

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND TRADE

FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND AID SUB-COMMITTEE

CANBERRA, 13 April 2021

Chair,

The Australia Myanmar Institute is honoured by the invitation to address the Committee during its public hearing on Myanmar. We are also in good contact with the newly established Parliamentary Friends Group. Your initiatives in Parliament are a great support for the people of Myanmar and for the bilateral relationship too.

We will not go over the horrific details of the situation in Myanmar since the military takeover on 1 February but will focus on the Committee's Question 7 and what the Australian Government and the Parliament might consider.

Some issues from the other questions are addressed in an article recently published by Asialink entitled "Myanmar – Yesterday, today and a new tomorrow"¹.

Our starting point today is that we consider that this military takeover will fail. It will not be able to withstand the unanimity of public opposition to what they have done. Everyone in Myanmar knows that its assertions of voter fraud are nonsense. Nothing could justify the killings which are taking place throughout the country every day.

The military could have looked for a negotiated future which could have led to the reconstitution of the elected parliament working under the 2008 constitution. That day is now long past, and work is under way on a new federal constitution which will assure the rights of all the people of Myanmar.

This new arrangement will include holding to account those responsible for today's atrocities.

Australia should now step forward as a key regional player. Not a middle power. We are at the centre of the Indo-Pacific economy, with a large Myanmar diaspora living alongside a very large number of other Australians sharing their love for Myanmar and its beautiful people.

Our immediate suggestions are attached to this statement, for ease of reference. In brief, however, they aim at the restoration of democracy and the rule of law in Myanmar and support for its economic and social growth for the benefit of its entire population. We emphasise the importance of Australia's work enabling for Myanmar's youth – they are the leaders of today's democracy campaign and it is they who will provide the base for the country's new leadership.

AMI stands ready to work with the Parliament and DFAT to bring it these recommendations to fruition.

Thank you.

¹ https://asialink.unimelb.edu.au/insights/myanmar-yesterday,-today-and-a-new-tomorrow/_recache

ANNEX

AMI recommendations to the Australian Government and Parliament

The Australian Government should:

- Actively and visibly join with others in the international community to support civil society and youth for the restoration of democracy and the rule of law. Work closely with the democratically elected Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) and calling for the end of all violations of civil and political rights, including the release of all political prisoners. Support the maintenance of free media in Myanmar.
- Work closely with Myanmar's neighbours and regional partners including ASEAN help Myanmar restore democratic governance and recover its position as an influential Indo-Pacific friend to Australia and the region.
- Facilitate a special bank account to which tax deductible contributions for Myanmar civil society and needy people can be made, and facilitate the transfer of the contributions to Myanmar. AMI can support this process.
- Grant Myanmar citizens on temporary visas in Australia an indefinite extension of their visas to ensure they are not sent back to inevitable persecution or worse.
- Open a special humanitarian visa program for people who have fled from threatening situations in Myanmar.
- Invoke an immediate and total arms embargo on the Myanmar military and security agencies.
- Strong targeted sanctions against a defined list of senior military figures and their families' economic interests, including access to foreign assets, travel and other communications.
- Urge the termination of all activities Australian companies have in Myanmar that involve partnership with military companies.
- Support efforts documenting crimes against humanity in Myanmar for provision to international investigative authorities.
- Maintain clear updated advice on the commercial and investment environment to the Australia-Myanmar Chamber of Commerce and to the Australian business community in Yangon, and to Australian companies with activities in Myanmar. Urge the termination of all activities which benefit military-backed companies.
- Significantly increase the Australian Aid program and redirect it to civil society and established international and domestic partners, prioritising immediate medical relief and education programs. AMI stands ready to support this process.
- Support the maintenance of an autonomous higher education sector relevant to Myanmar's future and to the attainment of its objectives as described in the UN Sustainable Development Goals. AMI can support this work.
- Actively encourage and support Parliament's use of its resources through bodies like the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) to build world-wide respect for the CRPH.
- Accept AMI as a trusted partner in progressing this work.

13 April 2021

