

Statement Regarding The Issues Arising From The CSO Joint Statement, Presented To UN Special Envoy During The Meeting Between The SE And Myanmar CSOS

Thursday 24 February 2022, by [OHMAR Khin](#) (Date first published: 22 February 2022).

Thanks, Debbie [Debbie Stodhard of ALTSEAN-Burma], for facilitating this meeting at my request and I also thank the Special Envoy and the team for setting up this meeting.

Madam Special Envoy, I'd like to begin by saying that we appreciate this meeting and look forward to a frank and fruitful discussion and exchange for the interests of our country's people.

We trust that you have read our joint statement signed by 247 civil society organizations in response to your CNA interview. We have also followed your statement to the media following the interview. After carefully reviewing and reflecting, we want to still register our concerns outlined in the statement and stress further on these points.

First point is the **power-sharing** with the military. We are still concerned of this power-sharing negotiated settlement scenario that might be imposed on our people, as experienced in the past decade. The UN and international community have endorsed and supported the military-led political process of power sharing in the past and we are concerned that it will continue to do so under the current circumstances while the people's revolution has been working to dismantle the military and its impunity.

As outlined briefly in our statement, This past decade, power-sharing consisted of disproportionate power for the military that ensured their control over politics and governance and economy through the 2008 constitution, drafted by the military and the 2010 election that they orchestrated.

This past 11 years of power-sharing arrangement was merely the continuation of the military's ongoing project of consolidating its power. In fact, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and many politicians were played and deceived by the military along their game since 1988 with the sham promises of multi-party democracy. Every time when the NLD entered the elections and won, the military would manipulate and stage a coup.

In the meantime, the military continue to play this divide-and-rule tactic among those non-Bamar ethnic minority nationalities to suppress and weaken their revolutions for ethnic equality, self-determination as they defend their ancestral land, culture, and communities. While committing crimes against humanity and war crimes against ethnic communities.

When NLD won the 2015 elections, instead of recognizing ethnic nationalities as equal owners of the union and forming alliance to form a federal democracy, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and NLD acted not that different. The NLD supported the centralized control of governance structure that the military built and entrenched based on Buddhist Bamar majority, or we call it *Burmanization* project,

disregarding and undermining the ethnic communities' equal ownership and leadership in Myanmar. This created loss of confidence and trust in DASSK and NLD government among ethnic communities and some human rights groups.

On the other hand, the peace process didn't establish any credibility or dignity in the eyes of the people. The military continued to employ divide-and-rule tactic among the stakeholders. Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement was never nationwide, excluding some while co-opting and coercing the others. Many injustices and HRVs were committed by the military but these were pushed aside in the name of peace negotiations. Civil society critical of the peace process were branded as peace spoilers and sidelined while meaningful participation of the civil society in the process was blocked at every turn. Women participation in peace conferences was just an attempt at window dressing the failing negotiations, while our advocacy on military's ongoing use of rape as a weapon of war in conflict areas were not supported by the peace donor governments. Our efforts to hold the military to account was reframed as "disturbing the peace process". All these added up to more uneven leverage where the peace process, in which the military's one-sided peace agenda supported by the UN and donor governments, allowed the military to continue to remain above every other stakeholder to the point they were openly violating this so-called NCA, continuing to militarize and attack people in ethnic areas, with the NLD-government and EAOs unable to do anything to stop them.

While sharing limited power with the NLD, the military continued stealing the wealth of the people, especially from ethnic communities; they exploited natural resources, robbed lands, expanded their business networks to ensure their economic domination for years to come. They continued to line their pockets while committing war crimes and crimes against humanity in ethnic areas and genocide and crimes against humanity against the Rohingya.

But then with the NLD winning another even larger landslide election in 2020, the military went back to their true self - that is to take the power back from civilians through a coup. Only because people categorically rejected, resisted and do not allow them to take the control of the country, they are not able to succeed with their coup attempt as we are seeing today. The junta has no control over the ground not only in ethnic territories but also in Bamar-majority regions.

This people's revolution presents unprecedented opportunity for a peaceful Myanmar as the people themselves have come to identify their collective vision for a new Myanmar that is based on federal democracy that ensures decentralization and equal power-sharing. Let us be absolutely clear that this unprecedented movement with a new vision of Myanmar does not include the military in politics.

Therefore, we'd like for the UN Special Envoy and other UN mandate holders, UN agencies, funds, programs and entities, to support the Myanmar people and their efforts towards a future federal democratic Myanmar where the military is never again allowed to have power.

Second point I'd like to raise is "**commonalities**". I can understand this could be painful for any international peace experts to take in. But there are no "**commonalities**" between the junta and the people. Many Myanmar political actors also learned from their past power-sharing experiences that there are no "commonalities" with this military in Myanmar context. Not anymore.

People are not going back to status quo before February 2021. They are in revolution to topple the military once and for all, while setting out a political transformation process without the military in it. Within Tatmadaw, they have the doctrine teaching soldiers to hate people with Muslim faith, to hate DASSK and NLD, to hate democracy activists and student activists as enemy of the state. So, this is why our people are doing ideology revolution as they realized the Tatmadaw built a state within the state. This is why thousands of soldiers, military personnel and police are defecting - not

deserting. They are revolting against the Tatmadaw ideology. So, if anyone wants to see Myanmar achieve peace, they must support Myanmar people dismantle this military.

It is extremely crucial for the UN to understand that the current political crisis is not between NLD and the junta or between NUG and the junta, but it is the junta staging a war against the nation and committing violence and atrocities against the people. There are full of evidence of their violations of international HR and humanitarian law. They created this multidimensional crisis and thus they cannot partner to the solution.

We would like to request you to bring this message with you to New York to prevent another mistake by international policy makers risking our country's people's lives and future of young generations.

Especially as we have observed a likelihood of the UN and governments to convince political entities from Myanmar to get into negotiation with the junta for a power-sharing settlement through the election that the junta has "promised" to hold in August 2023. This will not work anymore. Peaceful future for Myanmar is only when military is held to account by law and excluded from politics. And thus, a power sharing as a solution is not going to help save Myanmar.

Therefore, we would like for you to bring to New York that any suggestion that sends a signal to the military that the UN is willing to act as a broker for them to remain in power despite all the grave crimes they have committed will only further embolden them to commit more atrocities with total impunity and UN must look into how to prevent such power-sharing scenario.

Last, but not the least, is the issue of the perception of "*The military is in control at this particular time*". We find this a misinterpretation based on misreading of the ground realities. And this makes us worried. Myanmar people have successfully prevented the military from grabbing power over the country, despite all its brutal efforts and this needs to be acknowledged by the UN.

International experts on Myanmar have even responded to UN officials inaccurately suggesting that military has "taken over" the country or that it has an "iron grip on power", that "Misinterpretation leads to misrepresentation, misrepresentation leads to misunderstanding, and misunderstanding leads to mistakes". We could not agree more.

Such mistakes have been a persistent problem for the UN in Myanmar as outlined in the Rosenthal report, which found that systemic and structural failures rendered the UN impotent in the face of the Rohingya genocide. And the UN must not make the same mistakes, and once again, fail the people of Myanmar.

The people, especially the youth engaged in this revolution are not being unrealistic in their efforts to see their human rights and fundamental freedoms protected. Their calls reflect the principles laid out in the UN Charter and deserve the full support and respect of UN mandate holders.

To support a "Myanmar-led process" requires primarily to accurately understand the ground realities. And the best way to go about this is to "directly engage with and listen carefully to all those affected by the military's violence". Just talking to and hearing from the international civil society actors will not give justice to it. The calls of the people of Myanmar have been crystal clear. The military must never rule!

With this, I will stop here raising our concerns following our statement. And we look forward to hearing from you.

But, please allow me to take this opportunity to put on record in this meeting with you, Madam Special Envoy, that in our experience as Progressive Voice, organizing and facilitating series of civil

society engagement for our CSO partners and victims/survivors, with UN mandate holders, mechanisms and offices, over the past several years, I regret to say that our experience in trying to engage with the Special Envoy office has been left with our one-side efforts that were neglected, that the only rationale we could think of is that the engagement with local Myanmar civil society actors does not seem to be given a priority as an agenda for the SE. These past experiences have resulted in loss of our confidence in, and lessened our willingness to engage with, the Special Envoy mandate. Nevertheless, I hope this meeting will be a bridge between us to move forward. As our civil society colleagues will discuss further, we hope that you would put all measures necessary to give local Myanmar people's voices a top priority to ensure the process is Myanmar-led and procedures in place as necessary for the engagement with us.

Thank you.

Khin Ohmar Chairperson, Advisory Board, Progressive Voice

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P.S.

Progressive Voice Myanmar

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