

# International pressure mounts on military junta in Myanmar

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The political situation in Myanmar is getting worse after the military coup two weeks back. While the military junta has gone ahead with several draconian measures, hundreds of thousands of people have taken part in protests across the country. The latest in the series of such measures is the military regime's warning that the protesters would face up to 20 years imprisonment if they come in the way of the martial law regime. Such prolonged sentences will also be imposed on those who are engaged in "inciting hatred or contempt" against the military. The army announced the new legal measures even as the armoured vehicles roam around the streets of several cities in Myanmar ([Myanmar Times, 15 February 2021](#)). Yet, the protesters continue to demand the restoration of democracy and release of the elected leaders, including Aung San Suu Kyi.

Meanwhile, the United Nations officials have called on the military junta to ensure that the right of peaceful assembly is "fully respected" and demonstrators are "not subjected to reprisals." The UN spokesman, Stéphane Dujarric, said that the reports of "continued violence, intimidation and harassment by security personnel are unacceptable." Likewise, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Thomas Andrews, characterised the situation as amounting to a declaration of "war on the people of Myanmar" pointing to the late-night raids, mounting arrests, human rights violations, internet shutdown etc. He warned that these generals will be "held accountable" for such harsh measures ([UN News, 14 February 2021](#)).

The UN Secretary-General António Guterres said that the "ongoing arrests of political leaders, government officials, members of civil society and media representatives are deeply concerning. Mr. Guterres upheld that the information and communication "must not be disrupted" to ensure the right to freedom of expression, which includes access to information. He reiterated his call on Member

States “collectively and bilaterally” to exercise influence regarding the protection of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of the people of Myanmar and reaffirmed the Organization’s “unwavering support” to their pursuit of “democracy, peace, human rights and the rule of law” ([Ibid](#)).

According to the Deputy UN High Commissioner for Human Rights the “current crisis in the country is a profound setback after a decade of hard-won democratic gains.” She told a special session of the Human Rights Council that for over 20 years, “successive High Commissioners and many eminent experts have briefed this Council, and its predecessor, on violations committed by the country’s military,” adding that a lack of action has “emboldened military leaders and contributed to this present crisis.” She also pointed to the “indiscriminate use of lethal, or less than lethal weapons, against peaceful protesters” ([Ibid](#)).

Earlier, in a comprehensive account of the situation after the military takeover on 1 February, Special Rapporteur Andrews outlined the circumstances leading to the military coup. He began by emphasising that the very act of convening the special session underlined the seriousness with which the HRC viewed “what can aptly be described as an outrageous and illegal act – a coup d’état of a duly elected government and its duly elected leaders.”

There are also reports of use of live ammunition and lethal force against demonstrators, increased arbitrary detentions and intimidation, threat to the media, and instituting of regulations and laws that systematically strip away rights, access to information and privacy. Reports say that hundreds of government officials and members of civil society, which included the State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, President Win Myint, and members of the Union Election Commission, have been detained.

The UN Special Rapporteur called on the HRC to urge the Security Council “to consider all of the options it has previously used to deal with gross human rights violations” including sanctions, arms embargos, and travel bans, and calling for judicial action at the International Criminal Court (ICC) or ad hoc tribunals. Meanwhile, the Deputy High Commissioner al-Nashif pointed out that the crisis in Myanmar was “born of impunity” with long-standing lack of civilian control over the military and its disproportionate influence in the country’s political and economic institutions. She said: “For over 20 years, successive High Commissioners and many eminent experts have briefed this Council, and its predecessor, on violations committed by the country’s military, which include some of the most serious crimes alleged under international law,” adding that “lack of action to address them has emboldened military leaders and contributed to this present crisis.” She said that there was explicit warning by the HRC’s Fact Finding Mission in 2018, which said that “the Tatmadaw (Myanmar’s military) is the greatest impediment to Myanmar’s development as a modern democratic nation.

Even as the political situation getting deteriorated, the UN Human Rights Council adopted a resolution calling for the restoration of the democratically elected Government in Myanmar, the immediate and unconditional release of all persons arbitrarily detained, and the lifting of the state of emergency. In the resolution, the 47-member world body “strongly deplored” the detentions and the suspension of mandates of members of all parliaments, and “strongly urged” the Myanmar security forces to exercise utmost restraint and to refrain from any use of violence against peaceful protesters, and to respect the right to peaceful assembly ([UN General Assembly 2021](#)). The HRC also called for the “immediate and permanent lifting of restrictions” on the Internet, telecommunication and social media, and the avoidance of any further violations of the rights to freedom of opinion and expression, including the freedom to seek, receive and impart

information, in accordance with international human rights law ([Ibid](#)).

The HRC also voiced concern at the continuing reports of serious human rights violations and abuses in Myanmar, including against Rohingya Muslims and other minorities. It also stressed the need to address the root causes of the crisis in Rakhine state and to create the conditions necessary for the safe, voluntary, sustainable and dignified return of displaced persons, including of Rohingya Muslims and other minorities. As [K.M. Seethi](#) pointed out in his GSC article, “the Rohingyas in the Rakhine State are the most distressed minority in the country who were among the 2.6 million ethnic-minorities having been excluded from voting in the last November elections” ([Seethi 2021](#)).

## References

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