

ASEAN's Last Chance on Myanmar

14 October 2025

This statement is issued by Dato' Sri Saifuddin Abdullah, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Malaysia and current member of the House of Representatives of Malaysia; Khun Kasit Piromya, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand; Leila M. de Lima, former Secretary of the Department of Justice of the Philippines, former senator, and current member of the House of Representatives of the Philippines; and three former UN experts on Myanmar who are founding members of the Special Advisory Council for Myanmar (SAC-M)

ASEAN must use its upcoming 47th Summit this month to unequivocally reject the junta's planned sham election and to launch a complete strategic reset on Myanmar.

Following his 9 October visit to Myanmar, Malaysian Foreign Minister Dato' Seri Utama Haji Mohamad bin Haji Hasan set out firm minimum benchmarks for a credible Myanmar election, clarifying that it must be conducted "in accordance with the principles of free, fair, transparent, and credible processes" and "should be held throughout the country with the participation of all political parties and stakeholders".

On these grounds alone, the junta's planned election, slated to begin on 28 December 2025, fails. ASEAN must outright reject it. Anything short of this would be a callous betrayal of the Myanmar people and a dangerous reward to violent authoritarianism throughout the region.

The military junta's blatant lie on 10 October that Foreign Minister Hasan had "vowed to send election observation teams to Myanmar" exposes the junta's continuing propaganda campaign to fabricate legitimacy, again at ASEAN's considerable expense.

After more than four years of handwringing, dissembling and futile attempts to revive its dead-on-arrival Five-Point Consensus (5PC), ASEAN must concede that it has totally failed the Myanmar people. It has been fooled, out manoeuvred and humiliated by the junta at every turn. But the true calamity of ASEAN's failure is its real-world consequences. It has abandoned thousands of civilians to slaughter, surrendered the political initiative to powers outside its bloc, enabled transnational crime to flourish and greenlit future coups among member states.

An emboldened junta is ramping up its targeted killings of civilians, including children, confident in its total impunity. Last week, a junta paramotor bombed a candlelight gathering of people in Chaung U township of Sagaing region as they observed *Thadingyut*, the Buddhist festival of lights. At least 26 people were killed and another 40 were wounded in the 6 October attack. As Foreign Minister Hasan met with junta leader and accused war



criminal Min Aung Hlaing in Naypyitaw on 9 October, junta forces were obstructing desperate efforts by locals to secure medical assistance for the Sagaing survivors. A month earlier, a junta airstrike on a boarding school complex in Thayat Tabin village of Rakhine State reportedly killed at least 22 people, mostly students, and injured at least 20 more.

With junta violence peaking as the sham election bears down, ASEAN has one final chance to act.

First, ASEAN should make it absolutely [clear](#) that it opposes the junta's sham election, that it will not have any involvement in it, and that it will reject the outcome. Genuine and credible nationwide elections can only take place in Myanmar once an authentic and inclusive peace agreement has been secured, all fighting has stopped, all political prisoners have been released, all legitimate political parties can participate, and independent international election monitors are granted access—the only conditions in which a free and fair election is possible.

Second, ASEAN must tighten the screws on the junta. It has undermined its own authority by allowing the junta's contempt for the 5PC and ASEAN itself to go unpunished. ASEAN should expand its ban on junta leaders from high-level meetings to include all junta representatives at every level of ASEAN engagement. This should be the first in a series of graduating punitive steps ASEAN must take in response to the junta's continued intransigence.

Third, ASEAN must use its 47th Summit this month to launch a new strategy on Myanmar with a clear endgame—a democratic, durable and inclusive approach, as envisioned by the people. Malaysia as current ASEAN Chair and Philippines as incoming Chair—supported by ASEAN Special Envoy Tan Sri Othman Hashim—should champion a policy that includes the following ASEAN actions:

- Intensifying diplomatic efforts to secure an immediate end to all attacks, particularly airstrikes, the immediate release of all political prisoners, and a total countrywide ceasefire supported and enforced by ASEAN and the UN Security Council and monitored by international observers.
- Expanding coordination with key stakeholders including the National Unity Government (NUG), the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC), the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH), Ethnic Resistance Organisations (EROs), Consultative Councils, Federal Units, minority communities, including those who have been forced to leave Myanmar, and civil society, as well as with neighbouring countries and UN agencies, to support the urgent, impartial and unobstructed delivery of humanitarian and material assistance by all available means to all communities in need in Myanmar, to ensure aid is not weaponised, and to secure scaled-up financial support to bolster



recovery and reconstruction efforts and to address the broader humanitarian crisis. Full and unimpeded access must be granted to humanitarian agencies and actors.

- Augmenting recent Stakeholder Engagement Meetings on Myanmar by creating a formal ASEAN platform to support the key stakeholders listed above in their negotiation of a new federal democratic constitution for Myanmar in accordance with the will and interests of the people and inclusive of all communities including minorities and those among them forced to leave Myanmar. As a core condition, the Myanmar military, in whatever form it exists, must be made permanently subordinate to a democratically elected civilian government and parliament.
- Delegitimise the junta and confirm a series of graduating punitive steps that ASEAN will take if the junta refuses to abide by ASEAN decisions, fails to end its attacks on civilians and to release political prisoners, or continues to withhold and manipulate access to humanitarian assistance.
- Supporting accountability for international crimes committed in Myanmar and cooperating with international and national courts and tribunals and accountability mechanisms to secure justice, including courts exercising universal jurisdiction. There can be no amnesties for international crimes and grave violations and abuses. The cycle of impunity must end.

ASEAN should also extend the term of Tan Sri Othman Hashim as Special Envoy on Myanmar to ensure continuity in ASEAN's Myanmar engagement.

The people of Myanmar feel utterly abandoned. For ASEAN to have any hope of reversing the damage that its years of failure have inflicted on both Myanmar and itself, it must act now. Otherwise, how will ASEAN ever face the people of Myanmar?

Dato' Sri Saifuddin Abdullah

Khun Kasit Piromya

Leila M. de Lima

Marzuki Darusman

Yanghee Lee

Chris Sidoti

