



Special Advisory Council for — MYANMAR —

What Now, Hun Sen?

11 January, 2022

Myanmar's would-be dictator Min Aung Hlaing has once again shown himself to be unrepentant and unaccountable to anyone after meeting with Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen, says the Special Advisory Council for Myanmar (SAC-M). The meeting occurred while junta forces were launching airstrikes and intensifying offensives in ethnic areas and only two days before State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi received a further four-year prison sentence for bogus charges including possessing unlicensed walkie talkies and allegedly violating coronavirus protocols while campaigning.

Prime Minister Hun Sen undertook an ill-advised and contested visit to Naypyitaw to meet with Myanmar junta leader Min Aung Hlaing on 7 and 8 January 2022. The visit was condemned by the Myanmar people, Myanmar and Cambodian civil society and ASEAN parliamentarians, on the grounds that it would be instrumentalised by Min Aung Hlaing to seek legitimacy for his illegal junta. That is what happened.

Prime Minister Hun Sen failed to consult or engage with democratic leaders President Win Myint, State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, or other members of the National Unity Government. A joint statement issued after the visit by Prime Minister Hun Sen and Min Aung Hlaing did not once mention the cause of Myanmar's current suffering – Min Aung Hlaing's failed coup – and sought to deflect concern away from the nation-wide crisis to focus on the protracted civil wars between the military and Myanmar's ethnic nationalities.

"The joint statement issued by Prime Minister Hun Sen and Min Aung Hlaing is manifestly duplicitous, having been drafted with clear intent to stymie ASEAN efforts and mislead the international community as to the reality of the conflict in Myanmar," said Marzuki Darusman of SAC-M. **"It is an affront to the people of Myanmar and to ASEAN, to which we take great exception."**

The joint statement implicitly praised the junta for declaring a year-long "ceasefire" between the military and Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs). Yet, junta forces were launching airstrikes and intensifying offensives in ethnic areas, displacing a reported 10,000 people from Loikaw, Kayah state, at the very same time that the meeting was taking place.



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“Handing down the verdict and sentencing Daw Aung San Suu Kyi now, after having been delayed two or three times and barely two days after the Prime Minister’s visit, cannot be seen as anything but a deliberate, carefully timed attack on the Prime Minister designed to show him who’s in charge,” said Chris Sidoti of SAC-M. **“If Hun Sen accepts this insult without response, he will be fatally wounded in his role as ASEAN Chair barely as he begins his term, and his influence and authority will be shredded for the full year ahead. The decision is a direct challenge to Hun Sen: who calls the tune in ASEAN, the Chair or Min Aung Hlaing?”**

Cambodia will hold the ASEAN chairmanship throughout 2022. The National Unity Government of Myanmar has publicly stated its commitment to working in partnership with ASEAN towards resolving the junta-made political, economic and humanitarian crises and its readiness to engage constructively with the new Special Envoy of the ASEAN Chair on Myanmar.

“It seems the only person fooled by Min Aung Hlaing’s attempt to dress himself up as a rational civilian leader was Prime Minister Hun Sen,” said Yanghee Lee of SAC-M. **“What was already clear to everyone else is that the only way forward for the ASEAN Chair in responding to the crisis is not through publicity seeking actions but proper engagement with all stakeholders-- including the National Unity Government, EAOs and democracy groups, within the parameters already agreed by ASEAN -- and in coordination with the newly appointed UN Special Envoy of the Secretary-General.”**

Prime Minister Hun Sen undertook a foolish initiative but, having done so, the onus is now on him to get results. He cannot afford to let Min Aung Hlaing’s insult to his honour stand. As ASEAN Chair, he must lead an initiative to engage all parties in Myanmar without exception in developing a way forward that will ensure a democratic, peaceful, inclusive Myanmar. He must bring all ASEAN pressure to bear on the military junta, including through diplomatic, economic and security isolation if necessary, to secure an immediate end to the violence and the release of all political prisoners. So, what now, Hun Sen?

