



Special Advisory Council for MYANMAR

UN on the brink of another failure in Myanmar

8 October 2021: The United Nations is in danger of repeating its past mistakes in Myanmar, warns the Special Advisory Council for Myanmar (SAC-M). Effective leadership and an appropriate strategy are desperately needed if the UN is to avoid contributing to the suffering caused by the illegal military junta.

Since February, military leader Min Aung Hlaing's violent assault on the people of Myanmar has driven the country into a state of acute crisis. During this unprecedented nation-wide emergency, the people of Myanmar feel they have been abandoned by the UN.

A lack of leadership from the Secretary-General and paralysis within the Security Council have added another eight months to years of UN failure in Myanmar. Recent comments by senior UN officials inaccurately suggested that the military has 'taken over' has an 'iron grip on power,' and presented the crisis as being the latest development in a protracted armed conflict. This misrepresents the situation and risks worsening the problem severely.

“The sheer level of violence being inflicted on the population by Min Aung Hlaing is a clear indication that he does not have a grip on anything. The junta is the source of the violence, and to deduce otherwise is a serious misinterpretation,” said Yanghee Lee, founding member of SAC-M. **“Misinterpretation leads to misrepresentation, misrepresentation leads to misunderstanding, and misunderstanding leads to mistakes.”**

This has been a persistent problem for the United Nations in Myanmar. The Rosenthal report on UN involvement in Myanmar from 2010-18 found systemic and structural failures that rendered the world body impotent in the face of atrocities against the Rohingya in Rakhine state in 2016 and 2017. These failures were noted throughout the UN's engagement, from the Secretary-General to the Resident Coordinator. They must not be repeated in the latest crisis instigated by the illegal junta.

SAC-M is gravely concerned that the same failed logic of trying to accommodate the military, in an effort to continue in-country programming and maintain a presence in Myanmar, is guiding a misrepresentation by the UN of the current crisis and the junta's role in it.

“There is clearly no military-led solution to the conflict in Myanmar, after an eight-month period of a failed post-coup attempt by Min Aung Hlaing and his brutal forces,” said Marzuki Darusman, founding member of SAC-M. **“The UN in the country is adrift and seemingly beholden to the military. It risks being perceived as allowing a creeping process of imposing a military solution on the people's democracy movement.”**

The UN in Myanmar needs an appropriate strategy for engaging with the junta for what it is – an armed actor employing terrorism, not a government.

Despite the severity of the trials confronting Myanmar and the significant number of UN agencies, funds and programmes present, the UN Country Team has been without a permanent Resident Coordinator for most of the past four years.

“A deeply unfortunate series of circumstances has led to a lack of effective UN leadership in Myanmar throughout the crisis,” said Chris Sidoti. **“The top UN position in Myanmar is now vacant again. This is unacceptable and must be rectified without delay. Myanmar needs a senior, well-experienced person as the next UN Resident Coordinator, selected after consultation with the National Unity Government and civil society.”**