

Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Myanmar
Ms. Christine Schraner Burgener
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[as delivered]

Introduction

Madam President,

Members of the Security Council,

I welcome today's consultation and the Security Council's continued engagement.

Your unity is needed more than ever on Myanmar.

I have remained in close contact with the people of Myanmar across communities.

They, including committed civil servants, are the real heroes and protectors of the nation's democratic progress.

But the hope they have placed in the United Nations and its membership is waning and I have heard directly the desperate pleas- from mothers, students and the elderly- I receive every day around 2,000 messages, for international action to reverse a clear assault on the will of the people of Myanmar and democratic principles.

We must be robust and timely in pushing for a stop to the violence and the restoration of Myanmar's democratic institutions. We must denounce the actions by the military, which continues to severely undermine the principles of this Organization and ignores our clear signals to uphold them.

Increase in Military Brutality

Madam President,

Since the informal meeting of the General Assembly exactly one week ago, the military brutally unleashed its worst crackdowns yet since the 1 February coup, killing a total of around 50 innocent and peaceful protesters while seriously injuring scores more.

We have received confirmed reports many have been killed by live ammunition. The use of lethal force against peaceful protesters is clearly against international human rights law.

There are visual recordings of the military snipers in shooting positions aiming at unarmed protesters, as well as indiscriminate shooting into the crowds by military and police personnel, in various parts of Myanmar.

Arbitrary detentions and enforced disappearances are also continuing across the country.

As of 2 March, OHCHR is aware of around 1,000 people who are either known to be in detention or unaccounted for after having been arbitrarily detained since the coup.

Journalists are increasingly targeted, including specific assaults aimed at them at the protest scenes.

The Secretary-General, who remains closely engaged, continues to speak out and has strongly condemned the violent crackdown.

We cannot allow these serious human rights abuses. The right to life, the right to liberty and safety, the right to be free from torture and other ill-treatment, and the right to freedom of peaceful assembly must be respected.

The repression must stop.

Many elected parliamentarians, including the members of the Committee Representing Pyidansu Hluttaw (CRPH), are risking their lives in their attempt to undertake their mandates, while in hiding and moving from one location to the other for fear of getting arrested by the military.

It is critical that this Council is resolute and coherent in putting the security forces on notice and standing with the people of Myanmar firmly, in support of the clear November election results.

As I mentioned in the General Assembly, genuine democracy requires civilian control over the military.

Allow me to reiterate that the international community should not lend legitimacy or recognition to this a regime that has been forcefully imposed and nothing but chaos has since followed.

Instead, this Council should hear the voices of the people of Myanmar, provide a platform for elected representatives and civil society leaders to share directly with you the ground situation which is rapidly deteriorating.

Myanmar's Permanent Representative Ambassador U Kyaw Moe Tun who represents the legitimate National League for Democracy (NLD) government elected by the people, needs your full support.

Urgency for Security Council Action

Madam President,

I have continued to communicate to the military leadership the Organization's strong dismay and condemnation for its failure to live up to its responsibilities to protect the people.

I will remain engaged with all actors, including on my possible visit to assess the situation directly and continue to offer my good offices.

I take this opportunity to thank Member States, including many present here, for supporting my early visit under agreeable conditions.

It is our collective responsibility towards the people of Myanmar to safeguard their democratic aspirations.

As the Secretary-General has repeated, Member States must do their part collectively and bilaterally.

I remain in close contact with ASEAN leaders and the UN stands ready to support regional efforts.

As highlighted in the 2 March Informal ASEAN Ministerial Meeting, utmost restraint is required for a peaceful solution through dialogue.

This requires the immediate, unconditional release of political leaders including President U Win Myint, State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and all others detained as a first step.

In addition to my ongoing close cooperation with ASEAN members, I intend to plan a visit to other countries in the region in my efforts to help promote greater international coherence – if COVID-19 restrictions measures allow.

There is an urgency for collective action. How much more can we allow the Myanmar military to get away with?

We must be clear: previous and current crimes will not go unpunished. Perpetrators of past, and ongoing, serious violations of human rights will be held accountable through international mechanisms.

Long-term Implications of Crisis

Madam President,

Live ammunition and weaponizing individuals, including those convicted of political murders to cause unrest and fear is a gross betrayal of the people the military has sworn to protect.

No leader with the greater national interest genuinely in mind would create this level of chaos during a pandemic which requires an effective, inclusive response.

An important opportunity to build unity across the country in the fight against COVID-19 has been lost and is a great danger for the people in Myanmar but also for the region.

The expanded immunization programme and routine immunization have essentially stopped functioning since early February.

This is likely to build up rapidly into increased risks for multiple health emergencies with outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases across the country in addition to COVID-19.

In the past decade, Myanmar's economic integration advanced exponentially. It has become interconnected to the global economy, supply chain, investment and banking like never before.

But the ongoing crisis adversely affects the workers, producers, business owners, domestic and international investors in an unprecedented manner.

People are rushing to the ATMs to withdraw their savings for an imminent fear of a banking collapse. Banks have not opened branch operations since the coup.

The Central Bank of Myanmar has placed a limit to cash withdrawals in an attempt to control the panic, sending shockwaves to the businesses and driving them into the cash liquidity crises.

International remittances have also been held up and the bank accounts of a number of UN agencies are frozen.

Production and supply chains are disrupted, affecting employment, income and food security.

The coup has fundamentally impacted the labour force, investment, stability, predictability, connectivity and security. It is almost like witnessing Myanmar's economy going into the state of sepsis.

At the current rate, the situation is moving towards an acute humanitarian crisis which will first hit the poorest segment of the country, least resilient.

We must act now. Going back to isolation will bring economic and political pains the people do not deserve. The regional implications are imminent.

Humanitarian Access

Madam President,

The United Nations system – the Country Team on the ground and we at Headquarters - will continue to stand with the people of Myanmar, and I appreciate the Security Council's

previous call for safe and unimpeded humanitarian access to all people in need. This needs to be amplified.

Humanitarian needs remain acute, with more than one million people in need, with many of those living in areas currently or previously subject to conflict with the military, like Rakhine.

For the 126,000 Rohingya who remain confined in IDP camps, there must be genuine progress to provide them freedom of movement and durable solution to return to their homes.

We have heard concerning reports that the IDP camp closure is about to resume but without due consideration for durable solutions for the displaced.

Unfettered humanitarian access is a vital first step in ensuring progress.

Sustainable solutions addressing the root causes of displacement, disenfranchisement and violence in Rakhine are urgently needed and must be an integral part to Myanmar's restoration to the path of democratic reforms.

Myanmar's future, as a prosperous, stable, unified and open state, cannot be built on the suppression or exclusion of minorities or vulnerable communities.

And casting a wider gaze on the region, this is also the only way to relieve Bangladesh and other neighboring countries of their burden and give hope for all refugees to return home.

Increasing security challenges inside the refugee camps have highlighted that the current dire situation cannot be sustained.

If problems fester, regional implications, including irregular maritime movements, and criminal and extremist activities, will become more problematic.

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Again, recently, around 100 Rohingya people continued to risk their lives taking to the seas to escape dire conditions without adequate amounts of food or water.

Conclusion

Madam President,

Let us never forget that many of the problems in Myanmar previously taken up by the Security Council came about under almost half a century of military leadership and isolation, at the expense of the people.

It is our collective obligation to defend the defenseless.

In support of the Secretary-General's leadership, I will continue my efforts in solidarity with the people of Myanmar.

Their hope will depend on unified support and action from the Security Council.

Thank you.