



Special Advisory Council for MYANMAR

Humanitarian assistance alone is not a solution

12 November 2021: International humanitarian action for Myanmar, including provision of COVID-19 vaccinations, is a minimum response to the crisis, not a solution, and must not be leveraged by the illegal junta to reach a default political settlement, says the Special Advisory Council for Myanmar (SAC-M).

The United Nations (UN) Security Council issued a statement on Myanmar on Wednesday calling for full, safe and unhindered humanitarian access to people in need and for the full protection, safety and security of humanitarian and medical personnel. The Council also called for greater international support to ensure delivery and distribution of COVID-19 vaccinations.

The Security Council met amidst warnings that an offensive launched by the military junta in the northwest of Myanmar could out scale the genocidal atrocities committed by the same military against the Rohingya in 2017. The Council failed to even refer to northwest Myanmar, with stronger action blocked by Russia and China, who continue to supply the illegal junta with weapons and financial resources.

“The one thing even the Security Council can agree on is the need for international cooperation to improve the dire health and humanitarian situation in Myanmar,” said Yanghee Lee of SAC-M. **“Humanitarian assistance alone is not a solution to the crisis. The junta will also seek to leverage humanitarian assistance to reach a default settlement. An effective humanitarian response that empowers local actors is urgently needed.”**

Since the attempted coup in February, the junta's sustained, widespread and systematic attack on the civilian population has forced nearly three million people across Myanmar into urgent need of humanitarian assistance. The junta has weaponised Myanmar's devastating third wave of COVID-19, targeted medical professionals, occupied hospitals, forcibly displaced an estimated 250,000 people, blocked aid and destroyed food and medical supplies.

Local humanitarian and medical networks including ethnic service providers, community-based and civil society organisations, have been working to deliver assistance to people in need. The National Unity Government (NUG) has also established a COVID-19 task force to prevent, mitigate and control the spread of the virus.

However, in addition to facing daily attacks by junta forces, local actors are being hindered by weeks-long bureaucratic processes and onerous requirements placed on them by donors and international agencies resulting in more needless loss of life.

“The only way to meet the calls made by the Security Council this week is for the international community to honour their pledges to ensure localisation of humanitarian assistance,” said Marzuki Darusman of SAC-M. **“Relief aid must include reinforcement of the existing humanitarian and medical infrastructure that is in place already and operated by the NUG, civil society and various ethnic communities.”**

International donors including ASEAN, the EU, the UK, the US and UN agencies must partner with local actors and direct humanitarian aid through cross-border channels. A people-to-people approach of leveraging existing community networks is fast, adaptive and built on trust. This is essential, as the Myanmar military has a history of exploiting humanitarian crises of its own making for political gain. That was the case in the wake of Cyclone Nargis, on the back of which the military misled the international community into accepting its handling of the crisis giving it legitimacy for its continued control of the country. It must not be allowed to happen again.

“It is critical that humanitarian assistance does not embolden, legitimise or otherwise entrench the military junta — the source of the violence that has long enveloped Myanmar,” said Chris Sidoti of SAC-M. **“The junta is the cause of Myanmar's suffering. It is not a partner for the delivery of aid.”**

