



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

Karen Human Rights Group's Statement on Military Coup in Myanmar

4th February 2021

The Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) strongly condemns the coup orchestrated by the Burma/Myanmar Military (Tatmadaw). We call for the immediate release of all detained political leaders and civilians and for the reinstatement of the democratically elected government. This coordinated attack on democracy is a result of decades of impunity and constitutional protections given to the Tatmadaw. It is not only a threat to the country's democratic transition, but further endangers ethnic minorities already facing decades of human rights violations at the hands of the military.

Section 417 of the Constitution allows for the declaration of a state of emergency and is being cited by the military to justify their coup. However, claims of widespread fraud during the November 2020 election are unfounded. The military's actions are disproportionate and demonstrate a complete disregard for Myanmar's democratic process. Therefore, the newly established "State Administration Council" controlled by the Commander-in-Chief of the Defense Services is illegitimate. The landslide victory of the National League for Democracy (NLD) over the military affiliated political party, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), is the will of the people and must be respected.

People in Myanmar, and around the globe, are shocked by what is unfolding. However, we must remember that protections outlined in the 2008 Constitution have allowed the Tatmadaw to seize power from a democratically elected government. In recent years, it has been the overwhelming recommendation of KHRG, along with UN Missions, NGOs, and other Civil Society Organisations to reform the 2008 Constitution and limit the military's power in government. Attempts at reform have been vetoed by the Tatmadaw and the USDP. This serves as an indication of the military government to come. Although the Tatmadaw has a constitutional obligation to end the state of emergency within one year, and has promised to hold a new election by that time, KHRG believes that commitments to do so are meaningless given that elections are unlikely to be free and fair.

The military coup is not only a product of constitutional protections, but is a reminder of the culture of impunity that surrounds the Tatmadaw's actions in the country. This is particularly true for ethnic minorities, who have much to lose under a military dictatorship. Villagers in KHRG's operation area have experienced war and injustice for decades. In recent months, the Tatmadaw's complete disregard for the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) Code of Conduct has forced the peace process into a deadlock and contributed to escalating conflict. In north-eastern Karen State, around 5,000 villagers are currently displaced due to Tatmadaw shelling near villages and escalating clashes with the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). Furthermore, humanitarian aid and relief organisations have reportedly been blocked by the military from accessing displacement sites and supporting IDPs.

Decades of experience tells us that there will be no peace for ethnic minorities in Myanmar under a military dictatorship. The fear that has gripped the country, the conflict in ethnic regions, and widespread violations of human rights, will not only continue, but worsen.

KHRG demands the Tatmadaw reinstate the democratically elected government in Myanmar and respect international standards on democracy and human rights by releasing all people currently detained and ending conflict and abuses in ethnic communities.

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