

Myanmar needs a ‘do no harm’ solidarity-based approach to humanitarian aid

Saturday 25 September 2021, by [Ten ethnic organizations in Myanmar](#) (Date first published: 7 September 2021).

[7 September 2021] Donors and international humanitarian organizations must ensure conflict sensitivity and employ a ‘do no harm’ solidarity-based approach to provision of humanitarian aid in Myanmar said 10 organizations. Aid must be sensitive to human rights protection and provided through cross-border channels, local humanitarian and medical networks, ethnic health and aid providers, community-based and civil society organizations, said the groups.

“It is not the moral mountaintop to profess ‘neutrality’ when there is nothing neutral about partnering with the military junta in providing aid. They are the root causes of the multiple crises currently facing Myanmar and the very perpetrators of grave crimes and drivers of the mass displacements,” said Nai Aue Mon of Human Rights Foundation of Monland. “What we need is a ‘do no harm’ approach to aid that is centered around local communities with the commitment, expertise, capacity and the successful track record of working tirelessly to address the problem.”

The groups jointly released a briefing paper “Nowhere to Run: Deepening Humanitarian Crisis in Myanmar” encapsulating the deepening humanitarian crisis in Myanmar over the past seven months following the illegal coup attempt in February. The briefing paper highlights key insights from ethnic community representatives on how humanitarian aid can be effectively distributed within the ethnic regions and through local actors.

Those interviewed for the briefing paper expressed difficulties in accessing funds due to strict donor regulations and called on donors to be flexible, fast track applications and remove bureaucratic barriers to accessing funds during this humanitarian emergency.

“Strict donor regulations make it extremely difficult for local community representatives to access emergency funds that could save the lives of the people of Myanmar,” said Saw Alex of Karen Peace Support Network. “We built local community structures that have supported local people for decades through civil war and previous dictatorships. Donors and INGOs must ensure conflict sensitivity and support existing local community structures that are driving solutions to the current humanitarian crisis.”

The briefing paper points to how the junta has continued to weaponize humanitarian aid to its advantage by withholding, restricting, or even destroying the delivery of aid and have instrumentalized assistance to further its own narrative as protector of the people. Sections of the paper focuses on the humanitarian situation of Kachin, Karen, Shan, Karenni, Chin, and Rakhine States, while touching on central and southern Myanmar as the devastating consequences of military’s campaign of terror including displacement, shortages of food, job losses, livelihood hardships, and lack of adequate healthcare to combat COVID-19 is felt nationwide.

“There is a lot of talk and expectation placed on ASEAN and the AHA Centre to lead the

humanitarian response, but they lack the independence and capacity to handle a humanitarian crisis of this scale,” said Khin Ohmar of Progressive Voice. “ASEAN alone cannot tackle the human rights and humanitarian crises that are unfolding in Myanmar. These crises have been created by the military junta and thus partnering or working with the junta will bring more harm to the Myanmar people. ASEAN must seek out a UN coordinated response that is centered on creating equal partnerships with local organizations, respecting their expertise, agency and legitimacy to serve their communities.”

To solve these multiple crises effectively and sustainably, AHA Centre, UN, donors and other international actors must engage meaningfully with the civil society organizations, community-based organizations and ethnic health and aid providers on the ground that are fully capable of providing to aid the communities they serve and strengthen these services through bottoms-up agency and decision-making, rather than relying on those who are the root cause of the humanitarian catastrophe, the groups said.

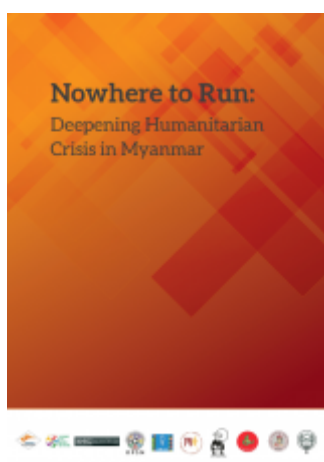
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Human Rights Foundation of Monland, Kachin Women’s Association Thailand, Karen Human Rights Group, Karen Peace Support Network, Karen Women’s Organization, Karenni Civil Society Network, Karenni National Women’s Organization, Pa-O Women’s Union, Progressive Voice and Ta’ang Women’s Organization.

• Progressive Voice :

<https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/2021/09/07/myanmar-needs-a-do-no-harm-solidarity-based-approach-to-humanitarian-aid/>

Nowhere to Run: Deepening Humanitarian Crisis in Myanmar



This briefing paper will provide an overview of the devastating humanitarian crisis in Myanmar, focusing on Kachin, Karen, Shan, Karenni, Chin, and Rakhine States, covering the nearly seven month period since the coup d'état attempt by the Myanmar military on 1 February, 2021. The attempted coup has severely compounded the existing humanitarian crises, straining the lives of vulnerable communities in ethnic regions, built on decades of civil war at the hands of the Myanmar

military and unremedied policies and structural barriers by previous governments allowing for the safe, dignified and voluntary return of internally displaced persons. The Myanmar military's fierce warmongering and persecution of those within the Spring Revolution has left over 3 million people food insecure, hundreds of thousands of people displaced and an economy in ruins.¹ The attempted coup has precipitated a near collapse of the banking system and has fueled the uncontrolled spread of the Delta variant of COVID-19, which the military has weaponized for its own gain.

The research methodology of this briefing paper is focused predominantly on desk research due to the rapidly changing humanitarian situation in Myanmar and challenging circumstances in conducting field research in the country due to security concerns per the ongoing violence by the Myanmar military. Limited and short-form interviews were conducted with those in secure locations, providing firsthand accounts of the unfolding humanitarian crisis from different regions of Myanmar, with specific insights into how humanitarian aid can be effectively distributed within the ethnic regions and with local actors. Due to security risks, as outlined in this paper, we were unable to cover all ethnic areas and access all potential interviewees. This briefing paper revisits ethnic areas discussed in the detailed joint report "There is No One Who Does Not Miss Home" published in 2019 by 15 Myanmar civil society organizations and reiterates and builds on the continuing calls to the international donor community to support local organizations, empower their agency and decision-making and for the provision of cross-border aid.

This briefing paper is predominately limited to ethnic regions, as these regions have suffered historically from decades of conflict, humanitarian crises and shortages of aid. At the same time, it should be stressed that many of the issues and themes discussed therein apply nationwide, including central and southern Myanmar, as the devastation in the wake of the coup is not limited to tightly drawn geographical boundaries. In aid of this, recommendations given at the end of the paper will predominantly focus on ethnic regions but can be applied beyond these regions. This briefing paper covers a period from 1 February, 2021 until the beginning of August 2021, encapsulating nearly seven months since the military junta attempted to unlawfully capture power by preventing the duly elected parliament from opening its first session since the November 2020 elections. A detailed list of recommendations accompanies the findings of this briefing paper, aimed at expediting the humanitarian response to the people in ethnic regions and beyond

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