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Dr. Sasa's Message on the 47th Anniversary of the Hanging of Myanmar's Student Leader, Salai Tin Maung Oo, for Anti-Military Dictatorship on June 26, 1976:

26 June 2023

Salai Tin Maung Oo's famous saying was, "They can kill my body but not my beliefs."

On this day in 1976, Salai Tin Maung Oo, a 25-year-old student leader, was brutally executed by hanging in Insein Prison. His execution marked one of the darkest chapters in Myanmar's struggle for inclusive federal democracy. Salai Tin Maung Oo's only "crime" was expressing his belief in federal democracy and his opposition to genocidal military dictatorships. He shared famous proverbs and wisdom that resonated with the people of Myanmar who sought freedom and federal democracy. Born on June 11, 1951, in Taungoo, Myanmar, Salai Tin Maung Oo was a beacon of hope for many during a challenging period in Myanmar's history.

At the young age of 11, Salai Tin Maung Oo witnessed the coup that took place in 1962, marking the beginning of a tumultuous era in his country. At the age of 21, Salai Tin Maung Oo was unlawfully arrested by genocidal military general Ne Win on December 5, 1972, for advocating federal democratic principles. After enduring brutal conditions, he was released from prison on January 3, 1974. He played a significant role in advocating for the use of "Salai" before Chin male names and "Mai" before Chin female names for the Chin people of Myanmar.

During the Burma crisis in 1974, known as U Thant's crisis, Salai Tin Maung Oo emerged as a prominent figure at the age of 23. U Thant, a Burmese diplomat, served as the third Secretary-General of the United Nations from 1961 to 1971. Salai Tin Maung Oo, an ethnic Chin zoological student at the University of Yangon, participated in student movements and labor strikes against military rule. He gained recognition in 1974 when students protested against brutal military dictator Ne Win's refusal to grant a state funeral to former United Nations secretary-general U Thant, who had passed away that year.

Tragically, on March 19, 1976, Salai Tin Maung Oo was unjustly rearrested along with his father, U Mya Din, his brother, Salai Hla Swe, and his sister, Mai Po Po, who actively participated in the struggle for freedom and federal democracy by the brutal military dictator Ne Win due to his unwavering struggle for freedom and federal democracy. He was sentenced to death. The brutal dictator offered him a chance to reduce his sentence if he expressed remorse and apologized for opposing military dictatorship. However, Salai Tin Maung Oo famously refused, stating, "I will never bow down before brutal military dictators. You can only kill my body, but you cannot kill my beliefs and hope." Consequently, he was executed by Ne Win on June 26, 1976. Before his execution, Salai Tin Maung Oo uttered his famous last words: "If I do not die quickly as planned by the execution of hanging, then I have defeated you dictators." He bravely prolonged his last breath as a symbol of his final struggle for Myanmar's freedom and federal democracy. His courageous spirit represented the true essence of the brave people of Myanmar. Salai Tin Maung Oo remains the only student known to have been hanged in the history of Myanmar. His opposition to military dictatorship has had a lasting impact on subsequent generations of students.

After 47 years, the courageous people of Myanmar continue to fight for their freedom and federal democracy, which brutal military dictators have suppressed by executing pro-democracy leaders. Just 12 months ago, four pro-democracy leaders, activists, and elected officials—Ko Jimmy, Phyo Zeya Thaw, Hla Myo Aung, and Aung Thura Zaw—were brutally executed by the genocidal military junta. Their only "crime" was exercising their fundamental freedoms. Over the past 27 months, the entire population of Myanmar has endured unimaginable suffering. The genocidal military junta has escalated attacks on civilians, killing more than 4,000 and unjustly arresting more than 23,000 civilians, including State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and President U Win Myint, and several hundred children. They have also destroyed more than 67,000 homes, including hospitals, schools, churches, and monasteries. Hundreds of airstrikes and dozens of massacres have been reported, and the Chin State, Salai Tin Maung Oo's ethnic region, has faced displacement and persecution. Tragically, approximately 30% of the Chin State's population has been uprooted by the military's brutal actions. Many Chin people have lost their lives, and entire towns and villages, like Thantlang Town, have been wiped out. Adding to the ongoing crisis, Cyclone Mocha devastated Rakhine State and Chin State last month, leaving an additional 5 million people in desperate need of life-saving assistance. The combination of the COVID-19 pandemic, the military coup, and the cyclone has plunged Myanmar into unspeakable pain, suffering, death, and destruction.

The brutal genocidal military junta has worsened the situation by blocking humanitarian aid and using starvation, hunger, pain, and suffering as weapons through their evil "four cuts" policies. Even before the recent cyclone, the humanitarian situation in Myanmar was dire, with approximately 18 million people, including 5 million children, in desperate need of life-saving aid. Additionally, nearly 2 million people were displaced, and 48 million individuals lived at or below the poverty line. Immediate international intervention is crucial to address this crisis.

Despite these atrocities and consecutive crises, the spirit of freedom that Salai Tin Maung Oo embodied decades ago still lives within the 54 million people of Myanmar. The brave people of Myanmar have made their unwavering decision clear—they will never give up or bow down before genocidal military dictators. The future they envision is a shining beacon of federal democracy that promotes, protects, and respects the freedom and rights of all people in Myanmar, regardless of their race, religion, culture, language, background, or ethnicity. The question is not if justice will triumph over injustice but when. The brave people of Myanmar will overcome the genocidal military junta once and for all. The military dictatorship will fade away, just as darkness fades before light. Brutal genocidal military dictatorships belong to the past, while freedom and federal democracy represent the future of Myanmar.

The brave people of Myanmar are fighting for freedom and federal democracy with all their might and every means available to them. They are willing to sacrifice their lives for freedom and democracy, just as Salai Tin Maung Oo did before them. We are not asking foreign soldiers to intervene in Myanmar, but we are once again calling upon the international community to impose tougher, coordinated, and targeted sanctions on individuals responsible for human rights violations in Myanmar. This includes military officials, associates, and their financial networks, such as MOGE. Additionally, countries and companies directly supporting the brutal genocidal military junta should face consequences. We urge the international community to advocate for the immediate referral of Myanmar's situation to the international

Criminal Court (ICC) and to support the representation of Myanmar by the National Unity Government of Myanmar (NUG) at the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

We call upon the international community, especially Myanmar's neighboring countries, to support the NUG, NUCC, CRPH, EROs, pro-democracy movements, civil society organizations, human rights defenders, and independent media in Myanmar. They tirelessly work to promote human rights, federal democracy, and accountability. Most urgently, we need the borders to be open for humanitarian corridors, pressuring genocidal military generals to respect human rights, release all political prisoners, and restore federal democratic governance to achieve peace, prosperity, and stability not only in Myanmar but also in the entire region.

It is crucial for the international community and Myanmar's neighboring countries to do everything in their power to end the crisis in Myanmar for the good and interest of all regions. By increasing pressure on the foot soldiers of the Tatmadaw to lay down their arms and by rallying around the pro-democracy movement and the people of Myanmar, immediately engage and officially recognize the National Unity Government of Myanmar (NUG).

Similar measures and means, as seen in Ukraine, should be employed to help Myanmar achieve its freedom and put an end to this crisis, pain, and suffering that have persisted for far too long in the Asia-Pacific region. Furthermore, we must acknowledge the significance of the NDAA Burma Act of the USA, the UN Security Council Resolution on Myanmar, and the ASEAN five-point consensus on Myanmar. Supporting the implementation of these measures on the ground in Myanmar will play a vital role in addressing the humanitarian crisis, human rights crisis, restoring democracy, and establishing peace, stability, and justice.

The 47th Anniversary of the brutal execution of Myanmar student leader Salai Tin Maung Oo, coupled with the deepening situation in Myanmar, demands immediate attention and a robust international response. By taking decisive actions and standing up for human rights, freedom, and federal democracy, we can put an end to the crimes against humanity in Myanmar, advance justice, promote human dignity, and restore democracy in Myanmar.

May the dream of Salai Tin Maung Oo come true soon!

May God bless Myanmar!

Sincerely,

Dr. Sasa
Union Minister
Ministry of International Cooperation
The National Unity Government
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