

MAP condemns the Myanmar junta's attempt to usurp ambassador posts in the UK and the UN, and calls on the British Government and the UN General Assembly to refuse accreditation

Press Release for Immediate Publication from the Myanmar Accountability Project, MAP

London, 19 July 2021: The Myanmar Accountability Project, condemns attempts by the Myanmar coup leaders to usurp top ambassadorial posts at the Myanmar embassy in London and the diplomatic mission at the UN in New York.

Documentation obtained by MAP confirms that officials with strong military backgrounds are being sent by the junta to fill these two influential posts.

“MAP has the official biographies of both these officers and they make ugly reading,” said MAP Director, Chris Gunness. “Aung Thurein, who the junta is demanding take over the UN seat, went straight into the army at the age of eighteen and according to his biography, he served until 2021, strongly suggesting he was in the military during the coup on 1 February and its bloody aftermath.”

“Moreover, Aung Thurein served on three Myanmar delegations to Beijing where, as a military man, he would likely have been involved in deals to procure arms. It is an affront to the world body that the military government is sending to the UN a man with such strong connections to an institution with blood on its hands and which stood accused of genocide in the Hague even before the coup.”

Over 900 people have been killed since 1 February. Human rights groups have well documented evidence that the Myanmar security forces have gunned down hundreds of peaceful protesters, some with a bullet directly to the head. In addition, over five thousand people have been arbitrarily detained, many are being held without trial and tortured.

At the same time, MAP has learnt that the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office is planning to grant diplomatic accreditation as the Myanmar Ambassador to London to Htun Aung Kyaw, who served as a fighter pilot during a seventeen-year career in the Myanmar air force.

According to his official biography, Htun Aung Kyaw graduated from the country's notorious military academy at Pyin Oo Lwin, from which leading members of the military junta have also passed out. These include coup leader and Commander in Chief, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing.

In addition, Htun Aung Kyaw served as a fighter pilot and fighter pilot trainer in the 1990s, when according to human rights groups, the Myanmar army and air force carried out aerial attacks on ethnic nationality villages killing many civilians, which may constitute war crimes.

“Prime Minister, Boris Johnson along with other G7 leaders have condemned the coup. The UK and all major allies have imposed sanctions on the coup leaders and their commercial interests,” said Gunness. “It is gross double standare and a moral outrage that the British Foreign Secretary, Dominic Raab, should oversee the accreditation as Ambassador of a man who does not represent the legitimate state authority of Myanmar and who served in an army that stands accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity.”

“MAP calls on the UK as an influential diplomatic presence on the Myanmar file at the UN in New York to ensure that the Credentials Committee, soon to meet at the General Assembly in September, does not recognise the military junta’s representative to the UN,” said Gunness.

“We also demand that Dominic Raab stop in its tracks the accreditation of Htun Aung Kyaw. It beggars belief that he is allowing into the UK an ambassador representing a murderous dictator that a UN Fact Finding Mission recommended in 2018 should be prosecuted for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, along with his top commanders. Htun Aung Kyaw should be kept out of the country, let alone be recognised as an ambassador in London. And if he turns up in the UK he should be detained and investigated.”

Ends

MAP is a London based NGO which fights for justice for victims of human rights abuses in Myanmar in national jurisdictions. For further information and interview requests please contact Chris Gunness, cgunness@outlook.com