

25 November 2024

Bangna Communiqué on the Political, Economic, and Humanitarian Crisis and Prospects for Peace with Justice in Myanmar

Introduction

With the aim to discuss “Towards a Global Advocacy for Democratisation, People’s Security, and Peace with Justice in Myanmar,” nearly sixty participants from across Asia, the majority of whom were from Myanmar and its diaspora, as well as North America and Western Europe, convened in Bangna, Bangkok, Thailand. We represented diverse groups, including advocacy and development partners, civil disobedience movement activists, civil society organisations, diplomats, educators, ethnic regional groups, faith-based organisations, human rights organisations, journalists, non-governmental organisations, non-violent civil disobedience activists, researchers, peace activists, pro-democracy movements, professionals, members of various religious faiths, scholars, social activists, and students.

In line with our commitment to peace with justice, human rights, people’s security, and sustainable development, this communiqué draws the attention of governments and international organisations to the distressing situation in Myanmar. We affirm that the international community must undertake collective efforts to advance a just, peaceful, and inclusive tomorrow for all Myanmar citizens.

We address this communiqué to national governments, regional organisations, specifically ASEAN, international organisations such as the United Nations and its specialised agencies, and faith-based organisations. Myanmar is in dire straits, and we call for collective actions to achieve peace with justice in Myanmar.

Context

Since the February 2021 coup d’état, Myanmar has been engulfed in an escalating political, humanitarian, and economic crisis that demands urgent international action. The military’s overthrow of the democratically elected government has led to a cascade of dire consequences. Democratic institutions have been suspended, long-standing ethnic conflicts have been exacerbated, and political opposition faces severe repression. The military regime’s actions have resulted in widespread human rights abuses, including unlawful killings, arbitrary detentions, torture, and indiscriminate airstrikes against civilian residences, schools, religious buildings, hospitals and clinics.

The regime has fostered an illicit economy, including trafficking and scam centres, profiting billions of dollars and further consolidating its power. This has led to severe economic and humanitarian consequences as well as aggravated the armed conflict situation with different ethnic communities. The ongoing challenges of climate change and the urgent need for climate justice also exacerbate the crisis, worsening conditions for the population. Meanwhile, millions of internally displaced persons and refugees continue to flee violence and persecution, adding to the humanitarian crisis. Critical issues, such as women’s rights, youth participation, peace, people’s security, and bottom-up grassroots-led leadership, are essential for Myanmar’s future durable stability.

The situation has further deteriorated with the launch of Operation 1027 by the alliance of three ethnic armed groups in October 2023, intensifying conflicts in north-eastern Myanmar. The military's announcement of conscription in February 2024 has exacerbated the crisis, leading to increased emigration and vulnerability among Myanmar's youth. These developments have intensified the forced displacement of civilians from various ethnic groups, creating a surge in internally displaced persons and refugees, many of whom are not on record.

There is an urgent need for emergency services, including food, shelter, healthcare, mental health support, and effective grassroots-oriented education, peace-oriented education at all levels for peacebuilding and liberation. According to the U.N. Human Rights briefing on Myanmar, September 17, 2024: "Over 18.6 million need humanitarian assistance and over 15 million are food insecure. Over half the population has fallen below the poverty line with the country's GDP dropping 12 percent on average since the coup." The military regime's obstruction of humanitarian aid delivery, particularly in regions such as northwest Myanmar, has further compounded the crisis, violating international humanitarian law and restricting access to those in dire need.

The planning for the regime's election lacks legitimacy, and any attempt to hold the election will not be legitimate. Therefore, any result will be nothing but a sham election. Our concern is that this election will further fuel intensified armed conflicts.

Despite the military regime's promise to hold these sham elections, their continued human rights violations, the imprisonment of thousands of political prisoners, and widespread atrocities against civilians have undermined any credibility in their governance. The international community's response has been largely ineffective in halting the military's abuses or facilitating a return to democratic rule.

This multifaceted crisis not only threatens the human rights and security of Myanmar's people but also poses significant challenges to regional stability and international peace. The situation demands coordinated and decisive action from the global community to address this emergency and support Myanmar's path towards democracy, justice, and sustainable peace.

Key Concerns

We are deeply concerned about ongoing human rights abuses, as reported by civil society organisations, non-governmental organisations, faith-based organisations, international organisations, and independent news media. These flagrant human rights violations have led to a humanitarian crisis, creating an urgent need for support for displaced persons nationwide.

Tens of thousands of families live in precarious conditions in internally displaced persons camps, camp-like sites, and urban settings, with many more seeking refuge in camps along Myanmar's borders. The unmet basic needs for food, shelter, physical health, mental health, and education are worrying. The closure of border trade, coupled with food and medicine shortages and rising commodity prices, has exacerbated the suffering. Sustained and

coordinated international humanitarian assistance is urgently needed to alleviate the suffering of the people.

Myanmar's rich diversity, with over one hundred ethnic groups, has been historically marked by conflict. The failure to recognise the status and rights of these groups has fuelled armed resistance to central authorities. The resolution of these armed conflicts necessitates an inclusive approach that respects specific local contexts.

The revival of democratic institutions is key to ensuring people's security and restoring trust in central authorities. The role of inclusive civil society organisations composed of all ethnic groups, including women, youth, people with disability, older people, and other disenfranchised communities, is fundamental in the transitional process for the sustainable rebuilding of democratic institutions in the country.

The critical situation in Myanmar has also intensified illegal trans-border activities, such as human trafficking, drug trafficking, irregular border crossing, and exploitation. Furthermore, the interests of global powers, such as China, India, Russia, and the U.S. complicates the resolution of the domestic conflict in Myanmar. This situation also has significant implications for regional stability, particularly for neighbouring countries such as Bangladesh, India, Thailand, and other bordering countries.

Holistic Tasks Ahead for Peace with Justice and Global Solidarity

We express our concerns to ASEAN member states regarding the ineffectiveness of their diplomatic efforts to ensure the realisation of the Five-Point Consensus. The Five-Point Consensus, agreed upon in 2021, calls for 1) the immediate cessation of violence, 2) constructive dialogue among all stakeholders, 3) appointment of a special ASEAN envoy, 4) humanitarian assistance, and 5) ASEAN envoy's visit to Myanmar.

We appeal to ASEAN member states to reconsider their approach and acknowledge that the current approach has proven ineffective. We urge ASEAN to adopt a new approach in engaging with the relevant key stakeholders.

We appeal to United Nations agencies and international humanitarian organisations, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, to:

1. Monitor the implementation of international human rights law and international humanitarian law;
2. Protect civilian lives and property;
3. Provide more resources for unarmed civilian protection activities;
4. Advocate for the cessation of air strikes against civilian communities;
5. Reinforce monitoring mechanisms;
6. Organise a context-specific, ethical, religiously sensitive, flexible, needs-based, and culturally tailored emergency humanitarian response, including the provision of legal documents to displaced persons to protect them and facilitate their freedom of movement;
7. Convene an international summit to raise awareness at the global level about the worsening crisis in Myanmar.

We appeal to foreign governments, international governmental and non-governmental organisations and communities, including media, international advocacy groups, and development partner agencies, to:

1. Engage in inclusive partnerships with community-based organisations, independent news media, non-governmental organisations, and people's governance structures at all levels;
2. Work with both state and non-state actors to ensure their responsibilities under international law to protect civilians are met;
3. Provide safehouses for human rights defenders;
4. Call for the release of political prisoners;
5. Foster genuine, open, and inclusive dialogue among all parties to the armed conflict, ensuring the inclusion of all ethnic groups;
6. Encourage the participation of local and international actors, especially women and youth, in peace processes to ensure the attainment of a just and durable peace;
7. Support on-the-ground efforts to restore democratic institutions;
8. Provide the necessary resources to meet the needs of affected populations;
9. Provide psycho-social support to civilian groups, including safe-space methodology and initiatives such as arts and storytelling;
10. Organise inter-ethnic dialogues and educational programmes to promote inter-ethnic understanding and cooperation;
11. Call for the return of legitimate power to civilians;
12. Support bottom-up state-building efforts for self-governance;
13. Provide international support for accessible education of children, including spaces for school building in refugee settings both within the country and abroad, and advocate for inclusive mediation, justice, and lasting peace for the people of Myanmar.

We appeal to faith-based organisations to:

1. Work together to promote the noble values of religion in relation to peace and justice;
2. Bring together religious and ethnic communities to work in unison to instil intercommunal harmony;
3. Act as vehicles for interreligious dialogue and inter-ethnic understanding;
4. Serve as key actors in early warning, peacekeeping, negotiation, and mediation with armed groups;
5. Proactively engage in protecting civilians from harm;
6. Support the development of communities' physical and mental resilience;
7. Furnish pastoral care and healing while working towards peace with justice;
8. Support local faith-based organisations to act as first responders to provide humanitarian relief;
9. Contribute to expanding international solidarity by offering recommendations for solutions that promote peace with justice, advance human dignity, and support the hopes of the Myanmar people through their influence and network;
10. Resist the unethical practice of proselytising in conflict-ridden areas.

We appeal to the member churches, national ecumenical councils of the Christian Conference of Asia, the World Council of Churches, and international ecumenical partners and communities to initiate a special programme of Ecumenical Accompaniment and Solidarity

for Myanmar. We urge the use of this common ecumenical platform for coordinating and facilitating Myanmar advocacy and solidarity engagements by the international ecumenical family.

Conclusion

The crisis in Myanmar poses significant challenges to democratisation, people's security, and peace with justice, threatening all forms of life, including biocentric or eco-centric systems in the region and in the world. Joint efforts are essential to prevent further deterioration of the crisis, uphold human dignity, and achieve sustainable peace. We reaffirm our commitment to cooperating and collaborating with all stakeholders to secure a just and inclusive resolution. The international community can make a difference by contributing in different ways to the development of an inclusive, peaceful, and just Myanmar.