



ASEAN PARLIAMENTARIANS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

H.E. Mr. Nguyen Xuan Phuc,
Prime Minister of Viet Nam
16 Le Hong Phong Street,
Ba Dinh District,
Ha Noi, Viet Nam

CC

His Majesty Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Mu'izzaddin Waddaulah
H.E Prime Minister Hun Sen
H.E President Joko Widodo
H.E Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith
H.E Tan Sri Muhyiddin Haji Mohd Yassin
H.E State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi
H.E President Rodrigo Roa Duterte
H.E Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong
H.E Prime Minister General Prayut Chan-o-cha

11 November 2020

Your Excellency,

Re: ASEAN's role in resolving the crisis in Myanmar's Rakhine State

As a regional network of parliamentarians from Southeast Asia committed to the promotion and protection of human rights, we write to you on the occasion of this week's 37th ASEAN Summit, to urge ASEAN to play a positive role in resolving the crisis in Myanmar's Rakhine State.

It has been three years since a brutal Myanmar military operation forced 740,000 Rohingya to flee to Bangladesh. Since then, the Myanmar government has not taken any meaningful steps to address the "root causes" of the crisis. Many refugees have embarked on perilous journeys by sea to reach ASEAN countries; the approximately 600,000 Rohingya still in Rakhine State continue to live under a system of apartheid, deprived of their rights to citizenship, freedom of movement, and access to essential services; and an intensifying armed conflict between the Arakan Army and the Myanmar military is threatening the safety of thousands of civilians from all communities.

GoWork - Coworking and Office Space, 9th floor, Chubb Square, Jl. M.H. Thamrin No.10,
RT.14/RW.20, Kb. Melati, Jakarta, Kota Jakarta Pusat, Daerah Khusus Ibukota Jakarta 10230,
Indonesia



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While we welcome the fact that ASEAN has taken a more proactive role in Rakhine State and is increasing its capacity and resources to respond to the crisis, we urge you to ensure that ASEAN's actions effectively create positive and sustainable change that contribute to ending the cycle of violence and displacement.

To do this, we call on your Excellency to demonstrate the required leadership to articulate a coordinated, long-term and holistic strategy that addresses the root causes of the crisis.

For ASEAN to have an impact and be effective in Rakhine State, it needs to acknowledge and address the situation that led the Rohingya to flee in the first place and address all aspects of the crisis, whether human rights, political, humanitarian, social, or economic. These include the ongoing conflict, accountability for international crimes, and the discriminatory structural state-imposed restrictions that remain in place in Rakhine State. By confronting these issues, ASEAN will both ensure its interventions do not do harm and also have a greater impact, as refugees will only return to a situation where they do not face entrenched discrimination, violence, and restrictions on their lives and liberty.

Without such a holistic approach, ASEAN's attempts at intervening risk being counter-productive and contributing to entrenching segregation, perpetuating serious human rights violations, including crimes under international law, and pushing more Rohingya to seek safety in neighboring countries.

We also urge you to ensure that ASEAN promotes transparency in its decisions and operations and that it ensures meaningful consultation and participation with the Rohingya and refugee communities in all decisions concerning their future, and that it proactively engages with civil society actors.

ASEAN would gain significantly from being more transparent and inclusive in its engagement. It would allow the grouping to have a more comprehensive, holistic understanding of the situation in Rakhine State, and thus develop and implement solutions for the benefit of all people living there. It would also allow ASEAN to demonstrate the region's capacity and competence to deal with multi-layered, multifaceted crises, maximize the use of ASEAN's resources, avoid duplication, and potentially enhance impact.



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We also would like to bring to your attention the need to strengthen the capacity of ASEAN institutions to respond to “man-made” disasters. ASEAN institutions required to intervene in Rakhine State must do so with the correct mandate, sufficient authority, resources, and expertise to be able to respond to such crises. This would not only strengthen ASEAN’s response, but it could also increase the bloc’s ability to address and advise on all crises across the region, whether a conflict, a natural disaster, or a global pandemic.

Finally, we would like to bring to your attention the list of detailed and concrete recommendations that are formulated in the report: [ASEAN’s Rakhine Crisis, Assessing the regional response to atrocities in Myanmar’s Rakhine State](#).

We strongly believe that thanks to its regular engagement with the Government of Myanmar, and its regional legitimacy, ASEAN has a positive role to play in resolving this regional crisis. By taking a holistic, people-centered approach, guided by the principles of “do no harm” and non-discrimination, ASEAN can effectively contribute to positive and lasting solutions for Rakhine State and the region as a whole.

This week’s ASEAN Summit presents an ideal opportunity to demonstrate that ASEAN can use its political leverage to push for real progress in Myanmar and strengthen its response. In the spirit of a “Cohesive and Responsive ASEAN,” we hope that you will use your leadership to address these issues and ensure that ASEAN is promoting sustainable solutions that have a positive impact on all communities who call Rakhine State home.

Yours sincerely,

Please note that any parliamentarian who has signed this letter has done so in their personal capacity and not in any way representing their political party, government, organization, etc.

Noor Amin Ahmad, Member of the Parliament of Malaysia

Syed Hamid bin Syed Jaafar Albar, former Member of the Parliament of Malaysia

Mercy Barends, Member of the Parliament of Indonesia

Teddy Baguilat Jr., former Member of the Parliament of the Philippines

GoWork - Coworking and Office Space, 9th floor, Chubb Square, Jl. M.H. Thamrin No.10,
RT.14/RW.20, Kb. Melati, Jakarta, Kota Jakarta Pusat, Daerah Khusus Ibukota Jakarta 10230,
Indonesia

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ASEAN PARLIAMENTARIANS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Walden Bello, former Member of the Parliament of the Philippines

Lurdes Maria Bessa, former Member of the Parliament of Timor-Leste

Antonio De Sa Benevides, Member of the Parliament of Timor-Leste

Chamnan Chanruang, former Member of the Parliament of Thailand

Wong Chen, Member of the Parliament of Malaysia

Maria Chin Abdullah, Member of the Parliament of Malaysia

Charles Chong, former Member of the Parliament of Singapore

Tian Chua, former Member of Parliament of Malaysia

Kobsak Chutikul, former Member of the Parliament of Thailand

Heng Danaro, former Member of the Parliament of Cambodia

Marzuki Darusman, former Member of the Parliament of Indonesia

Eng Chhai Eang, former Member of the Parliament of Cambodia

Sarah Elago, Member of the Parliament of the Philippines

Ferdinand Gaité, Member of the Parliament of the Philippines

Natrah Ismail, Member of the Parliament of Malaysia

Chang Lih Kang, Member of the Parliament of Malaysia

Leila de Lima, Member of the Parliament of the Philippines

Meity Magdalena, former Member of the Parliament of Indonesia

Lena Maryana Mukti, former Member of the Parliament of Indonesia

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U Shwe Maung, former Member of the Parliament of Myanmar

U Kyaw Min, former Member of Parliament of Myanmar

Ngim Nheng, former Member of the Parliament of Cambodia

Anthea Ong, former Nominated Member of the Parliament of Singapore

Kasit Piromya, former Member of the Parliament of Thailand

Sivarasa Rasiah, Member of the Parliament of Malaysia

Kunthida Rungruengkiat, former Member of the Parliament of Thailand

Charles Santiago, Member of the Parliament of Malaysia

Kong Saphea, former Member of the Parliament of Cambodia

Maria Angelina Lopes Sarmento, Member of the Parliament of Timor-Leste

Mardi Seng, former Member of the Parliament of Cambodia

Abel Pires da Silva, Member of the Parliament of Timor-Leste

Mu Sochua, former Member of the Parliament of Cambodia

Men Sothavarin, former Member of the Parliament of Cambodia

Melani Suharli, Member of the Parliament of Indonesia

Eva Sundari, former Member of the Parliament of Indonesia

Antonio Tinio, former Member of the Parliament of the Philippines

Ho Vann, former Member of the Parliament of Cambodia

Tom Villarin, former Member of the Parliament of the Philippines

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