

***Written evidence from Guy Banim, Robert Cooper, Michael Doyle, Seán Farren, and Charles Petrie (MYA0029)***

We are members of a group of friends of Myanmar. Each has personal experience of greater or lesser depth, through the United Nations or other organisations.

- Guy Banim, conducted evaluation of international support to the Myanmar Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee;
- Robert Cooper, former UK and EU diplomat, was special adviser on Myanmar for EU High Representative,
- Michael Doyle, former EU diplomat with twenty years of experience in international crisis response;
- Seán Farren, former MLA and Executive Minister, Northern Ireland Assembly; Chair of the Hume Foundation;
- Charles Petrie, former UN Assistant Secretary General, with more than eight years experience in Myanmar;

Our comments below are responses to the questions posed by the Committee.

1. How can the Government improve its response?

The starting point for a response is to understand that the situation in Myanmar is new. In launching the coup on 1<sup>st</sup> of February the Commander in Chief failed to take account of the transformation of Myanmar that ten years of relative democracy and freedom has brought. A new generation has mobilised in a new fashion: civil servants, and workers have gone on strike; Ethnic Armed Organisations have recruited, rearmed and taken a public posture in opposition to the *coup*. The banking system and the broader economy are on the verge of imploding; health and medical services are no longer able to cope and a countrywide health emergency is on the near horizon.

On the political level, the 1<sup>st</sup> of February coup has been equally transformative. A new political dynamic has emerged bridging the divide between the Bamar majority's focus on democracy and the other ethnicities' battle for a federal state.

No foreign government has found an effective way to engage with the Tatmadaw. ASEAN has proposed a five-point process that has yet to start; China has important interests that would be best protected by a stable, legitimate civilian government.

It is unlikely that any foreign power will intervene. The best advice for the UK Government would be not to revert to the 1990s and 2000s playbook but to look for policies and approaches that work with the new realities of Myanmar.

Anything that the British Government can do to ensure safe access to the internet - vital for organization of the opposition – would be of great help, while also allowing more accurate monitoring of the situation and tracking of human rights violations.

The situation is desperate, but also hopeful. The best that outsiders can do is to help keep people and hope alive.

## 2. What was the impact of the February sanctions?

Over the twenty years from 1990 to 2011, sanctions and isolation had a more limited impact on the regime in Myanmar than many of the Burma advocacy groups would like to make others believe. After the initial shock of their introduction, the regime reoriented their international focus, and used the sanctions to deflect criticism on the state of the economy. It was the general population that paid the price.

Further sanctions will not have a great impact in the short term. In the medium term they risk bringing further deterioration to the economy, accelerating the criminalisation of some sectors and the collapse of others. Many sectors of the economy are already under the control of cronies, warlords and international criminal networks. If the centre implodes as a result of the heavy-handed Tatmadaw response to the protests, forces will be unleashed that could be impossible to contain.

## 3. Justice and Redress?

The Justice system in Myanmar is poor; redress is unknown.

## 4. ASEAN?

ASEAN has not yet followed up its statement of 24 April. It has no machinery for joint action. A first step would be to appoint an envoy; but he or she would need to be a strong personality, and would need political and administrative support to achieve anything. ASEAN has a regional legitimacy and could be a nucleus for an international response.

## 5. UN action?

The UN has been largely absent though it has the capabilities and people, and could contribute much. The UN Secretary General should be encouraged urgently to come up with a comprehensive strategy and a resourced implementation plan. This could include the deployment of a joint ASEAN/UN observer mission, and humanitarian aid. Precedents for such special political missions include the joint Organisation of American States' / UN International Civilian Mission deployed to Haiti, while examples from Asia include the Aceh Monitoring Mission, the International Monitoring Team – Philippines, and the UN Mission Nepal.

## 6. What to do if socio-economic collapse reaches the point of no return

The Tatmadaw miscalculated when they staged the coup. The country is slowly falling apart. There will come a point when the deterioration of socio-economic conditions in the country will be such that, whoever emerges 'victorious', the task of rebuilding the country will be beyond their capacities. The international community will want to provide humanitarian assistance. It will be essential that humanitarian assistance is not framed as purely lifesaving. Local community structures need to be supported and populations protected.

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