

# **Statement**

## **International Partners Must End all Cooperation with the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission**

11 March 2021

On 11 February 2021, the CSO Working Group on MNHRC Reform (Working Group)<sup>1</sup> called on the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission (MNHRC) to denounce the military coup and stand with the people of Myanmar. It has failed to do so. We therefore believe that the MNHRC is an ally of the military regime, not a human rights institution. We, the Working Group and 56 local and regional CSOs and networks, call for the suspension of the MNHRC from regional and global platforms of national human rights institutions, and the end to any cooperation from its international partners.

Since our initial demand that the MNHRC denounce the coup, the use of violence by the military regime has escalated and the use of lethal force by the police and the military is becoming a daily occurrence. Over 60 people have died at the hands of live fire in cities across Myanmar. Water cannons, rubber bullets and beatings are inflicted on peaceful demonstrations, injuring hundreds and thousands of people have been arbitrarily arrested, charged and sentenced. Light Infantry Divisions 33 and 77 - battle-hardened shock troops regularly involved in the most brutal violence in ethnic areas – have been deployed in urban areas. Paid, pro-regime counter protesters have been instigating violence against peaceful protesters, including stabbings. Thousands of people have been released from prison, sent to urban neighborhoods at night-time to create havoc and instill fear. Hundreds more people have been arrested throughout the country as night-time raids led by the police, and backed up by soldiers, are conducted while a curfew is imposed on the people’s movement. As of 10 March, 2,008 people have been arrested, charged or sentenced since the beginning of the coup according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners.

The internet is cut out each night, cutting people off from the outside world, fearing what will come next. A proposed Cyber Security Law will compel telecommunications companies to intercept correspondence. Amendments to the Penal Code, such as potential 20-year sentences for obstructing the military’s duties, have been passed. Amendments to the Ward or Village Tract Administration Law have brought back the requirement for households to report all overnight guests while amendments to the Privacy Law means the authorities can enter and search any private property, and arrest people, without a warrant. This legislation harks back to the worst days of military rule while, the violence, intimidation and repression is only increasing.

Yet despite all this, a month since the coup, the MNHRC has remained silent. The people are on the streets every day, putting their lives at risk for a better future that in which they can enjoy their fundamental rights and the MNHRC has not done anything to condemn the coup, nor the violence inflicted on peaceful

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<sup>1</sup> The MNHRC Working Group consists of 22 diverse Myanmar civil society organizations that works to advocate for the reform of the MNHRC so it is an effective, independent, and transparent NHRI that promotes and protects the rights of all people of Myanmar in line with the Paris Principles – the international standards for NHRIs.

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demonstrators. This is beyond the need for technical assistance or the lack of capacity. According to the General Observations of the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) Sub-Committee on Accreditation (SCA), which are to guide NHRIs in their compliance with the international standards for NHRIs – the Paris Principles, an NHRI in a time of emergency or coup, must “continue to conduct itself with a heightened level of vigilance and independence in the exercise of its mandate.” Remaining silent in this time of emergency represents not just a failure in upholding its most basic responsibilities, but as a willing accomplice to the military regime. Therefore, we do not view the MNHRC as a legitimate NHRI. Rather it is an institution that is a part of the military regime.

Therefore, international governments and their respective NHRIs must not recognize in any form the MNHRC as a legitimate NHRI, and cut all engagement and cooperation. Other international partners of the MNHRC, such as funding agencies, UN bodies and regional organizations must end all cooperation, funding, and assistance they provide to the MNHRC. Furthermore, the regional and international bodies of NHRIs that the MNHRC is a member or participates in – specifically the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI), the Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions (APF) and the Southeast Asia National Human Rights Institutions Forum (SEANF) – must suspend the MNHRC from any form of membership.

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**Signed by:**

1. All Arakan Students’ and Youths’ Congress
2. Alliance for Gender Inclusion in the Peace Process
3. Ananda Data
4. Arakan CSO Network
5. Arakan Rivers Network (ARN)
6. Backpack Health Workers Team
7. Burma Medical Association
8. Candle Light Group
9. Chin Human Rights Organization
10. CSO Working Group on MNHRC Reform
  - Action Committee for Democracy Development
  - Assistance Association for Political Prisoners
  - Association of Human Rights Defenders and Promoters
  - Athan – Freedom of Expression Activists Organization
  - Burma Monitor (Research and Monitoring)
  - Equality Myanmar
  - Future Light Center
  - Generation Wave
  - Genuine People’s Servants

- Human Rights Educators Network
  - Human Rights Foundation of Monland
  - Kachin Women’s Association Thailand
  - Karen Human Rights Group
  - Karenni Human Rights Group
  - Loka Ahlinn (Social Development Organization)
  - Metta Campaign Mandalay
  - Myanmar People Alliance (Shan State)
  - Progressive Voice
  - Synergy (Social Harmony Organization)
  - Ta’ang Women’s Organization
  - The Seagull: Human Rights, Peace & Development
  - Yangon Watch
11. Democracy, Peace and Women Organization
  12. Digital Rights Collective
  13. Enlighten Myanmar Research Foundation EMreF
  14. Free Expression Myanmar
  15. Fidi Foundation (Hakha)
  16. Gender Equality Network
  17. Karen Affairs Committee
  18. Karen Environmental and Social Action Network
  19. Karen Grassroot Women Network
  20. Karen Organization for Relief and Development
  21. Karen Peace Support Network
  22. Karen Rivers Watch
  23. Karen Student Network Group
  24. Karen Teacher Working Group
  25. Karen Women’s Organization
  26. Karenni Civil Society Network
    - Karenni National Youth Organization
    - Karenni National Women’s Organization
    - Karenni Evergreen
    - Karenni Student Union
    - Karenni Legal and Human Rights Center
    - Karenni Social Welfare and Development Center
    - Karenni Refugee Committee
    - Karenni Health Department
    - Karenni Literacy and Culture Development Committee
    - Karenni Education Department
  27. Kayan Women’s Organization
  28. Keng Tung Youth
  29. Maramagri Youth Network
  30. Myan ICT for Development Organisation (MIDO)

31. Myanmar Cultural Research Society
32. Network for Human Rights Documentation (ND-Burma)
  - Assistance Association for Political Prisoners – Burma
  - Human Rights Foundation of Monland
  - Kachin Women’s Association – Thailand
  - Ta’ang Women’s Organization
  - Ta’ang Students and Youth Union
  - Tavoyan Women’s Union
  - Association of Human Rights Defenders and Promoters
  - All Arakan Students’ and Youths’ Congress
  - Future Light Center
- Partner Organizations
  - Chin Human Rights Organization
  - East Bago – Former Political Prisoners Network
  - Pa-O Youth Organization
  - Progressive Voice
33. Pa-O Women’s Union
34. Pa-O Youth Organization
35. Pyi Gyi Khin
36. Shan MATA
37. Socio-Economic & Gender Resource Institute
38. Southern Youth Development Organization
39. Triangle Women Support Group
40. Women’s League of Burma
  - Burmese Women’s Union
  - Karenni National Women’s Organization
  - Kachin Women’s Association Thailand
  - Kuki Women’s Human Rights Organization
  - Karen Women’s Organization
  - Kayan Women’s Organization
  - Lahu Women’s Organization
  - Pa-O Women’s Union
  - Shan Women’s Action Network
  - Ta’ang Women’s Organization
  - Tavoy Women’s Union
  - Women for Justice
41. Youth Circle

**Signed by regional organizations;**

42. Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK)- Bangladesh
43. All India Network of NGOs and Individuals Working with National and State Human Rights Institutions (AiNNI)- India
44. Asian NGO Network on National Human Rights Institutions (ANNI)
45. Bytes for All (B4A)- Pakistan

46. Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)
47. Centre for Human Rights and Development (CHRD)- Mongolia
48. Covenants Watch- Taiwan
49. Indonesian Human Rights Monitor (IMPARSIAL)- Indonesia
50. Institute for Policy Research and Advocacy (ELSAM)- Indonesia
51. Korean House for International Solidarity (KHIS)- South Korea
52. Law and Society Trust (LST)- Sri Lanka
53. Maldivian Democracy Network (MDN)- The Maldives
54. Odhikar- Bangladesh
55. Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (PAHRA) - The Philippines
56. Suara Rakyat Malaysia (SUARAM)- Malaysia
57. The People's Empowerment Foundation (PEF) - Thailand