

Myanmar: Pride and Prejudice

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“After this revolution, I’m sure that citizens & the govt will accept LGBT people, as we have participated nationally in the revolution...I am sure the govt will consider LGBT people, & if not, we’ll fight for our rights.”

- Sue Sha Shinn Thant, LGBTQ activist

The International Day Against Homophobia Transphobia and Biphobia - 17 May - was [created](#) to bring attention to the violence and discrimination that LGBTQIA+ people face throughout the world. The LGBTQIA+ community in Myanmar has been a consistent, visible, and active component of the Spring Revolution. This community, as everywhere in the world, have always faced discrimination, but the particularly cruel and inhumane violence committed against them by junta soliders reflects their bravery to continue to take to the streets and resist.

After February 1, 2021, when coup leader Min Aung Hlaing attempted to take control of the country, the people resisted in mass protests, and present in these protests were the LGBTQIA+ community, [visible](#) with rainbow flags at the frontlines of demonstrations. In the heady early days of the revolution, before the junta resorted to brutal violence, people of all communities filled the streets, asserting their rights and their identity with pride. The LGBTQIA+ community have a prominent space in this revolution, with an intersectional solidarity being displayed between various minority communities that have often borne the brunt of discrimination and violence throughout society, and especially at the hands of the Myanmar military.

The space in the Spring Revolution is a result of the LGBTQIA+ community’s own struggle to [assert](#) their identity and rights, and the work of activists and organizations who have pushed back against exclusive, chauvinist norms, despite the persecution they face. It must be remembered that sex between men is still [illegal](#) in Myanmar under the colonial-era Penal Code, while the Police Act of 1945 is used to arrest transgender people. Discrimination at home, through societal and cultural norms goes hand-in-hand with discrimination in public. The tragic [case](#) of Ko Kyaw Zin Win, a university librarian who committed suicide after being forcibly outed and repeatedly bullied at his workplace and online in 2019 reflects the deep-rooted discrimination ingrained in society. The [response](#) of the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission, who deemed him to be “mentally weak” demonstrates how this discrimination is also part of what was supposed to be the government’s primary human rights body.

While there remains a huge amount of work to be done, there has been progress in acceptance of the LGBTQIA+ community, and the appointment of Aung Myo Min as the National Unity Government’s Minister of Human Rights as the first ever openly gay minister reflects the spirit of a revolution that is seeking to overturn not just military rule, but deep seeded structures of discrimination. However, while such space and progress in acceptance is recognized and celebrated, it must not be forgotten that the LGBTQIA+ community face the threat of inhumane violence, especially protesters who are arrested - many of whom are still detained - by the military junta. In

June 2021, the NUG [released](#) a report highlighting their situation, documented how 12 LGBTQIA+ people were shot dead in the first five months of the revolution, and also the particular forms of sexual harassment that transgender people experience in prison while being tortured. Arrested transgender people are [mocked](#), humiliated and sexually abused. They thus face an extra layer of discrimination not just as demonstrators, but as LGBTQIA+. A recent [campaign](#) by the LGBT Alliance Myanmar - "light behind bars" - is aimed at bringing attention to the sexual violence faced by prisoners, including LGBTQIA+ people, and for the International Committee for the Red Cross to pressure the junta to allow prison visits.

The Spring Revolution is more than simply getting rid of the military junta. It is about dismantling the chauvinistic, misogynistic and exclusionary ideology that underpins this violent institution. It is an ideology that translates into discrimination, persecution and violence against minorities of all kind, including the LGBTQIA+ community. The small amount of space carved out before the coup attempt, thanks to organizations, networks activists and individuals who defied cultural norms and risked their lives to celebrate the LGBTQIA+ community, was a small step forward. This is reflected in their visibility in the Spring Revolution, and despite the struggles they still face, their presence and acceptance by more sections of Myanmar society in the movement shows a future of tolerance and equality is possible. The LGBTQIA+ community is very much part of the Spring Revolution, and when the military is overthrown, their bravery and sacrifice must translate into a more prominent place in Myanmar society, where they don't have to fear being ostracized, bullied, or discriminated against, whether through outdated legislation or social sanctions. As LGBTQ activist & transwoman Sue Sha Shinn Thant [told](#) *Time* magazine in the early days of the revolution, before she was violently arrested, "After this revolution, I'm sure that citizens & the govt will accept LGBT people, as we have participated nationally in the revolution...I am sure the govt will consider LGBT people, & if not, we'll fight for our rights."

*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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