

ASEAN Supports Thai Plan to Supply Myanmar Junta With Humanitarian Aid

Friday 9 February 2024, by [The Irrawaddy](#) (Date first published: 30 January 2024).

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Myanmar's junta have agreed to Thailand's plan to create a "safe zone" on the Thai border to provide humanitarian assistance to Myanmar.

Thailand's foreign minister, Parnpree Bahiddha-nukara, achieved unanimous support for the deal at the bloc's foreign ministers' retreat in Luang Prabang on Monday.

"It is Thailand's initiative to create a safe humanitarian zone between the Thailand-Myanmar border, and it has been welcomed by ASEAN members during the retreat," Parnpree told the media, the Bangkok Post [reported](#).

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Myanmar last month estimated that more than 2.6 million people have been displaced nationwide.

The porous 2,400km Thai border is a common escape route for refugees.

After the 2021 coup, ASEAN proposed a "five-point consensus", including plans to send humanitarian aid to Myanmar, but the junta failed to implement the measures.

Thailand has been [considering](#) sending humanitarian aid to vulnerable communities in Myanmar and in December [announced](#) the creation of a joint task force with Myanmar's regime to assist displaced people along the border.

The meeting in Laos included the [regime's representative](#), Marlar Than Htike, the permanent secretary at the junta's foreign ministry.

She reportedly told the meeting that the regime was ready to support the process.

ASEAN has banned the junta's leadership from major meetings since its failure to implement the five-point consensus in 2021.

Parnpree said Thailand is considering establishing an area to provide humanitarian assistance and he said he would visit Mae Sot on the border on February 8-9 to inspect possible areas for humanitarian assistance.

He said the ASEAN Coordinating Center for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management would play a key role as an observer and the Red Cross in Myanmar and Thailand would work together.

"This is an area that we have made progress on in Myanmar," he added.

Lao foreign minister Saleumxay Kommasith praised Thailand's efforts to create a humanitarian

corridor.

Observers warned that the disaster management center's board includes regime representatives and is not neutral while Thailand is not working with anti-regime forces, which control most of the border.

It is feared the regime will weaponize aid for its advantage and deny access to rebel-held areas. Myanmar's Red Cross is controlled by the junta.

Paul Greening, formerly of the United Nations with over 20 years' experience in Asia, including Myanmar, told The Irrawaddy: "This initiative will legitimize the SAC [State Administration Council] and allow it to use aid to its advantage."

He called for ASEAN to work with the civilian National Unity Government and anti-regime armed groups for cross-border aid, many of which have been providing aid for decades.

"They have the capacity if given the funds and opportunity. Unfortunately, Thailand and ASEAN will ignore them and support the SAC," Greening added.

Since the 2021 coup, Myanmar has been at war with repeated regime airstrikes and shelling.

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