

Forum: Security Council (SC)

Issue: The situation in Myanmar

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Introduction

Myanmar, also known as Burma is a country located in Southeast Asia. Over the course of its history, it has struggled with military rule, civil war, poor governance, and multifaceted crises. Two of the most significant ongoing conflicts involve the military and democratic and civil society forces, while there is also a significant conflict involving the military and various ethnic communities fighting for increased autonomy within Myanmar.

In February of 2021, Myanmar's military seized power in a coup that ignited months of mass protests. The imposed junta regime has drawn the attention of the international community ever since, in light of serious human rights violations. In the two years since the coup more than “3,000 protestors have been killed, 20,000 people arrested, and 55,000 houses burned”.

Definition of Key Terms

Coup d'état

A coup d'état refers to the abrupt overthrow of a government through illegitimate means by a small faction, frequently involving military forces. This coercive and unauthorized seizure of power is characterized by the swift and forceful removal of existing political leadership, resulting in a change of government, often with significant implications for the established order and governance structure of a nation.

Military junta

A military junta is constituted by a group of military officers tasked with governing a nation following the seizure of power, typically facilitated by a coup d'état. This governing body, often characterized by an authoritative and centralized structure, emerges from the military's successful overthrow of the existing government, leading to a period of direct military control and influence over the affairs of the state.

War crime

According to the Statute of the International Criminal Court war crimes are defined as “serious violations of the laws and customs applicable in international armed conflict” and “serious violations of the laws and customs applicable in international armed conflict not of an international character”¹.

¹ “Definition of War Crimes.” Icrc.org, 2023, www.ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/customary-ihl/v1/rule156#refEn_41B4CBC3_00001. Accessed 30 Nov. 2023.

Arbitrary arrests

An arbitrary arrest or detention occurs, when persons are subjected to arrest or charged with crimes following procedures not in accordance with the law or unfair trials. However, it should be borne in mind that according to Article 9 of the Universal Declaration for Human Rights “No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.”²

Indiscriminate attacks

Indiscriminate attacks are defined in the context of the International Humanitarian Law as “attacks which are not directed at a specific military objective and consequently are of a nature to strike military objectives and civilians or civilian objects without distinction.”³

Background Information

Sub-topic 1: Assessing the humanitarian consequences of post-coup tactics implemented by the junta

In the wake of the 2021 military coup in Myanmar, the initial protests escalated into a complex conflict between the military, democratic forces, and civil society. This escalating conflict is undeniably taking a heavy toll on the population. As this crisis unfolds, a compelling need arises for a thorough examination of the humanitarian consequences, casting light on the profound impact on the people and underscoring the urgency for international intervention and support.

Needless to say that in response to the military coup, numerous protests erupted in the weeks following the overthrow of the civilian-elected government. A case-in-point is when tens of thousands of civilians including health workers, bankers and teachers led a peaceful disobedience movement refusing to go to work until the elected government returned to power. This led to military forces brutally suppressing any and all protests using tactics, such as but not limited to; Initially, military forces were seen targeting civilian protesters as well as people’s homes by shooting live ammunition. What’s more, in the aftermath of the protests along with an opposition movement destroying villages that were believed to support the opposition was also part of the plan to target any non-compliance movements whatsoever. After all, more than 1,500 people were subject to murder by military forces whilst thousands of arrests of journalists, medical workers and NLD politicians took place at the time and continued in the foreseeable future.

Following the coup, military forces implemented a military junta, officially known as the State Administration Council. What followed were imposed tactics that the Human Rights Watch (HRW) and other organizations have gone so far as to designate them as war crimes. More specifically, since the

² “Precarious Justice: Arbitrary Detention and Unfair Trials in the Deficient Criminal Justice System of Saudi Arabia: VI. Arbitrary Arrest and Detention.” Hrw.org, 2023, www.hrw.org/reports/2008/saudijustice0308/11.htm.

³ Icrc.org, 2023, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/fr/customary-ihl/v2/rule12>.

stages coup in 2021, military forces have been involved in acts such as but not limited to: mass killings, arbitrary arrests and detention, torture, sexual violence, and attacks on civilians in conflict areas.

Adding to the above, with regard to arbitrary arrests and killings, Myanmar's security forces have proceeded to the arrest of a significant number of democratic activists and supporters, accounting to 16.000. As a result of these actions, the estimated death toll exceeds 2,300 individuals.

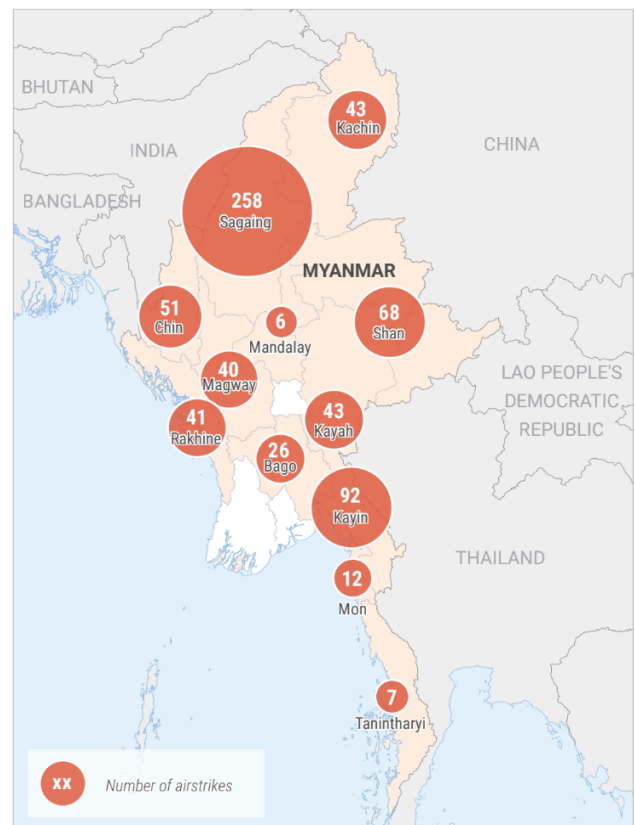
Furthermore, it is important to note that military forces have not hesitated to impose serious penalties along with persecutions. First and foremost, Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of the National League for Democracy, is serving a 33-year sentence after closed military trials. Remarkably, in July, the military executed four political prisoners, marking Myanmar's first use of the death penalty in over three decades.

Military tactics have also extended to indiscriminate attacks and along with displacement of populations. For one thing Myanmar military has carried out ground and air attacks, resulting in numerous civilian deaths. Additionally, post-coup fighting has internally displaced over one million people, with an additional 70,000 refugees fleeing into neighboring countries.

Picture 1: Airstrikes targeting civilian population
Source: OHCHR⁴

Last but not least, amid a post-coup economic crisis, the junta has severely hindered the delivery of humanitarian aid to communities most at risk. More specifically, it has blocked humanitarian aid from reaching millions of displaced people and others at risk, hence violating international humanitarian law. Moreover, security forces imposed new travel restrictions, attacked aid workers, blocked access to roads and aid convoys, destroyed non-military supplies, and shut down telecommunications services.

In conclusion, it is abundantly clear that the military junta has brought on some serious repercussions for the civilian population in opposition to the system, extending to "war crimes" and "crimes against humanity". Notably, the military's brutal crackdown on dissent and widespread abuses has sparked strong condemnation from the international community, including the United Nations, foreign governments, and human rights organizations.

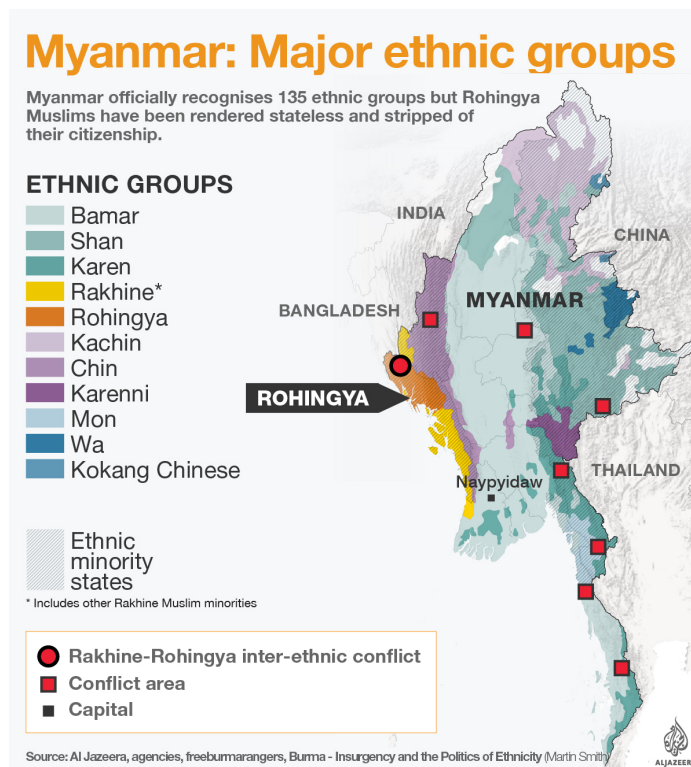


⁴ <https://bangkok.ohchr.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/HRC54-OHCHR-Factsheet-Myanmar.pdf>

Sub-topic 2: Discussing the impact of ethnic diversity on conflict

Beyond the conflict involving democratic and civil society forces, Myanmar faces ongoing tensions rooted in its diverse nature due to a substantial number of ethnic groups. To illustrate, Myanmar is a multi-ethnic state, recognizing over 130 ethnic groups. Minority ethnic communities make up at least one-third of the population and inhabit half the land area⁵. However, it shall be taken into consideration that the largest ethnic group, the Burmese (Bamar), constitutes around 70% of the population⁶.

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Picture 2: Ethnic groups in Myanmar
Source: Al Jazeera

Since gaining independence from British rule in 1948, Myanmar has struggled to address ethnic diversity within its borders via forging a consistent national identity. In addition, notions deeply rooted in

⁵ "Myanmar/Burma." *Minority Rights Group*, Nov. 2020, www.minorityrights.org/country/myanmarburma/.

⁶ Maizland, Lindsay. "Myanmar's Troubled History: Coups, Military Rule, and Ethnic Conflict." *Council on Foreign Relations*, 31 Jan. 2022, www.cfr.org/backgrounder/myanmar-history-coup-military-rule-ethnic-conflict-rohingya#chapter-title-0-5.

the colonial period suggest that those deemed to be insufficiently “indigenous”, i.e. ethnic groups should not be granted full participation in politics along with protection under the bill of rights in the constitution. Furthermore, the state has shown strong favoritism towards the largest ethnic group in the country, the Burmans, leading to a fundamental climate of mistrust and conflict between excluded ethnic groups and the state.

Given the extensive participation of the military, also known as Talmadaw, in the country's politics, the conflict between ethnic groups and the state has naturally extended to include the military as well. In other words, conflicts are fueled between the two parties due to the aforementioned division and ongoing discrimination towards ethnic groups, creating a vicious cycle of violence. A case-in-point is when the Tatmadaw, and local security forces mounted a brutal campaign against the Rohingya ethnic group in 2016 and 2017. This campaign included killings, destruction of villages, and widespread violence, resulting in thousands of Rohingya deaths.

As a result, Rohingyas faced forced migration due to the military's actions, creating a severe refugee crisis in neighboring countries. The situation prompted international legal actions, with Gambia filing a lawsuit against Myanmar at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in 2019, accusing the country of violating the UN Genocide Convention, whilst allegations of ethnic cleansing and genocide against the Rohingya have overall been significant factors in international condemnation of Myanmar's military. As a response to the undeniable discrimination and exclusion, ethnic armed groups emerged as a response to the fight for greater autonomy and political representation. For instance, various groups, including the Karen, Kachin, Shan, and others, formed armed wings to resist the central government's control and pursue their vision of self-determination.

Moreover, following the 2021 military coup, armed ethnic groups have actively engaged in resistance efforts. A vital asset in the establishment of these opposition forces has undoubtedly been the National Unity Government (NUG) a civilian government formed by ousted parliament members and lawmakers founded shortly after the military coup and operating in opposition to the latter. With regard to its engagement with ethnic groups, the NUG has aimed to convince such to build political and military alliances with ethnic armed groups, offering concessions such as an ethnically diverse cabinet and plans for a new federal charter. Furthermore, the NUG formed the People's Defense Force (PDF) as its armed wing, aiming to resist the military regime. In light of this, ethnic armed groups have either collaborated or coordinated with the NUG and PDF in various regions, launching joint attacks against military installations and government offices.

Sub-topic 3: Examining the role of the military in the political landscape and transition to civilian rule

As can already be seen from the analysis results of military coups involving the military, Myanmar's military, the so-called Tatmadaw, undoubtedly plays a crucial role in defining the country's

politics. This is also evident from the fact that the military has maintained significant power and influence in Myanmar since its independence in 1948.

First and foremost, the founder of the political Burma National Army, General Aung San, played a crucial role when it came to the liberation of the country against colonial powers, consequently leading to its independence. In the subsequent years, the military enjoyed strong public support and enthusiasm for what led to the liberation of its people. Hence, it comes as no surprise that the military has held substantial power over the political scene ever since.

The 1962 military coup led by General Ne Win is a significant example in this context, which after overthrowing the democratic government proceeded to ban opposition parties and introduced the “Burmese Way to Socialism”, essentially leading to an economic crisis and Myanmar’s near-total isolation from the international community.

1988 marked a year of protests by the population, demanding democratic reforms and the establishment of a liberal party representing those demands, the National League for Democracy (NLD). Despite the latter winning elections, the military refused to recognize the results and remained in power for approximately two decades. What’s more, the military drafted a new constitution in 2008 as a means to preserve its control over the government and key elements of the industry.

In 2011, the military officially dissolved the junta and combined elements of its own authority with the addition of civilian participation into an established parliament for a transitional period, which sparked hopes for democratic reforms. Examples of such were introduced in the following years, including measures to safeguard freedom of speech against media censorship and granting amnesty to political prisoners. Myanmar held multiparty elections in 2015, with the NLD winning a landslide victory. Despite the fact that Suu Kyi became the de facto head of the civilian government, the military retained control over security and foreign relations.

The military coup in February 2021 disrupted hopes for democratic reforms. In summary, the military's actions during the coup can be understood in the context of their declining authority as a result of democratic reforms, which threatened to undermine their ability to influence and control national politics.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

People’s Republic of China

China, which shares a 2km common border with Myanmar does indisputably play a significant role, when it comes to addressing the conflict. In other words, it can be considered one the largest trading partners and closest diplomatic allies. Overall, China has developed numerous infrastructure and investment projects in Myanmar, for example, as part of its Belt and Road Initiative. In view of the recent events, China has not only approved of the military coup but also granted de facto recognition of the military leaders. Last but not least, China has provided Myanmar a substantial amount of financial and

military support totaling US\$113 million.

Russian Federation

Russia is along with China one of the major supporters and arms suppliers of the coup, whilst also providing diplomatic support. It can be realized that Russia may be competing with the latter for influence and authority over the situation. To be more precise, Russia has invested \$406 million in weapons and materiel since the military coup, including such but not limited to; missile systems, surveillance drones, helicopters, and fighter jets.

Singapore

Singapore, being one of the founding members of the ASEAN is a profound example of yet another country expressing its support of the junta. To illustrate, the military has imported \$254 million worth of supplies endorsed by Myanmar. However, in 2023, the nation's politics on the subject have drawn a great deal of criticism. Countless online petitions, open letters to the government, and press releases from civilian-led organizations have been sent to Singapore's leadership pleading for the cutting of the supply line.

EU (European Union)

The European Union has taken a clear stance on the matter from early on. It has namely expressed its strong dissatisfaction with the junta regime and condemns any human rights violations. Needless to say, that the EU does not recognize the authority of the military government and demands their dissolution. For that reason it has imposed several rounds of sanctions on targeted individuals and entities, accounting to seven rounds, as of 2023. The EU has also repeatedly expressed its wish for international cooperation on the matter, urging for an arms embargo to restrict the military's atrocities. All in all, the EU advocates for an inclusive solution involving the National Unity Government, political parties, civil society, religious leaders, and ethnic groups and is further willing to proceed to additional measures, if deemed necessary.

France

France has been a vital asset to the EU when it comes to condemning the military's atrocities. French delegates and diplomats have publicly denounced Myanmar's decision to execute four people on June 4, 2022, in their statements. What's more, France supported UN General Assembly and UN Human Rights Council resolutions in 2021 calling for an end to abuses and the restoration of civilian rule. Lastly, France backed multiple rounds of EU economic sanctions and travel bans on senior military leaders and military-owned entities supporting the military rule.

USA (United States of America)

The United States of America has maintained an overall distant relationship to Myanmar after the 1980s, occasionally involving sanctions in light of military uprisings. With regard to the 2021 military coup the US has condemned human rights abuses and imposed sanctions on military leaders, as part of its 2021 Burma Act. Remarkably, the country's actions include pushing ASEAN countries to increase pressure on the junta. On a national level, Congress has passed laws on a national level to address the issue and develop a national plan that includes important components like cost imposition and the NUG's legitimization.

ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations)

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is an economic and political union, which comprises 10 Southeast Nations, established in 1962. In regards to the Myanmar coup, ASEAN has condemned violence and attacks. In April 2021, members of the ASEAN came up with the Five Point Consensus (5PC), which included "provisions for an immediate end to violence, dialogue among all parties, the appointment of a special envoy, humanitarian assistance by ASEAN and a visit by the regional bloc's special envoy to Myanmar to meet with all parties"⁷. Ever since, several ASEAN summits have been hosted in several locations, with the most recent ones including those in Indonesia, Thailand (September-November 2023). However, it can be argued that ASEAN is unable to take united action, as its actions are deeply criticized. This is because, among other things, some of its members remain top trading partners and arms suppliers.

Timeline of Events

Date (start - end)	Name	Description
January, 4 th , 1948	Myanmar Independence	Myanmar gains independence, marking the beginning of Tatmadaw's significant role in the country's politics.
March, 2 nd , 1962	General Ne Win's coup	General Ne Win leads a military coup, overthrowing the democratic government, banning opposition parties, and introducing the "Burmese Way to Socialism," resulting in economic crisis and international isolation.
August, 8 th , 1988	Pro-Democracy Protests	Protests demand democratic reforms and the

⁷ Nadi, Khin. "How ASEAN's Failed "Five-Point Consensus" Has Let down the People of Myanmar." The Wire, 19 May 2022, www.thewire.in/south-asia/how-aseans-failed-five-point-consensus-has-let-down-the-people-of-myanmar

		establishment of the National League for Democracy (NLD). Despite the NLD's election victory, the military refuses to recognize the results, maintaining power for two decades.
January, 2011	Dissolution of the Junta	The military dissolves the junta, introducing civilian participation into an established parliament, raising hopes for democratic reforms. Measures include freedom of speech and amnesty for political prisoners.
November, 8 th , 2015	Multiparty Elections	NLD wins a landslide victory in multiparty elections, but the military retains control over security and foreign relations, limiting the impact of civilian rule.
2016-2017	Rohingya Crisis	Tatmadaw conducts a brutal campaign against the Rohingya ethnic group, resulting in killings, destruction of villages, widespread violence, forced migration, and international condemnation.
November, 11 th , 2019	ICJ Case Against Myanmar	Gambia files a lawsuit against Myanmar at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), accusing the country of violating the UN Genocide Convention in its treatment of the Rohingya.
February, 1 st , 2021	Military coup	Military coup overthrows the civilian-elected government, sparking widespread protests. The military brutally suppresses demonstrations, leading to thousands of deaths, arrests, and an estimated death toll exceeding 2,300 individuals.
April, 16 th , 2021	Formation of the National Unity Government	The National Unity Government (NUG) forms in response to the coup, actively engaging with armed ethnic groups and establishing the People's Defense Force (PDF) to resist the military regime. Ethnic armed groups coordinate attacks against the military.

December, 29 th , 2022	Sentencing of Aung San Suu Kyi	Aung San Suu Kyi is sentenced to 33 years after closed military trials.
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Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- Human rights implications of the crisis in Myanmar, 12 February 2021 (**A/HRC/RES/S-29/1**).

In response to the state of emergency in Myanmar, the Human Rights Council adopted resolution A/HRC/RES/S-29/1 on February 12, 2021, without a vote. It calls, among other things, for the restoration of the elected government, the release of arbitrary detained persons, and an end to human rights violations.

- Resolution on ending all forms of violence in Myanmar, 21 December 2022, (**S/RES/2669**)

Security Council resolution 2669, adopted on December 2022 demands an “immediate end to all forms of violence, the protection of civilians and the respect for human rights, stresses the need to uphold democratic institutions and processes in accordance with the will and interests of the people of Myanmar, urges the Myanmar military to immediately release all arbitrarily detained prisoners, including President Win Myint and State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, and calls for concrete and immediate action, noting the military’s commitments to the leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations to effectively and fully implement the five-point consensus.”⁸

- The situation in Myanmar, 18 June 2021, (**A/RES/75/287**).

“The resolution strongly condemns the actions of the Myanmar military in the February 2021 coup and its aftermath, including excessive use of force and the arbitrary detention of President Win Myint, State Counsellor Aung San Suu Ky, and other government officials. It called on the armed forces to immediately stop the violence. It also notes certain recent actions by the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice with regard to the situation in Myanmar.”⁹

- Situation of human rights in Myanmar, 4 April 2023 (**A/HRC/RES/52/31**).

HRC’s resolution A/HRC/RES/52/31 was another attempt to address the human rights situation in Myanmar. It condemns human rights violations and calls upon armed forces to respect the people’s democratic will, put an end to the unjustified use of military tribunals to try civilians, and ensure full protection of the human rights of all persons in Myanmar.

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

⁸ <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G23/077/64/PDF/G2307764.pdf?OpenElement>

⁹ <https://unwatch.org/database/resolutions/a-res-75-287/>

Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (The Gambia v. Myanmar)

In 2019, Gambia with the support of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) filed a case before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague. The case alleged that Myanmar's atrocities against the ethnic Rohingya in Rakhine State violated various provisions of the Geneva Convention. However, the former's official statements and the respondent's party's response are anticipated within 2024. Given the aforementioned nations' shared interest in promoting the preservation of human rights in Myanmar, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom filed a joint declaration of intervention in the case in addition to the Maldives filing a separate declaration.

International Criminal Court (ICC) authorized investigation into the situation in Myanmar

In 2019, The International Criminal Court (ICC) has approved a full investigation into Myanmar's alleged crimes against the Rohingya in view of the 2017 targeting campaign of the military against the aforementioned ethnic group. Nevertheless, it shall be noted that Myanmar is not party to the Rome Statute, and the ICC does not have jurisdiction over the country unless one of its nationals accept the ICC's decision and jurisdiction over the case respectively. As one would expect Myanmar rejected the aforesaid decision stating that the "[The] ICC's decision is not in accordance with international law"¹⁰.

Sanctions

Sanctions is a key part of the response of numerous countries to the Myanmar conflict, as illustrated by the examples of the European Union and the United States of America. Concerning the former, the first US sanctions were imposed just 10 days after the military government rose to power. All in all, The United States has since imposed nearly 20 rounds of sanctions on Myanmar, targeting military leaders, business entities associated with the military, state-owned enterprises, arms brokers and suppliers of aviation fuel. In addition, the EU and United Kingdom have imposed multiple rounds of sanctions. Characteristically, the EU imposed the seventh round this year, adding further individuals and entities on the already long list of sanctions, whilst the United Kingdom has sanctioned 34 individuals and 27 entities.¹¹ Last but not least, Canada and Australia have introduced similar sanctions, although the latter only did so two years after the coup had taken place.

ASEAN Leaders' Review and Decision on the Implementation of the Five-Point Consensus¹²

In view of the fact that ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus (5PC) has failed short to meet demands

¹⁰ Aydin, Nury. "Myanmar Rejects Jurisdiction of ICC for Rohingya Muslim." [www.aa.com.tr](http://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/myanmar-rejects-jurisdiction-of-icc-for-rohingya-muslim/1648020), Nov. 17AD, www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/myanmar-rejects-jurisdiction-of-icc-for-rohingya-muslim/1648020.

¹¹ "Financial Sanctions, Myanmar." GOV.UK, www.gov.uk/government/publications/financial-sanctions-burma.

¹² "FINAL-ASEAN-LEADERS-REVIEW-AND-DECISION-ON-THE-IMPLEMENTATION-OF-THE-5PC-1.pdf" <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/01>.

with regard to the crisis in Myanmar, as observed by the Human Rights Watch and other organizations, the ASEAN countries' leaders gathered on 5 September 2023 in Jakarta, Indonesia to review the implementation of the 5PC. The leaders agreed, among other things, that the 5PC should continue to serve as the main framework for resolving the political crisis in Myanmar. They also introduced a few provisions to facilitate the implementation process, such as cooperating with all relevant stakeholders in Myanmar, increasing humanitarian aid with additional funding from outside partners, and bolstering international cooperation on the issue.

EU-ASEAN Commemorative Summit in December 2022

The EU-ASEAN Commemorative Summit, which took place on December 14, 2022, reaffirmed the two organizations' long-standing diplomatic ties while simultaneously serving as the first-ever summit between the leaders of the member countries. With regard to the situation in Myanmar the EU pledged to back ASEAN's efforts towards establishing peace in Myanmar. A case-in-point is ASEAN's five point consensus which both organizations are currently working upon, with the aim of facilitating a peaceful solution to the ongoing crisis.

Possible Solutions

Sub-topic 1: Assessing the humanitarian consequences of post-coup tactics implemented by the junta

It is an indisputable fact that the people of Myanmar are suffering from severe human rights violations as a result of the country's ongoing uprisings and violence. Nevertheless, every person's human rights should be guaranteed. Working with the private sector, Member States could prevent the military from receiving funding that could be used for crimes against international law, including violating human rights. Another solution could be introducing measures (such as an arms embargo) to stop the flow of weapons within the nation, which are essentially triggering further conflicts. It is also recommended that the Security Council keep up its support for accountability and documentation efforts, and consider referring the situation in Myanmar to the International Criminal Court.

Sub-topic 2: Discussing the impact of ethnic diversity on conflict

Considering that ethnic diversity in Myanmar has led to a conflict between ethnic groups fighting for greater independence and the military, solutions to resolve this conflict should be developed. When it comes to the Rohingya crisis, the international community shall introduce measures to provide relief to the targeted persons in the aftermath of the crisis. To be more precise, it will be made sure that Rohingya in Bangladesh, Myanmar, and other places have access to enough food, medicine, and housing. Countries should also consider granting asylum to Rohingya victims of human rights violations. The underrepresentation of ethnic groups in the government is an issue that still needs to be resolved.

Including ethnic armed groups in the social structure (such as the security system) can also be a long-term, successful way to lower violence and promote stability.

Sub-topic 3: Examining the role of the military in the political landscape and transition to civilian rule

It goes without saying that the role of the military in Myanmar shall be restricted with the aim of achieving long-term peace and stability in the region. One way to do that would be to make sure the military isn't provided with any direct or indirect supplies of weapons, ammunition, military vehicles and equipment etc. When it comes to the long awaited democratic reforms, the Security Council ought to work toward holding the multiparty elections as soon as possible, putting an end to the "state of emergency" declared by the military and guaranteeing a fair and trouble-free election process.

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