



**The Hon Scott Morrison MP**

Prime Minister  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

31 August 2021

**Re: Australia's response to the crisis in Myanmar**

Dear Prime Minister,

We, current and former parliamentarians from Southeast Asia, are writing to you to urge the Australian Government to take urgent action to support human rights and democracy in Myanmar, and to express our deepest concern at Australia's stated policy to [wait on action by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations](#) (ASEAN).

As elected representatives of the people of the ASEAN region, we would like to respectfully urge you to anchor Australia's response to the military coup in Myanmar to what its people have been demanding, and what other democratic nations have done, not ASEAN's lack of action.

More than six months since the military coup and the subsequent campaign of violence unleashed by the Myanmar Army, ASEAN has failed in its responsibility to the people of Myanmar, and the broader international community.

Despite an initial meeting on 24 April 2021, during which ASEAN Member States reached a Five-Point Consensus, little further action has taken place. It took four months for ASEAN to reach an agreement to appoint on 2 August the second Foreign Minister of Brunei Darussalam, Erywan Yusof, as its Special Envoy.

We would, however, welcome with caution this appointment. It is important to keep in mind that the Minister, as the representative of ASEAN's Chair, has led the bloc's ineffective response so far, including a delegation to Myanmar in June, during which he not only met solely with the junta, but also pushed their narrative that elections could take place, even suggesting that ASEAN sends monitors. We are also concerned that the Minister of an absolute monarchy that does not abide by international human rights standards has been tasked with convincing a murderous army to respect these principles.

Furthermore, no humanitarian aid has been provided so far, and ASEAN is still yet to engage all relevant parties in Myanmar, in particular the National Unity Government.

ASEAN's actions even raise questions as to whose interests it is truly representing when it invites Myanmar Army representatives to its official meetings, granting them political and regional legitimacy, or works to water down a UN General Assembly Resolution calling for the prevention of arms sales to the Myanmar military.

Meanwhile, the situation in Myanmar continues to deteriorate. Both the [UN Special Rapporteur](#) on the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar and Human Rights Watch recently concluded that since the coup the Myanmar military has committed the [crimes against humanity](#) of murder, enforced disappearance, torture, rape and other sexual violence, severe deprivation of liberty, and other inhumane acts causing great suffering.

In recent weeks as Myanmar has witnessed a rapid spike in coronavirus cases, the junta has confiscated oxygen, and attacked healthcare workers and facilities, actions that risk turning a crisis into a disaster.

Yet, ASEAN's very own principles of non-interference and consensus-based decision making prevent the bloc from taking any meaningful steps towards an end of violence in Myanmar. Even its provisions of humanitarian aid, if it takes place, risks [further legitimizing the junta](#), and not reach those in need.

In that regard we would like to echo the findings of our fellow parliamentarians from Australia who in their recent [Inquiry into certain aspects of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Annual Report 2019-20 - Myanmar](#) noted that: *"there are complex relations within and between ASEAN nations, and that this led to concerns that ASEAN would not intervene decisively on the Myanmar crisis."*

ASEAN's limiting founding principles and division among its Member States have allowed Myanmar's military to stall the little efforts it has made so far and to use ASEAN as a shield to strengthen the junta's position regionally and internationally.

Therefore, we are writing to you to ask you bluntly, is this really what Australia wants to align its foreign policy with? Instead, we would like to ask you to be a regional partner to the people of Myanmar and the people of ASEAN, not the authoritarian leaders of our region, who are working together to protect themselves from scrutiny and accountability.

We believe that, given Australia's position in the region, strong democratic institutions, and its close ties with both ASEAN and democracies elsewhere in the world, it is perfectly placed to play a leading role in helping to put an end to the violence and support the desire of the people of Myanmar to live in a democracy that fully respects human rights of all.

That is why, while we call on your government to demand action by ASEAN, we urge you not to wait to follow the bloc's lead. Instead, as a starting point, Australia must urgently use its position to impose targeted sanctions on the generals leading the junta, and the economic entities they control, as recommended by the UN Special Rapporteur on Myanmar, implemented by Australia's key partners such as the EU, US, UK, and Canada, and most importantly requested by [the people of Myanmar](#).

In contrast to ASEAN's actions so far, we also call on your government to not legitimize the military junta's authority in any way, and instead follow the recommendations set out by [Australia's Parliament](#) by formally engaging with the democratically-elected representatives of Myanmar, including the Committee Representing the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) and the National Unity Government (NUG).

Yours faithfully,

**Signatories:**

1. Abel Pires da Silva (Current MP, Timor-Leste)
2. Ana Theresia "Risa" Hontiveros (Current MP, Philippines)
3. Andi Paris (Current MP, Indonesia)
4. Antonio De Sa Benevides (Current MP, Timor-Leste)
5. Aung Kyi Nyunt (Current MP, Myanmar)
6. Bencha Saengchantra (Current MP, Thailand)
7. Bobby Rizaldi (Current MP, Indonesia)
8. Botta Long (Former MP, Cambodia)
9. Braema Mathi (Former MP, Singapore)
10. Carlos Isagani Zarate (Current MP, Philippines)
11. Chamnan Chanruang (Former MP, Thailand)
12. Charles Santiago (Current MP, Malaysia)
13. Edcel Lagman (Current MP, Philippines)
14. Eng Chhai Eang (Former MP, Cambodia)
15. Eufemia Cullamat (Current MP, Philippines)
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17. France Castro (Current MP, Philippines)
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19. Jakkaphon Tangsuthitham (Current MP, Thailand)
20. Jose Christopher Belmonte (Current MP, Philippines)
21. Kasit Piromya (Former MP, Thailand)
22. Kasthuri Patto (Current MP, Malaysia)
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