



Diplomacy Training Program

Myanmar Diaspora, Human Rights Advocacy, Capacity Building Program

17 November 2021

It is a true pleasure to join you this evening to mark the opening of the Myanmar Diaspora, Human Rights Advocacy, Capacity Building Program. I have been involved in organising similar training courses for Burmese activists in Thailand. As a facilitator and co-organizer of these trainings, I was very impressed with the DTP program and, of course, I am a great fan of Mr. José Ramos-Horta. We shared the same vision and mission for human rights and for democracy. I take great pride in now addressing a DTP course as the National Unity Government's (NUG) Minister of Human Rights. Some of you are joining us from inside Myanmar, where you continue to fight for freedom, rights and democracy at great personal risk. This takes tremendous courage and I thank you for your commitment to our people and to our nation. As of today, at least 1,260 of our people, including children, have been killed by the military junta. Another 10,143 have been arrested, while 7,251 remain in detention subject to torture, disappearances and sexual violence. Another 65 people have been sentenced to death by military tribunals. Senior United Nations officials, including the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Special Rapporteur on Myanmar have held the military responsible for a human rights catastrophe. They have also said that the military's atrocities likely comprise crimes against humanity and war crimes. This is because their attacks are deliberate, widespread and systematic, target civilians, and are conducted in the full knowledge of the junta leadership.

To repeat, these crimes include murder, rape, severe deprivation of physical liberty, and enforced disappearances. Tragically, for so many in Myanmar, the fight for human rights has come at the cost of their lives or freedom. My own story goes back to 1988 and that revolution of our generation. The military's atrocities drove us into the jungles and then, just as now, the youth were forced to take up arms to fight for their survival. For many years I was exiled from our homeland, as I am again now. And just as then, I remain committed to the overthrow of the military. It was in the jungle camps that I first grasped the true meaning of human rights. At the 1988 protests, we would shout for democracy, shout for human rights, but I did not yet have a true sense of what these things were. Out of a hunger for knowledge, we set up a "Jungle University" in our camp that was filled with donated books. Here I found a copy of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and it was unlike anything I had read. It spoke of equality and it challenged discrimination. Amongst all the suffering and violations that I saw around me, human rights finally made sense. I began to collect people's stories and to document their experiences to share with the world. To shine light on the military's crimes against its own people. As this effort grew, I got the opportunity to study at Columbia University and, from there, I started the Human Rights Education Institute of Burma (HREIB). Our mission at HREIB was to share knowledge, to teach human rights in meaningful ways, and to equip future generations to keep the world aware of the people's struggle. Over the years, we trained thousands of participants. Today, we all face a new struggle. We are part of a new Spring Revolution. Our country and our people are suffering terribly. We must rebuild our nation. Each of us has been given the gift of education and opportunity. This DTP course is a new opportunity, and with that comes responsibility: a responsibility to do all you can with this new knowledge in service to our country and to all those denied such opportunities. We must never stop

learning, also it is important that we must never stop working for Myanmar. This Program also comes at an exceptionally important time. I express my gratitude to the DTP for generously holding it, and to the NUG Representative Office in Australia, led by Dr. Tun Aung Shwe, for its extraordinary efforts in support. Myanmar needs a new generation of human rights defenders and advocates, and that is what this course will equip you to be. For our part, the NUG remains committed to bringing the military junta's crimes to the world's attention and to pursuing accountability. We are engaging with the very bodies that you will learn about – the UN Security Council, the General Assembly, and the Human Rights Council – as we fight for recognition as the legitimate representative of the people, and as we urge the international community to take desperately needed action against the criminal military junta. In closing, I wish you a very successful course and I thank you again for your leadership, for your courage, and for your service to the Myanmar people.

Thank you very much.