



ASEAN: Leaders' Meeting fails ASEAN peoples' aspiration for human rights and democracy

(Bangkok, 30 April 2021) – 'ASEAN has failed to recognise the peoples' desire for a meaningful political solution to the Myanmar crisis during its Leaders' Meeting,' said the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA), along with its member organisations from Indonesia and Myanmar in a joint statement today.

The rights groups derided the ASEAN Leaders' Meeting that took place in Jakarta on 24 April 2021 to discuss the situation in Myanmar. It was disappointing that the National Unity Government (NUG) was not invited to the meeting, which was one of the key demands from the peoples of Myanmar.

Two days before the meeting, 870 civil society organisations and 827 individuals from Myanmar, the Southeast Asian region, and beyond issued an open letter¹ calling ASEAN leaders to reject the presence of the junta, invite the NUG, release political prisoners in Myanmar, and coordinate with the United Nations in addressing the dire situation in Myanmar. Despite pleas from across the globe, none of those demands were met at the Leaders' Meeting.

The Leaders' Meeting, though it did generate a five-points consensus, including calling on the immediate cessation of violence, constructive dialogue of all parties, and deploying an ASEAN Special Envoy to Myanmar, was not a meaningful engagement aligned with the will of Myanmar people, as the junta's chief Ming Aung Hlaing was the sole representative from the country.

'The fact that a perpetrator of state violence and target of international sanctions like Min Aung Hlaing was allowed to negotiate and agree on the consensus, together with other ASEAN Member State Leaders, led to a weak resolution from ASEAN,' said Shamini Darshni Kaliemuthu, Executive Director of FORUM-ASIA.

'By giving Ming Aung Hlaing a seat at the table, ASEAN also lends legitimisation to the military junta and risk elevating his position as a de facto leader. ASEAN has failed to recognise the peoples' desire for a meaningful political solution during its Leaders' Meeting,' she added.

'If ASEAN would envision a Myanmar-led process, it needs to include the democratically-elected government who represents the voice of the people in its negotiation, not the military,' said Khin Ohmar, Chairperson of Progressive Voice. 'By not coming into a unity to call for the release of all political prisoners as the output of the meeting, while blaming the peoples of Myanmar, among other issues, ASEAN Leaders' Meeting has succumbed to the junta's presence.'

The rights groups reject the reprisals against the NUG by the unlawful military junta, which coincided with the ASEAN Leaders' Meeting. A day before the Leaders' Meeting, the military junta issued arrest warrants for Myanmar's NUG ministers, indicating the military's commitment to repress and stifle Myanmar people's movement for federal democracy and justice.

1 <http://1.forum-asia.org/CSOLetterASEANsummit>

Further, the rights groups are also alarmed by the oppression against peaceful protesters in front of the ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta to oppose the presence of Min Aung Hlaing at the Leaders' Meeting. At least five paralegals and assistant lawyers from FORUM-ASIA member organisations, Indonesia Legal Aid Foundation (YLBHI) and the Indonesia Legal Aid and Human Rights Association (PBHI), along with six protesters from the youth and labour movement were detained at the South Jakarta Police Station.

'The arrests showcase a continuous repression from the Indonesian government to the freedom of peaceful assembly and association,' said Asfinawati, Chairperson of YLBHI. 'It also implies that Indonesia, as the biggest democratic nation in ASEAN, does not want to criticise and would like to maintain its relationship with the junta.'

With the ASEAN Leaders Meeting that failed to meet the peoples' demand, the repression against protesters in Indonesia, and junta's arrest warrants for the NUG ministers, ASEAN intervention has again diverted from the peoples' desire for a conflict-free and peaceful Myanmar to another "futile reunion" between leaders.

'Only by having a meaningful dialogue with the peoples of Myanmar and their representative NUG, and prioritising and incorporating their voices in its intervention can ASEAN be a meaningful and relevant mechanism to solve the crisis in Myanmar effectively,' said the rights groups.

The joint statement is signed by:

1. Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)
2. Commission for the Disappeared and Victims of Violence (KontraS)
3. The Alliance of Independent Journalists Indonesia (AJI)
4. Indonesian Legal Aid and Human Rights Association (PBHI)
5. Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation (YLBHI)
6. Institute for Policy Research and Advocacy (ELSAM)
7. Progressive Voice
8. The Indonesian Human Rights Monitor (IMPARSIAL)

About FORUM-ASIA:

The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) is a Bangkok-based regional network of 81 member organisations across 21 Asian countries, with consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, and consultative relationship with the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights. Founded in 1991, FORUM-ASIA works to strengthen movements for human rights and sustainable development through research, advocacy, capacity-development and solidarity actions in Asia and beyond. It has sub-regional offices in Geneva, Jakarta, and Kathmandu. www.forum-asia.org

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