingness of the Myanmar junta to allow ASEAN's Special Envoy for Myanmar, Brunei's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Erywan Yusof, to meet with detained State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, have catalyzed this decision. The junta has [responded](#) that it is "extremely disappointed" and "strongly objected" to this decision, which is not surprising given how it is desperate to claim any sort of legitimacy as the government of Myanmar - a legitimacy that it severely lacks. The announcement follows an open [letter](#) from 52 civil society organizations to the bloc, calling on "ASEAN leaders to deny the head of the Myanmar military junta a seat at the table and display to him that his callous disregard for the people, and his regional neighbors, does not come free of consequences," while also stating that "Myanmar's junta has failed to respect this [ASEAN Five-Point] consensus on every single count."

The reference to the Five-Point [Consensus](#), presented as a diplomatic achievement by ASEAN when it was reached in April, and the junta's failure to live up to the expectations of such an agreement, should not be surprising. Another agreement that was signed with great fanfare, constantly referred to in years since, and has been shown time and time again as something that the Myanmar military did not agree to in good faith, is the 2015 nationwide ceasefire agreement (NCA). [Signed](#) between the military, eight ethnic armed organizations (EAOs), and the military-backed government of President Thein Sein in October 2015, with many EAOs part of the drafting process but excluded from the final agreement, the NCA was trumpeted as a successful step in the peace process. Even before the attempted coup the military regularly [breached](#) its terms through building military infrastructure in and encroaching on Karen National Union territory, one of the biggest and politically significant EAOs. Furthermore, in a statement on the six year anniversary of the NCA, the KNU [expressed](#) that "It is with great regret that we see the military coup on 1 February 2021 has

breached all NCA's principles and stopped the NCA implementation, so that the military returns to dictatorship with the use of coercive force for solving what are political problems." It is ironic, that as the junta and the representatives of NCA signatories, most of whom are smaller organizations with little military standing, [commemorated](#) six years of a 'nationwide' 'ceasefire' 'agreement,' the Myanmar military is [amassing](#) troops and hardware in preparation for sustained military operations in Chin State and Sagaing and Magway Regions, areas that have seen some of the most organized, spirited and effective resistance against the military. The civilian population in these areas brace for violence, murder, destruction and devastation.

It should be clear that, as with the NCA, the Five-Point Consensus agreement that the junta agreed with ASEAN will not be upheld in good faith by the power-hungry junta. Thus, while it is welcome that the ASEAN has indicated that a political representative of the junta will not be invited at the upcoming summits, as a [statement](#) by Myanmar civil society organizations expresses, any representative of the junta, political or non-political must be rejected. Giving the junta legitimacy by allowing them space at international platforms and fora, is unfortunately not unprecedented. Examples include the UN Office for Drugs and Crime allowing a junta official, Lieutenant-General Than Hlaing, who is sanctioned by Canada, US, UK and the EU, to [participate](#) in their 64th session of the Commission on Narcotics Drugs in April. US Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, [participated](#) in a virtual meeting with ASEAN Ministers, including Myanmar in August.

While giving the junta a platform is immoral and an insult to the legitimate democratic government of Myanmar - the National Unity Government (NUG) - and the brave people fighting against tyranny in Myanmar's Spring Revolution, it is also a wrong political choice and goes against democratic principles. This is a coup that is failing, has zero legitimacy, either through the Constitution and law, and most importantly via the people of Myanmar themselves. The junta is not in control of the country, and their only claim to legitimacy is their ability to use brutal and arbitrary force. The NUG, as the democratically elected and legitimate government of Myanmar, should be taking its rightful place at the upcoming ASEAN summits, as well as all other international platforms and fora. The junta is losing on all fronts, and the only morally acceptable and politically astute choice for actors in the international community such as ASEAN is to reject their violence, support the people's revolution, and engage with their democratic representatives rather than an illegitimate and brutal military, that is nothing but a criminal organization.

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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