

## **Written evidence submitted anonymously**

[Note: This evidence has been redacted by the Committee. Text in square brackets has been inserted where text has been redacted.]

### **Introduction**

I am a UK citizen, born in the UK. I grew up in England and was educated here (LLB Law (Hons), [university]) and am a qualified a solicitor (2007).

My parents were born in Burma and moved to England in their youth. My mother is half English and half Burmese. I have been to Burma many times and have family and friends there directly affected by the military coup, including two of my cousins who were arbitrarily arrested in March 2021 and remain imprisoned as political prisoners to date.

The current situation is a living hell for those in country being held hostage by the unelected military regime. For us on the outside, we are heartbroken and in grief bearing witness to terrorism against a whole nation.

I wholeheartedly plead the UK government to push the boundaries of its power and international relations to help the people of Myanmar at their greatest time of need. The country's suffering will only worsen if the military retains power. The people simply want to build their own lives and prosper in peace under a true democracy.

The people have shown incredible peaceful protest through the Civil Disobedience Movement and through their united efforts to support each other to maintain the resistance – financially, emotionally, through their own charitable donations - however the situation is rapidly deteriorating. The absence of fast, effective international support has left the people isolated and it is now a matter of pure survival for them, where just remaining alive is a privilege.

For the first time in Myanmar's history the majority of the population, including the ethnic minorities, are united by the common goal of eradicating military rule and creating a true, federal democracy. We cannot miss the opportunity to help them.

Myanmar as a democracy in South East Asia is the goal the UK must set - to have a democratically in the region and for global peace, security, respect for human rights and the environment. A future under a brutal dictatorship which has complete disregard for human life and international rules will be disastrous for the people of Myanmar and serve only to solidify global authoritarian power as the military cements its relations with other authoritarian nations.

### **My cousins' imprisonment**

In [date] 2021, two of my cousins and one of their wives were arbitrarily arrested by the police and detained at [prison] for three days. My cousin's wife was released on the fourth day however my two cousins were transferred to [prison], where they are currently being

held with no date for release, possibility of bail or visitation rights. They have been charged with s505A of the Penal Code. They are allowed a lawyer to represent them and are now in the process of a farcical court trial. The first three court hearing dates were cancelled on the day without notice – on two occasions because the prosecution failed to turn up. On the fourth court date, examination of the police witness commenced and now there are weekly court sessions for continuation of their trial. My cousin's wife has been able to speak to my cousins on a handful occasions via their lawyer, who in turn is only able to speak with my cousins on a court date. She has seen that my cousins have visibly lost a lot of weight.

She told me the conditions of the interrogation centre were poor. Although she was not physically harmed, others were. They had no beds or no bathrooms to wash. Males and females were held separately. She was kept with approximately 40 women. During her detainment, the police attempted to brainwash them that the military is doing what it is doing to protect the people. The General who released her said that compared to the whole population, "*hundreds of dead bodies is nothing*". This shows the military mentality - no hesitation to kill and human life means nothing. The General said he was releasing her because of his "sympathy" and asked her to persuade others to side with the military. Her release seems to be a method of the military to use her in this way. Since being released, she is terrified. The police appear to have tampered with her phone and she takes all precautions to safeguard her phone when using it in the event of a stop and search by the police or military to inspect phones for anti-coup activities. She goes regularly to [prison] to take supplies like toiletries, dry food, clean clothes to my cousins. She is resolved to be strong but the situation is causing her immense distress as well as depressing her. She and my cousin were only recently married and they were at the start of their life together.

My other family members are equally living in terror and scared to leave their homes for fear of being abducted, abused or killed. One of them described the ground situation as a "zombie apocalypse" but with the police and soldiers as the zombies. The mental and emotional impact is unrelenting and cannot be ignored as well as the urgent concern for their livelihoods and the future of the economy which is being devastated.

### **How can the UK Government improve its response?**

- a) Officially recognise the National Unity Government (NUG) and support its efforts to form a democratic government. NUG is Myanmar's greatest hope to overthrow the military. The military has the backing of China, Russia and ASEAN who will never support the people in their quest for democracy as this does not align with their own systems. The people need the backing of all democratic nations. By formally recognising NUG, it will empower the NUG and boost morale to the Myanmar people, as well as confirm the illegitimacy of the military regime. The UK government must, as a democratic nation, support the democracy movement. This is not, as the Chinese government say, a "democratic transition". This is an unequivocal illegal power grab by the military. Please imagine hypothetically if this happened in the UK, those remaining elected MPs in exile seeking to restore democracy would want the full support of other democratic nations.
- b) Impose a global arms embargo against the military;

- c) Increase targeted sanctions against all military businesses, connected businesses and persons;
- d) Impose a no fly zone to stop air strikes;
- e) Provide financial support to the Civil Disobedience Movement;
- f) Provide urgent aid to internally displaced persons (the current death count does not include the indirect deaths caused by the resulting humanitarian crisis or Covid-19 because the military coup disrupted the government's pandemic response);
- g) Refer the military to the International Criminal Court for crimes now being committed and for the genocide of the Rohingya;
- h) Support education – schools and universities have been closed already for 1 year because of Covid-19 and education is now jeopardised because of the coup;
- i) Support the independent media who are countering the military's propaganda and disinformation campaigns.

The UK Government should actively form as large an international alliance as possible to agree and implement all of the above, including ASEAN.

### **UN Security Council**

The UNSC's response is a failure. China and Russia, who do not govern their own countries in accordance with the UN Charter and Universal Declaration of Human Rights, should not be permanent members. Further, their manifest conflicts of interest in helping Myanmar return to democracy directly affects their ability to carry out their role as UNSC members. The UNSC is failing to achieve its purpose because of this and needs to be urgently reformed.

No matter whether a member state is a democratic or authoritarian government, what is at stake here is 54 million lives of people who have repeatedly asked for UN help.

Any UN member supporting the military in any way should be made to declare its links – financial interests, business dealings or otherwise to the military, and its vote should be discounted.

### **Arms Embargo and Sanctions**

A global arms embargo must be immediately imposed.

The same applies for global targeted sanctions to break the military's financial backbone, particularly for any new business or investments. We need sanctions on all military businesses, officials and related persons. Such sanctions must be imposed globally for maximum effect.

Organisations such as Justice for Myanmar are exposing the military's opaque dealings and hidden sources of income. Please work with them.

Regarding international companies continuing existing business in Myanmar, the benefit of them remaining in country must be balanced with the downside of them leaving. Two of my

relatives work for an international telecoms company in Myanmar which, commendably, has been outspoken against the internet restrictions. If the company pulls out, the resulting unemployment will be devastating. Is this risk greater than the tax that the company continues to be pay to the military? My cousin says it is. If they are unemployed, life will become much harder for them, particularly where they are also financially supporting CDM and donating their salaries to people in need on the ground. However, this telecoms company looks after its employees well and has always upheld that it does not agree with the internet restrictions. Each company should be assessed on its own merits and there should be open dialogue with them – balancing the help it provides to the people on the ground and the amount of money it is paying to the military. Funds should be redirected to escrow accounts or to NUG if needs be.

In the failure of achieving globally agreed sanctions or an arms embargo, any government, business or person in business with the military should be put on a watch list or sanction list as “dealing with a terrorist organisation”, because that is exactly what the military is. The circulation of tainted military money in our economy via unscrupulous parties who carry on dealing with the military should be stopped.

Strategies should be considered to crackdown on those circumventing sanctions to carry on doing business with the military.

## **ASEAN**

The ASEAN 5-point consensus has had zero impact. ASEAN should never have engaged with the military. There has been no cessation of violence or progress made. The glacial pace at which ASEAN is ineffective. ASEAN’s intentions to implement a strategy which is in alignment with the desire of the people are limited to its own values. ASEAN needs to take a much stronger stance and no longer placate or indulge the military as that method has evidently not worked. ASEAN should immediately remove Myanmar from its membership or engage with NUG. Any negotiations solely with the military are fruitless.

## **Justice**

The most urgent priority is for the military to stop its violence as well as humanitarian aid however legal justice, albeit a longer route, must still be pursued via the ICJ and the ICC. This will apply pressure to the regime.

The Gambia vs Myanmar case at the ICJ threatens the senior military figures’ dignified exit from politics if they are found guilty of the genocide of the Rohingya, however they must held accountable for the crimes committed.

## **Conclusion**

The people of Myanmar have lost hope of any kind of international help and in the ability of the UN or ASEAN. The UK Government, as a major democratic power, as the UNSC penholder, holds a key global position to help. If we do not, the UK will appear powerless otherwise to protect all the values and principles that a democratic nation stands for and that the UN is meant to uphold, not only in the battle for democracy in Myanmar but also for the protection of democracy worldwide.

I am thankful for the action the UK Government has already taken however now is the time to pull out all the stops for the people of Myanmar and for us all who value freedom, democracy and human rights. Please be the generation of leaders that saved Myanmar. Please be the leaders that stood up to authoritarian rule, for this generation and the next.