

UK Civil Society Joint Statement on The Prevention of Atrocities in Myanmar

05 FEB 2021 –LONDON

Members of the UK Atrocity Prevention Working Group and its friends call upon Her Majesty's Government to act swiftly, comprehensively and with conviction in response to the unjustifiable seizure of power from Myanmar's fragile democracy.

A robust, coordinated response

Having orchestrated genocide in Rakhine and faced little more than being banned from holidaying in the US, EU and UK, Min Aung Hlaing, head of the Myanmar military, is calculating there will be a similarly weak international response to this coup. It is essential that he is proven wrong.

International coordination is vital and we welcome statements from the government that the United Kingdom will work with international partners to mobilise an international response. This should include targeted sanctions on military owned and controlled companies as recommended by the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar, working with international partners to build a coalition of countries imposing arms embargoes against Burma, and support for international justice processes at the International Criminal Court and International Court of Justice.

We support Her Majesty's Government in its work with partners to bring about such a response.

Leverage prevention capabilities

The UK Atrocity Prevention Working Group exists with the aim to help improve the UK's prediction and prevention of mass atrocities. We therefore raise serious and urgent concerns of the increased risks ethnic minorities, democracy and human rights activists, and independent journalists in Myanmar now face.

In 2017, in its report on the UK response to the 2017 atrocities in Rakhine, the Foreign Affairs Select Committee was clear that 'the FCO must now learn lessons on atrocity prevention from the crisis to apply to Burma and elsewhere.' The government did not. The following year the Committee was stronger still; 'Everything we have heard as part of this inquiry has strengthened our belief that an atrocity prevention strategy is now more vital than ever. The Government needs to act urgently to produce a comprehensive atrocity prevention strategy and implementation plan to ensure it moves beyond words and towards concrete actions.'

Atrocity risks were already high in Myanmar. Those risks have now worsened.

For us it is clear, unless this gap in UK policy is urgently and meaningfully addressed, the absence of a clear articulate strategy on identity-based violence, genocide and crimes against humanity will once again be to the detriment of Myanmar's ethnic minority populations.

We urge the Government, once and for all, to acknowledge that its current approach to conflict and instability is not sufficient and special focus must be paid to preventing the very gravest crimes that are, once again, a real risk for minority populations and activists in Myanmar.

Accountability and justice

Until now, the international community has been too slow and too distracted to ensure that those who are most responsible for the crimes committed in Rakhine in 2017 are brought to justice. The alarming events of the past 48 hours bring into the sharp focus the need to join the case against Myanmar at the International Court of Justice and to refer the situation in the country to the International Criminal Court.

We support HMG in calling on Myanmar's military leaders to

- Immediately and unconditionally release all those currently arbitrarily detained;
- Allow Parliament to resume and elected MPs to fulfil their mandate without impediment
- Immediately restore the Internet and all forms of communications

We urge HMG to

- Use all avenues to improve the immediate protection and safeguarding of rights activists, journalists, and local leaders
- Make good use of its new independent Human Rights Sanction Regime, and apply targeted, hard hitting sanctions on military owned and controlled companies, as recommended by the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar
- Work with regional power brokers, especially Japan, as well as the United States and its other allies to build a coalition of conscience that will coordinate in applying such sanctions and communicating with the military leadership
- This coalition should also work to increase the number of countries implementing arms embargoes against Myanmar
- Urgently undertake a comprehensive risk analysis for Rakhine and the whole country and closely monitor the indicators of identity-based violence, genocide, and crimes against humanity
- Leverage atrocity prevention capabilities across HMG, state partners and civil society to assess and closely monitor indicators of identity-based mass violence, genocide and crimes against humanity – indicators commonly missing from UK risk analysis frameworks
- Establish a cross-cutting emergency communications protocol connecting UK state partners and local civil society to act as an early warning system
- Prioritise humanitarian assistance to the victims of conflict and human rights violations by the military, including via cross-border mechanisms
- Work with social media companies, in particular Facebook, to suspend the accounts of USDP and military leaders that have used their platforms to spread disinformation, fear, and incitement to violence. Encourage Facebook to stop allowing the military to use Facebook to recruit members using their Facebook pages, and to take down Facebook pages promoting military companies' products
- Join the Gambia and other states by intervening in its case against Myanmar at the International Court of Justice. An announcement of intention to intervene does not need to wait until legal objections raised by Myanmar are resolved
- Publicly support the referral of the situation in Myanmar to the International Criminal Court

At the UN Security Council, we urge the UK to;

- Continue to push for an open meeting, invoking the Uniting for Peace mechanism if China or other states continue to block efforts and so move the conversation to the General Assembly
- Invite the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar to brief the Council. If China blocks this then
 - a. convene Arria formula meeting for the Special Rapporteur to brief the other 14 members and
 - b. urge the Secretary-General to step in, using his Article 99 powers to brief the council, and then sending the Special Rapporteur to brief on his behalf
- Lead calls for the establishment of a UN mandated global arms embargo.
- Push publicly for the referral of the situation in Myanmar to the ICC
- Ensure the UN country team in Myanmar fully implements the lessons of Human Rights Up Front and learns from its failure to do so in 2017

We reiterate our offers of support to Her Majesty's Government during this crucial period for Myanmar and its people. Our channels of communication are always open and hope that in this time of acute concern, civil society expertise will be drawn upon.

Signed:

Burma Campaign UK



Children on the Edge



European Centre for the Responsibility to Protect



Global Witness

The Jo Cox Foundation

Kachin Relief Fund



Protection Approaches

Rights for Peace

The Sri Lanka Campaign



Syria Solidarity UK

United Against Inhumanity

United Nations Association – UK



Waging Peace

Inquiries should be directed to:

Mark Farmaner, Director, Burma Campaign UK

Burma Campaign UK is one of the leading Burma campaign organisations in the world

Mark.Farmaner@burmacampaign.org.uk

Dr Kate Ferguson, Co-Executive Director, Protection Approaches

Protection Approaches convenes to the UK Atrocity Prevention Working Group

Kate.Ferguson@protectionapproaches.org