

ASEAN: Withdraw Invite to Myanmar Junta Leader

Southeast Asian Leaders Should Press for Return to Democratic Rule



State Administrative Council Chairman and Commander-in-Chief Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing makes a televised statement in Naypyitaw, Myanmar, February 11, 2021. © 2021 Tatmadaw True Information Team Facebook page via AP

(Jakarta) – The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) should immediately withdraw its invitation to [Myanmar](#)’s junta leader, Sr. Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, to [attend its upcoming summit](#), Human Rights Watch said today. ASEAN has scheduled an emergency meeting in Jakarta, Indonesia, on April 24, 2021, to discuss the crisis in Myanmar.

ASEAN’s inclusion of Min Aung Hlaing lends unwarranted legitimacy to the junta’s State Administrative Council over Myanmar’s democratically elected government, which the military overthrew in a coup on February 1. Before and since the coup, the United States, United Kingdom, and European Union have imposed financial and travel sanctions on Min Aung Hlaing for his involvement in grave human rights violations as military commander-in-chief.

“Min Aung Hlaing, who faces international sanctions for his role in military atrocities and the brutal crackdown on pro-democracy protesters, should not be welcomed at an intergovernmental gathering to address a crisis he created,” said [Brad Adams](#), Asia director at Human Rights Watch. “ASEAN members should instead take this opportunity to impose targeted, economic sanctions on junta leaders and on

businesses that fund the junta, and press the junta to release political detainees, end abuses, and restore the country's democratically elected government.”

On November 8, 2020, Myanmar's voters overwhelmingly elected members of the National League for Democracy (NLD), headed by Aung San Suu Kyi, to the national parliament. The NLD secured 83 percent of the contested seats. Myanmar's military, the Tatmadaw, claimed that the election was marred by massive fraud but has produced no credible evidence to substantiate that charge. Both domestic and international election monitoring organizations found the elections credible and rejected the Tatmadaw's unsubstantiated claims.

Myanmar's generals refused to accept the massive electoral defeat of the military-linked Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) and acted to deprive Myanmar's people of their right to choose their government, a right enshrined in international law. Early on February 1, the day that the new parliament was to sit for the first time, the military arrested and detained President Win Myint and State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, along with scores of other NLD ministers, members of parliament, and regional administrators.

The state security forces have arbitrarily arrested numerous local NLD officials, at least two of whom have been tortured to death in detention. The authorities have also arrested commissioners of the national Union Election Commission and many of its state and regional offices.

[Malaysia](#) and [Indonesia](#) have publicly expressed concern about the coup, and [Singapore](#) and the [Philippines](#) have urged the Myanmar security forces to exercise restraint. However, ASEAN as a group has done little more than call on [“all parties”](#) to refrain from violence and to seek a peaceful solution through “constructive dialogue.”

This call ignores the reality that the violence has overwhelmingly been committed by state security forces against peaceful protesters, and the State Administrative Council has declared unlawful two bodies that would be likely parties to any dialogue. On March 21, the SAC declared the [Committee Representing the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw](#), a group representing elected lawmakers, an “unlawful association.” On April 20, the SAC issued the same declaration for the recently formed [National Unity Government](#), established by opponents to the coup.

Ongoing nationwide protests organized by the national Civil Disobedience Movement have demonstrated widespread opposition to rule by the military, which has governed the country for most of the past 60 years. The junta's response to the largely peaceful protests has been increasingly brutal. Since the coup, security forces have [killed over 700 people](#), including at least 45 children as young as five, and detained an estimated 3,200 activists, journalists, civil servants, and politicians. Hundreds have been [forcibly disappeared](#), which may amount to crimes against humanity.

Over the past weeks, the military has demonstrated the callous disregard for human life that has driven its strategy for decades. In video footage from cities and towns across the country, soldiers can be seen shooting down children, [brutally beating](#) medical aid workers, and [firing shotguns](#) into crowds of peacefully protesting doctors. In the city of Bago on April 9, military and police used grenades against

barricades erected by protesters, killing scores of people.

The State Administrative Council has also ordered the shutdown of mobile data and public Wi-Fi connections, resulting in the shutdown of much of the country's internet, and placed areas of the country under martial law. In these areas, protesters, other opponents of military rule, and journalists face trials in [closed military courts](#) under unfair trial procedures, with no right to appeal. Under the council [order](#), those convicted by military courts may be sentenced to death or hard labor for unlimited periods of time. Since the declaration of martial law, military tribunals have sentenced at least 19 people [to death](#).

“ASEAN should be playing a constructive role in resolving Myanmar's crisis, not providing a podium to the general most responsible for creating it,” Adams said. “ASEAN should make clear that it stands with Myanmar's democratically elected government and will demand accountability from Min Aung Hlaing and other junta leaders responsible for the deaths of hundreds protesting for democracy.”