



## **Regional Solutions to Restore Democracy and Protect Human Rights in Myanmar**

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### **I. Introduction**

On 1 February 2021, a military crackdown occurred in Myanmar after a famous democratic figure and leader of the elected government of the National League for Democracy (NLD), Aung San Suu Kyi, was detained along with her colleagues (Jasmine, 2021). According to recent reports, all across the nation citizens of Myanmar began to protest against the Tatmadaw to demand free and fair elections. These clashes between the military forces and civilians have continued unabated, resulting in the murder of 20 local people (Reuters, 2021). Because ASEAN was criticized for failing to take any action as regards these human rights violations, this essay will illustrate and provide some possible regional solutions to enable it to address the issue more effectively.

### **II. Body**

The very first step ASEAN must take to help Myanmar citizens reclaim their basic rights is to reframe the issue as one involving "human right violations" rather than "internal affairs," thereby prioritizing citizens' lives over its non-interference policy. According to BBC News, security forces in Myanmar have sought to suppress local protestors by the use of brutal methods including shooting, bombing, spraying water, destroying civilian shelters, and by censoring the media (Christopher, 2021). Therefore, ASEAN must take tough action against Myanmar's military government to assist its citizens, in addition to enhancing human security by providing guidance to protestors on how to claim their fundamental rights.

As such, ASEAN leaders should address this issue via peaceful means such as by convincing the military government to agree to a cease-fire since involving itself directly in Myanmar's domestic matters would breach the ASEAN Charter. But despite this, ASEAN

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leaders together with the Myanmar government, agreed at a special ASEAN summit on 24 April 2021 to a five-point consensus including: (1) the immediate cessation of violence in Myanmar; (2) constructive dialogue amongst all parties concerned to seek a peaceful solution in the interests of the people; (3) mediation to be facilitated by an envoy of ASEAN's chair, with the assistance of the Secretary-General; (4) humanitarian assistance provided by ASEAN's AHA Centre; and (5) a visit by a special envoy and delegation to Myanmar to meet all concerned parties. In other words, this agreement seeks to tackle human rights violations and stop the violence in Myanmar (Muhammad, 2021).

On 5 July 1997, ASEAN faced a similar situation in Cambodia leading some ASEAN foreign ministers (including those from Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand) to create an "ASEAN Troika" to mediate Cambodia's internal conflict (Sorpong, 1998). Thus, it is not inconceivable for ASEAN to also act as mediator to peacefully resolve Myanmar's political crisis by encouraging the conflicting parties to negotiate and conducting thorough inspections of future national elections to secure a free and fair process, thereby restoring democracy in Myanmar.

Finally, in addition to the two aforementioned resolutions, ASEAN could also impose economic sanctions and consider solutions requiring reformation of its bodies and principles including the one on non-interference as regards human security. Further, it could advance the capability of the Political-Security Community to become a defense arrangement and adopt a peacekeeping role, as well as reassess the 2012 ASEAN Human Rights Declaration, all of which would enable ASEAN to become a more effective and reliable organization in the region.

### **III. Conclusion**

To summarize, ASEAN could help restore democracy and reinstate the basic rights of Myanmar's citizens by formally requesting a cease-fire of its military government whilst mediating negotiations between the two conflicting parties. At the same time, imposing economic sanctions, reaffirming the 2021 ASEAN Human Rights Declaration, and improving the ASEAN Political-Security Community's (APSC) role in securing human rights and political stability would also help to ensure peace and prosperity in the region.

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