

De Lima Joins Former Foreign Ministers in SAC-M Push on ASEAN

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Pressure is building on ASEAN to categorically reject the Myanmar military junta's planned sham elections and to launch a total strategic reset on Myanmar.

Yesterday, Leila de Lima, former Secretary of Justice of the Philippines, joined two former foreign ministers from Malaysia and Thailand, as well as three former UN experts on Myanmar and founding members of SAC-M, in co-signing a [joint statement](#) urging ASEAN to act after more than four years of failure to address the crisis in Myanmar.

The other signatories were Dato' Sri Saifuddin Abdullah, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Malaysia and current member of the House of Representatives of Malaysia, and Khun Kasit Piromya, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand.

De Lima, also a former senator and current member of the House of Representatives of the Philippines, is one of the country's most respected human rights advocates and a prominent regional voice in support of the Myanmar people. Her endorsement of the joint statement comes at a critical moment, with the Philippines preparing to assume the ASEAN Chair from Malaysia at the end of the year.

Co-signatory Dato' Sri Saifuddin Abdullah delivered a strong [intervention](#) in the Malaysian Parliament yesterday, quoting directly from the joint statement and urging ASEAN to stand with the Myanmar people:

"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," Abdullah said.

"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."

"The people are winning, the junta is losing," he added.

The junta is escalating its targeted killings of civilians, including children, as it scrambles to recapture territory lost to resistance forces ahead of the elections.

On 6 October, a junta paramotor attack on a candlelight gathering marking the end of Buddhist Lent killed at least 26 civilians and wounded 40 more in Chaung U township, Sagaing region. Meanwhile, more than 20,000 political prisoners, including elected leaders,



remain in junta detention facilities that are notorious for systematic torture, abuse and sexual violence.

Malaysian Foreign Minister Dato' Seri Utama Haji Mohamad bin Haji Hasan clarified last week that for elections in Myanmar to be credible, they 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"**. The junta's planned sham elections fail to meet any of these minimum benchmarks.

On Monday he further [clarified](#) that ASEAN was unlikely to send election observers to Myanmar, refuting the junta's blatant lie that the Foreign Minister had "vowed to send electoral observation teams".

But with the junta election slated to begin on 28 December, the upcoming 47th Summit this month is ASEAN's last chance to act.

Malaysia as current ASEAN Chair and Philippines as incoming Chair—supported by ASEAN Special Envoy Tan Sri Othman Hashim— must seize this opportunity to champion a new policy on Myanmar 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 key stakeholders 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.

