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Position on International Humanitarian Assistance in Myanmar/Burma

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Urgent call for responsible and ethical humanitarian assistance

The NUG calls for rapid and expanded humanitarian assistance to save the lives of all people in Myanmar. The recent military coup and ongoing atrocity crimes committed by the junta have yet again plunged our people into a complex political and humanitarian emergency.

The NUG's humanitarian policy is led by the needs of our people on the ground. These needs are acute, and are the direct result of the unlawful actions of the military. Since 1 February 2021, the military has killed more than 900 individuals, including many children; it has unlawfully detained thousands, subjecting many to torture; and it has precipitated a banking crisis and rising food insecurity, with the World Food Program estimating that an additional 3.4 million people will now go hungry. This adds to the military's decades of misrule and criminal behavior, which are the reason why Myanmar has required such high levels of international assistance. More than half a million people are now internally displaced.

People across Myanmar require urgent assistance. The military is ill-equipped to manage the economy and meet the needs of our people. This same military is impeding access and recourse for life-saving humanitarian assistance to the people of Myanmar. The military continues to target the general public as well as healthcare and humanitarian workers.

Humanitarian assistance should prioritize the immediate needs currently called for by communities. There are serious needs across all sectors. We echo calls for an emphasis on basic needs: food, water, medicine, and shelter, and/or direct financial support.

The NUG respects and supports the basic values of humanity and impartiality in humanitarian aid, which seek to protect life and health, and ensure respect for human beings on the basis of need alone. The NUG and the people of Myanmar are struggling to free our country from military dictatorship and establish a peaceful federal democratic union. As such, we expect humanitarian agencies to respect the fundamental rights of Myanmar's citizens to determine their own political future, and to recognize and support us as we do so.

The NUG also calls for all international humanitarian actors to agree to certain guiding principles to ensure that their activities do as much good as possible and avoid the risk of benefiting the military in its campaign to control the country through mass violence.

Goal

The NUG calls on all international humanitarian aid to be provided in a way that meets the needs of people most in need and is rooted in a localization approach that respects the people's democratic right to organize the delivery of their own relief.

Guiding Principles

1. International humanitarian assistance should be provided to all those in need, without discrimination and be designed to reach the specific needs of the most vulnerable.
2. International assistance must reflect the needs and will of the local public.
3. International humanitarian assistance programs must be designed and implemented to ensure they are not used to promote or benefit the political or financial interests of the military junta.
4. International humanitarian assistance should be coordinated with and empower existing governance structures supported by the people in all parts of Myanmar, including NUG-aligned administrative bodies and CSOs/CBOs in ethnic-administered areas, for a localized humanitarian response to needs on the ground.

Principles for international humanitarian assistance in Myanmar/Burma:

Strong principles and conditions are required to ensure that humanitarian work does not in practice serve the harmful interests of the military. Assistance must reach those most in need and must not in any way legitimize the junta that is the cause of the people's suffering.

We urge international humanitarian actors to collectively agree to the following principles when considering the provision of assistance to areas controlled by the junta:

1. Avoid substitution policies or undermining the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM)

The people of Myanmar are using their agency to peacefully oppose the unjust military coup. This involves making difficult sacrifices, including not participating in the military administration. The people do not want international actors to undermine this peaceful resistance strategy. Respect their decisions. It would be unethical to substitute international provision of services, such as healthcare, education, or others, where the CDM is actively choosing to not provide these services through the military administration.

Instead, resources should be provided directly to local actors who can flexibly and creatively provide these services in ways that do not legitimize or otherwise support the military junta. By resourcing established civil society organizations and ethnic administrations, depending on the location and including to provide services through CDM professionals, international assistance can help ensure that needs are met without causing greater harm.

Ensure that support for COVID vaccinations is not used as a weapon against people participating in the CDM or otherwise manipulated for the benefit of the junta. Vaccination

support should be directed, on the basis of medical need, through providers that are not controlled by or linked to the military. The military should not determine who receives vaccines or what parts of the country are eligible. Vaccines must also be provided from neighboring countries to areas that can be reached without the involvement of junta authorities.

2. Do not legitimize the military junta

International actors should not hold meetings or attend ceremonies that may be used as propaganda by the junta. Significant portions of the country are not under military control, and assistance should be provided to these areas immediately without junta involvement.

Under no circumstances should support be provided to the junta's ministries or facilities. No assistance should enable the expansion of the junta's administrative control. Doing so would not be a neutral act.

All international actors should engage with the NUG.

3. Do not enable the military junta to benefit financially

International humanitarian actors must ensure that they take all necessary measures to ensure that the military junta does not benefit materially from any humanitarian activities. This includes not paying any taxes, import tariffs, fees, or otherwise transferring any funds to the junta or entities under its control. Do not allow any funds or assets to flow through the junta's administrative apparatus or any linked entities. Do not use any financial institutions linked to the junta. Conduct rigorous due diligence to ensure that entities being funded are not linked to the junta.

4. Ensure independent access to all populations, as per international norms

Any arrangements to provide assistance within the country should not be limited by agreements with the military based on geography or beneficiaries. Do not agree to any restrictions or requirements for military permission to deliver assistance to people who need it. Work with neighboring countries to increase access to all locations and people.

Ensure that the Myanmar military will not accompany any transport or delivery of humanitarian assistance. Without this guarantee, such deliveries will put civilians at greater risk. Ensure proper data protections, and do not share information with the military or its administration.

5. Commit to flexible, adaptable, and localized provisions of assistance, to the fullest extent possible

The most effective approaches to providing humanitarian assistance will focus on working through local partners and using their expertise. Ensure that provision of humanitarian assistance is designed and managed by local CSOs and CBOs, to the utmost extent possible. Commit to flexible and adaptable approaches. Do not require that local partners be registered or have bank accounts in their own names. Large aid providers will be necessary in certain situations and must ensure that they do not disrupt the work of local networks. Support flexible approaches to financial transfers. Avoid unnecessarily burdensome administrative requirements. Commit to cross-border assistance, which should be managed by offices and personnel based outside Myanmar.

Have plans in place to cease or shift operations if guiding principles cannot be adhered to. If the regime blocks or manipulates any assistance, coordinate with NUG to find alternative means of delivery.

Recommendations for cross-border international assistance

International organizations should commit to providing cross-border assistance (across all borders), which is urgently needed. This can be delivered via experienced and capable NGOs, CSOs/CBOs, and ethnic administrations and service providers. These existing organizations have a long history of working cross-border and with international donors and organizations. Decentralized and localized cross-border aid is appropriate for our emerging federal democratic union and can reduce future conflicts.

1. Humanitarian aid programs should be designed, managed and implemented by local ethnic civil society service providers. The aid programs, including capacity building programs, must be managed by local people.
2. When providing humanitarian assistance in the administrative areas of EAOs, the humanitarian aid policies of respective EAOs must be followed.
3. Humanitarian agencies should commit to adaptable and localized provisions of assistance and flexible funding.

Engagement with the NUG

The NUG invites all humanitarian organizations to directly engage with the NUG Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management and other relevant Ministries to discuss the coordination and facilitation of humanitarian assistance.

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