
ASEAN: Addressing the Bloc's Building Blocks

ASEAN being a more integrated bloc should take a firmer stand and a more unified response to the Myanmar crisis with utmost urgency. Myanmar and its neighboring countries will be snowed under a spawn of other crises should it fail to do so including further rise in Myanmar refugees, greater opportunities for organized crimes and drug trafficking, worsening pandemic and potential economic collapse. Strict and swift implementation of the Five-Point Consensus reached at the special ASEAN Summit in Jakarta on April 24 should then be top priority.

The Five-Point Consensus aims to achieve immediate end of violence in Myanmar while providing aid through the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance (AHA Center) and starting an inclusive political dialogue mediated by a special ASEAN envoy and delegation to visit Myanmar. The success of its implementation depends greatly on two things: harmony among the member states' way of implementing the consensus and the ASEAN chair's active presence.

However, little progress has been made to effectively carry out its implementation as we see no cessation on the junta's crackdown on protesters killing over 800 people and detaining more than 6,100 so far. On one hand, ASEAN members should agree on the special envoy's role and responsibilities before appointing one. An envoy composed of representatives from countries that have significant leverage over Myanmar such as Thailand or Singapore – the former's military has close ties to Myanmar while the latter contributed much to Myanmar's economic progress – along with representatives from the current and succeeding ASEAN chairs and some UN engagement is ideal. The envoy would elevate ASEAN's chances to stay on top of the crisis while ensuring continuity in the delivery of humanitarian assistance and progress of the dialogue.

This ideal envoy would need full financial and moral support from ASEAN for it to perform its role. The envoy shall create teams from the AHA Centre that will facilitate the delivery of aid while they simultaneously engage in peace talks with all concerned parties in Myanmar. This means that the Five-Point consensus is more effectively implemented as one instead of delivering it separately.

While this pursuit shall go on for years, ASEAN should consider reviewing the ASEAN Charter to potentially revise conflicting principles. This conflict has been brought to light in the recent Myanmar crisis. The ASEAN Charter, which transformed the union closely to become like the EU, sets out the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of member states while upholding principles of adherence to international law, democracy and constitutional government. Therefore, ASEAN has the duty to call out a member state's unconstitutional change of government while also respecting its internal affairs.

At the center of this turmoil are the people of Myanmar whose basic human rights are trampled down and who are being ripped of the democracy they have barely enjoyed. The ongoing social unrest only shows the world their thirst for a democratic change. Unless ASEAN stands firm to uphold its principles of democracy and constitutional government by immediately implementing the Five-Point Consensus, going down a political and economic rabbit hole is a huge possibility. A need for a second look at the ASEAN Charter is also imperative for the union to withstand similar challenges in the future and continually thrive.