

Specials

Myanmar's Heroes and Villains of 2021

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Contents

- [The Myanmar People: The \(...\)](#)
- [Min Aung Hlaing: Myanmar's \(...\)](#)
- [Fallen Heroes Who Sacrificed](#)
- [Daw Aung San Suu Kyi: Still](#)
- [U Win Myint: Myanmar's Unbowed](#)
- [PDF: Army of the Myanmar \(...\)](#)
- [EAOs: Joining Hands with \(...\)](#)
- [NUG & CRPH: Legitimate \(...\)](#)
- [Civil Disobedience Movement](#)

As Myanmar rang in 2021, while the COVID-19 pandemic posed a significant challenge, it seemed there was much to look forward to as the government of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) prepared for a historic second term in office. But those hopes for the future evaporated, along with the social, economic and democratic gains the country had made in the preceding five years, when the Myanmar military ousted the government at dawn on Feb. 1 and locked up much of the elected leadership including State Counselor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and President U Win Myint, citing voter fraud in the 2020 election, which the NLD won in a landslide.

The vibrant, youth-led protest movement that arose to challenge the coup—for many of those protesting, the vote Min Aung Hlaing stole from them was the first they had ever cast—was soon met with a level of violence that has shocked the world. The brutality of the crackdown also sparked a civilian armed resistance movement which, though seriously outgunned, has kept the military regime from taking full control of the country 11 months after the senior general seized power to satisfy his long-thwarted personal political ambitions. Every day of 2021 brought some shocking new story or image of the junta's violence and repression, but Myanmar has also been heartened by the rise of a Civil Disobedience Movement and the formation of a shadow National Unity Government. A number of ethnic armies have also committed to the anti-regime fight. Most inspiring—if heartbreaking—of all has been the sacrifice of at least 1,382 civilians, including many children, killed by the regime's forces, and the more than 11,200 people who have been detained for opposing the takeover. But the most enduring story of 2021 has been that of the Myanmar people's courageous, unwavering and principled struggle to restore their hard-won democracy through whatever means they can, be it protesting or striking, wielding a rifle or striking pots and pans. It is a story that looks certain to continue as long as the illegitimate military regime remains in power.

Below, The Irrawaddy looks back at some of the key individuals and groups involved in shaping the course of events in one of the most tumultuous years in Myanmar's modern history.

The Myanmar People: The Guardians of Democracy



protesters confront security forces in Yangon in February. / The Irrawaddy

Myanmar people cherish democracy. It has a special value to them because, unlike in the West, where it is considered a birthright, they have had to put their lives on the line and fight for it against their military rulers since 1962. When a fledgling democracy arrived in 2016, they were determined to keep it alive. In 2020 they flocked to polling stations despite a surging COVID-19 epidemic and a majority of them cast their votes for the ruling National League for Democracy (NLD) in order to sustain democracy in the country. When their votes were voided by the military coup on Feb. 1, Myanmar exploded into protest.

At the forefront of the anti-regime protests were members of Generation Z, who came of age during Myanmar's democratization years. During the demonstrations, their warning to the regime was: "You messed with the wrong generation!" Others shouted "Respect our Votes!", challenging coup leader Min Aung Hlaing's assertion that the NLD had committed vote fraud, a claim he used to justify the takeover. Furious with the military's power grab, people from all walks of life across the country joined the opposition movement by whatever means was at their disposal. They boycotted beer and cigarettes produced by the military. Doctors chose to attend protests rather than going to hospitals. Trains no longer left stations. Bank tellers angrily shouted "Release Mother Suu right now!" Government offices were left empty as staff stayed at home in protest against the coup. As a result, the regime's administration could barely function. Later, Min Aung Hlaing reluctantly admitted that he hadn't foreseen such resistance.

But he brooked no opposition. He ordered his troops to shoot to kill any protesters, deepening the public's ire. The world looked on in shock when his soldiers slaughtered more than 100 people in a single day in March. He sacked anyone who refused to work for him and issued arrest warrants for them. People instantly set up mutual aid funds for those who had been fired or gone into hiding, while encouraging them by saying, "We only have each other!" and "We must win!"

The determination is still going strong after all these months. The regime still does not fully control the country. When the major street protests in big cities fizzled out under the brutal crackdowns, people upcountry flooded their small towns' streets shouting anti-regime slogans, showing that the people's opposition to the junta was not waning. Even today, someone is always protesting somewhere in the country. When young people took up arms to fight against the regime, Myanmar people at home and abroad funded them, from their shoes to their guns. They supported the shadow National Unity Government (NUG), which they consider their rightful government. When the NUG called for a nationwide revolt against the junta in September, they heartily welcomed it, because the regime's brutality has made them determined to restore democracy, whatever it takes.

On Dec. 10, Myanmar people across the country collectively showed the world that even 11 months on their opposition to the regime was unwavering, holding a daylong silent strike. To the junta's embarrassment, the whole nation of nearly 55 million people stayed out of sight for the day, with even roadside vendors who live on their daily proceeds refusing to open their businesses.

For the people of Myanmar, 2021 has been a tough year. The coup has robbed them of their dreams. Seeing young people killed or arrested has broken their hearts. But they had to live their lives. Behind their daily activities, however, there is smoldering anger, despair and tears that still haven't run dry. They will surely be the ones driving the people's unwavering resistance against the regime for the next year as they strive to restore democracy.



A poster naming coup leader Min Aung Hlaing as a criminal is seen during a protest in February. / The Irrawaddy

Min Aung Hlaing: Myanmar's Chief Villain

When his soldiers used deadly force on peaceful protesters in the streets and sprayed bullets in residential areas, among many other atrocities committed against civilians this year, people couldn't help but wish that coup leader Senior General Min Aung Hlaing had never been born.

They weren't overreacting.

His seizure of power from the country's democratically elected government on Feb. 1 has turned the country upside down socially, politically and economically. On that fateful day, Myanmar people lost their peace of mind, their sense of joy, and, most importantly, their future. More than 1,300 people have lost their lives at his soldiers' hands so far, mainly for opposing his regime, while thousands of others are languishing in interrogation centers and prisons. The UN predicts that almost half of Myanmar's 55 million people will be poorer next year, with the urban poverty rate set to triple. The country's fledgling democracy has been smothered. In short, the havoc Min Aung Hlaing has wreaked on the county is colossal. No wonder people wish him unborn.

All of this devastation is a direct result of his lust for power. It is well known that the sick man of Naypyitaw has long dreamed of being president of Myanmar. When his allies in the pro-military parties were heavily defeated by the Daw Aung San Suu Kyi-led National League for Democracy (NLD) in the 2020 election, all the devastated Min Aung Hlaing could do was stage a coup and arrest the State Counselor, along with President U Win Myint and others. To justify his brutal move, he shamelessly alleged electoral irregularities. When this lame excuse was challenged by protesters shouting slogans such as "Respect our votes!" he simply ignored them.



Protesters step on a picture of Min Aung Hlaing during a protest in Yangon in February. / The Irrawaddy

But more than 10 months after the coup, Min Aung Hlaing is looking increasingly like a deluded, out of touch dictator. In meetings, he delivers long, rambling speeches wearing his ready-made smile. He pushes his cabinet to implement absurd projects, such as his plan to run electric cars in a country plagued by blackouts. When he daydreams aloud of making Myanmar the region's most developed country within 10 years, the people ridicule him.

For all his fantasies, he has no achievements to point to so far. Faced with unwavering civilian armed resistance to his regime, he has still not been able to bring the country fully under his control. The economy is in a downward spiral. The only thing he excels at is killing and jailing people. Of course, these are not the sort of accomplishments he is eager to boast about.

Furthermore, the coup has earned him nothing positive. Internationally, he and his regime members have been isolated by sanctions. Even the Association for Southeast Asian Nations, of which Myanmar is a member, took the unprecedented step of sidelining him from its summit for his failure to implement a peace plan he had agreed to. The resistance at home and abroad has not influenced him. Instead, he has tried to crush local armed opposition groups with airstrikes, shelling and massacres in their stronghold areas, committing crimes against humanity in the process. So it should come as no surprise if "a speedy death for Min Aung Hlaing" is Myanmar's popular wish for 2022. Even if the wish is granted, however, there is no hole in hell hot enough for him.

Fallen Heroes Who Sacrificed Their Lives for Their Country



Top from left to right: Biak Rem Chin, 23; Nyi Nyi Aung Htet Naing, 23; Kyal Sin, 19; Poet Khet Thi, 44; Dr. Thiha Tin Tun, 26; Wai Wai Myint (aka Apple), 29; Khant Nyar Hein, 17; Nurse Khin Khin Kywel, 24; Teacher Tin New Yee, 59; Poet K Za Win, 39; Khin Myo Chit, 6; Sai Bhone Min Thant, 20; Zaw Myat Lynn, 46; Thinzar Hein, 20; Chit Min Thu, 25; and Htet Myat Aung, 19.

At least 1,382 heroes have been killed by the murderous junta's forces in the 11 months since the military staged its coup, most of them while engaging in anti-regime activism. The majority put their lives at risk knowing there was a very real chance they would become victims of the regime's brutality.

Despite this awareness, they put themselves forward, fully focused on their goals: democracy and a brighter future. Their backgrounds were diverse, but most lived relatively normal lives until the coup. The military's takeover turned them into determined activists devoted to resisting the junta.

The first protester to lose her life—exposing just how thin the regime's initial veneer of tolerance really was—was 19-year-old student Mya Thwate Thwate Khaing, who was killed when police cracked down on a protest she was attending in Naypyitaw. When the junta escalated its deadly suppression of demonstrations in Yangon in late February, network engineer Nyi Nyi Aung Htet Naing begged the UN to intervene and end Myanmar's military dictatorship, asking "how many dead bodies UN needs to take action." The next day he was shot down by soldiers.

Witnessing these young people being killed was especially heartbreaking for schoolteachers. On her Facebook page, Daw Tin Nwe Yee, 59, called on the regime to stop harming the country's precious youth, before putting on her schoolteacher's uniform and joining her colleagues in a protest in Yangon. The mother of two was shot and later died of her injuries.



The funeral of a young protester who was shot dead by security forces on March 20. / The Irrawaddy

Before leaving home for a protest on March 11 in Yangon's North Dagon Township, 25-year-old Chit Min Thu begged his pregnant wife to forgive him for joining the protest. He insisted, "If I don't go out, and if others do the same, we won't get democracy back!" He did not make it home that day; his child will grow up without him.

Far from deterring protesters, however, the deadly crackdowns only motivated more people to take to the streets across the country. At the front of the protest columns were young people equipped with little but teargas masks and makeshift shields to protect themselves from the charging regime troops. Aside from those things, all they had was a burning desire to strike a mortal blow against the regime, whatever it took. More blood was spilled and Myanmar groaned painfully as she lost more of her children to the regime.

Khant Nyar Hein was a medical school freshman whose dream was to treat poor patients free of charge. He was shot dead in March in Yangon while taking part in a protest, robbing the country of a fine future doctor.

In Mandalay, Kyal Sin, a 19-year-old singer, dancer and taekwondo champion was shot dead when troops crushed a protest she was taking part in. In Sagaing Region's capital Monywa, poet K Za Win was dragged along the road after being shot at a protest. His fellow poet Khet Thi was tortured to death after being arrested for his anti-coup artwork.



Kyal Sin before she was shot dead by security forces

Some gave their lives saving others as the regime's bullets flew around them.

In Monywa, nursing student Thinzar Hein, 20, was shot in the head while treating wounded protesters, and Foodpanda deliveryman Ko Zaw Thein Aung, 20, was similarly shot in the head while helping an injured woman during a crackdown there.

Members of the ousted National League for Democracy were not spared.

A ward chairman for the party in Yangon's Pabedan Township, U Khin Maung Latt, and U Zay Myat

Lynn, who was in charge of the Suu Vocational Training Institute in Shwepyithar Township, were among the NLD figures who have been tortured to death in the regime's custody.

There is no doubt that those 1,375 sacrificed their lives for the movement to end the regime and restore democracy in Myanmar. Their deaths brought tears, anger and grief. On the other hand, their sacrifice, courage, bravery and determination serve to unite all opponents of the regime.

Rest in honor, heroes! Myanmar will never forget you for your service.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi: Still Inspiring Love and Hatred



Daw Aung San Suu Kyi

If Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, now aged 76, were to look back over her life, she might conclude that the past 33 years have been defined largely by two opposing forces: love and hate. For all the opposition she inspires in some quarters, she has been a beloved figure in Myanmar's politics since 1988, and undeniably remains one. Myanmar's generals have regarded her as their archenemy since that year for leading the opposition against them, backed by a popular support they have never enjoyed.

In the past, the collision of these two forces saw her repeatedly placed under house arrest by the men in uniform—three times between 1989 and 2010, her confinement spanning a total of 15 years. The two emotions were aroused again late last year when her National League for Democracy (NLD) won a landslide victory in the general election, earning a second term in office. In a slap in the face to voters, the army staged a coup in February, alleging that the NLD had committed massive vote fraud—a claim international poll observers rejected. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was arrested for a fourth time and coup leader Min Aung Hlaing filed 11 charges against her. Many see the junta's legal campaign as a bid to remove her from politics once and for all; if found guilty of all charges, she faces 102 years' imprisonment, meaning she will spend the rest of her life behind bars.

The people's affection for her stems simply from her benevolence and sincerity towards them, qualities the generals never have shown them. The most recent example was in 2020 when Myanmar was hit hard by COVID-19 under NLD rule. She consoled the people, urging them not to panic and promising to take care of them, as a people's government is supposed to do. She kept her word, and the people felt safe. When she was arrested during the takeover, people flooded the streets of cities and towns to call for her immediate release, insisting she was their elected and legitimate leader.

For the sake of the country, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has always said she looked forward to reconciling with the military, which she called "Daddy's army," as her father, General Aung San, founded it in 1941. She said she held no grudge against them and during her time in office even referred to the generals in her cabinet as "rather sweet." When the International Court of Justice heard a case against Myanmar over the military's genocide against the Rohingya, she went to The Hague and told the judges that the perpetrators should be tried at home, tarnishing her international reputation. Despite her unwavering forbearance towards them, however, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is once again a prisoner of the generals, who still hate her. Their soldiers have killed more than 1,300 people, most of them young, for their opposition to the regime and their demands

for her release. The country to which she has committed her life has been shattered by the military takeover. It would be interesting to know what she now thinks of the military, confined to house arrest at an undisclosed location somewhere in Naypyitaw.

U Win Myint: Myanmar's Unbowed President



President U Win Myint attends the unveiling ceremony of an equestrian statue in Naypyitaw in 2020./ The Irrawaddy

When the two senior military officers suddenly appeared in his room at the Presidential Palace in Naypyitaw early on the morning of Feb. 1, U Win Myint realized immediately that the military had staged a coup against his civilian government led by the National League for Democracy (NLD). The officers urged U Win Myint to resign from his post as Myanmar's president, suggesting he cite ill health as the reason. They threatened the president with harm if he didn't cooperate.

U Win Myint refused, saying, "I would rather die than resign." The 70-year-old was then detained at an unknown location. At the same time, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the State Counselor and de facto leader of the NLD government, was undergoing a similar ordeal. The regime has filed several charges against the president since his detention.

U Win Myint has won four electoral races on the NLD ticket—in the general elections in 1990, 2015 and 2020, and in a by-election in 2012.

After two years as Parliament Speaker, he became President in March 2018 after U Htin Kyaw retired on health grounds. Anti-graft efforts were stepped up after he assumed the presidency, both in the administrative and judicial branches. One of the most significant reforms was to bring the General Administration Department, which had been overseen by the military-controlled Ministry of Home Affairs, under civilian oversight. However, the military transferred the department back to the Home Affairs Ministry after the coup.

Trained as a lawyer, he has engaged in politics for more than 30 years since the pro-democracy uprising of 1988, joining the NLD in its early days.

Like many other politicians of the time, U Win Myint ended up in prison after the military refused to honor the results of the 1990 general election. The terrible conditions in prison couldn't shake his faith, nor did the threats from the men in uniform on the day of the Feb. 1 takeover.

After the coup, On the first day of his trial, the judge asked U Win Myint to state his occupation. He replied: "President of Myanmar." He still considers himself to be the head of state, having been approved in the position by Parliament, which is largely made up of lawmakers elected by the people of Myanmar.

A majority of the people who took to the streets to protest the coup would agree; one of their call-and-response slogans during the protests was: "Who is our president? U Win Myint!" They

demanded his immediate release along with that of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. Upon learning of his challenge to his captors on the morning of the takeover after lawyers relayed his courtroom testimony, the people felt validated in their support for him, and their respect for him only grew.

PDF: Army of the Myanmar People



A member of the Loikaw-PDF from Kayah State during a clash in neighboring Shan State's Pekon Township in November. / Loikaw PDF

After their protest columns were hit by live bullets and grenades and many of their comrades shot dead in late February and March, anti-regime protesters in Myanmar came to realize that taking up arms was the only answer if they were to defeat the regime.

So, thousands of protesters in cities and towns across the country headed to border areas where ethnic armed groups were active, to undergo military training. The people's armed revolution against the regime had dawned.

Myanmar's first civilian armed rebellion broke out in Kale Township, Sagaing Region in late March when protesters and residents resisted the regime's lethal crackdowns by taking up slingshots, homemade gas guns and traditional hunting firearms, some dating to the 19th century. Caught off guard by the attack, regime troops there suffered serious losses.

Inspired by their Kale counterparts, anti-regime activists in other parts of the country, except Rakhine State, formed local civilian resistance forces that would become collectively known as the People's Defense Force (PDF). They equipped themselves with homemade gas guns, slingshots, homemade traditional hunting rifles and improvised mines to defend their villages and anti-regime groups from the junta's raids and crackdowns.

With the help of those returning from training on the borders, local PDFs upgraded their arsenals. Molotov cocktails were replaced with cellphone-controlled mines. The Shinzawa pistols they smuggled in became handy for killing regime-appointed administrators or collaborators. When some braver and more energetic souls grabbed M-16s and successfully sprayed bullets at soldiers at security checkpoints in Yangon, the whole country was thrilled, as they had only seen such action in Hollywood movies. These heralded similar attacks in other parts of the country, inflicting casualties and instilling fear and a sense of insecurity among the regime's soldiers—much to the people's delight.



Local PDF members take part in training at their base camp in the forest near Demoso, in Myanmar's eastern Kayah State, in October. / AFP

In early May, Myanmar's parallel civilian National Unity Government officially recognized the PDF as its armed wing, recruiting those who had been trained in areas controlled by ethnic armed groups and organizing the forces engaged in the ongoing nationwide civilian resistance. Numerous PDFs are scattered across the country and carry out attacks in their regions.

The PDFs are mainly comprised of young people from various backgrounds: farmers, workers, politicians, journalists, doctors, artists and even some striking police and soldiers. The majority of Myanmar people at home and abroad treat members of PDF groups as their own children. They feed them, dress them and arm them. They pray for their well-being and safety. This is the third time in Myanmar's modern history that the country has seen wide-ranging popular support for an armed resistance movement, after the wars against the British in 1885 and the Japanese fascists in 1945. The PDFs became the people's best hope when the NUG called for a nationwide revolt against the regime in September. The PDFs have proved themselves to be the people's pride and joy, inflicting serious casualties on the regime's forces, especially in Magwe, Sagaing, Chin and Kayah, in collaboration with local ethnic armed groups.

The NUG claims that almost 5,000 junta soldiers were killed and 1,700 wounded in June through November by PDFs and ethnic armed groups.

Meanwhile, the regime still has not been able to fully bring the country under its control, mostly due to the PDFs. It has branded the resistance fighters as terrorists and responded to them fiercely, including raiding PDF hideouts in cities, making arrests and seizing weapons. It has deployed a large number of troops and used artillery, gunships and fighter jets [1] to attack the PDFs and ethnic armed groups in Magwe and Sagaing regions and Chin, Shan, Kayah and Karen states, where resistance is most active.

So, will the civilian armed resistance wane?

When asked this, a PDF leader in Sagaing's Tabayin Township replied: "We have lost everything—families, homes and businesses. We only have the war against the regime. We must keep going till the end. We can't turn back."

EAOs: Joining Hands with the People's Revolution



Top from left to right: troops of the Karen National Union's armed wing, the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA); and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA). Bottom from left to right: troops of the Karenni National Progressive Party's armed wing, the Karenni Army (KNPP/KA); and Kokang's Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) / The Irrawaddy, KNPP and MNDAA

Until the Feb. 1 coup, Myanmar—with the exception of some areas in Karen, Shan and Rakhine states—had enjoyed a brief period of respite from more than 70 years of civil war as ceasefires took

hold, but fighting between the Myanmar military and the country's ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) intensified in the wake of the takeover.

In March, shortly after the junta began its lethal crackdowns on peaceful protesters, some ethnic armed groups joined the anti-dictatorship movement.

Most prominent among them are two long-standing revolutionary groups—the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) in the north and the Karen National Union (KNU) in the south. The groups have provided military training to youth resisting the military regime, and shelter to striking civil servants who refuse to work under it.

In May, the Chin National Front (CNF) became the first EAO to announce a formal partnership with the shadow civilian National Unity Government (NUG). It has teamed up with local civilian resistance groups collectively known as the People's Defense Force (PDF) in Chin State and surrounding areas to fight against regime troops there. Both the KNU and CNF are signatories to the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) inked by a number of EAOs in 2015 with the quasi-civilian government.

The KNU, KIA and CNF are among as many as eight EAOs that have sided with the people against the military dictatorship, the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) said at a November press conference. The NUCC is the NUG's political consultative body leading efforts to lay the groundwork for the creation of a federal union.

The armed resistance movement against the junta is stronger in the areas controlled by these EAOs, particularly in Myanmar's northwest, north and southeast. Another group, the Kayah State-based Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), is also fighting alongside local PDF groups there. EAOs that have chosen to side with the PDFs in their fight to topple the regime have been heartily embraced by the majority of people across the country, and the combined forces have inflicted serious casualties on the junta's troops.

On the other hand, some smaller EAOs have been holding talks with the junta, while others have chosen to ignore the conflict between the regime and its opponents as if it's none of their business, seeing it as an internal squabble between the ethnic Bamar majority led by ousted leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) and the brutal military. Despite this, the people's resistance movement has gained momentum with the support of the most prominent EAOs. The junta has responded with massive military offensives and committed atrocities against civilians supporting the resistance movement in Karen, Kayah, Chin and surrounding areas in upper Myanmar.

As for the NCA-based peace process, it came to a complete halt in 2021.

The junta has tried to revive the NCA process by pushing EAOs not to join the pro-democracy groups, but analysts dismissed its recent meeting with six northeast-based EAOs led by the United Wa State Army (UWSA) as a face-saving exercise that failed to achieve a breakthrough.

Sadly, with the junta stepping up its offensives and the civilian resistance showing no sign of wavering, 2022 seems certain to see more violence and bloodshed.

NUG & CRPH: Legitimate Representatives of the Myanmar People



Joining their compatriots in Myanmar and across the globe, Myanmar nationals in Japan organize a rally to show their support for the parallel National Unity Government. / Photo: CJ

The anti-junta resistance movement gained new momentum in April when elected lawmakers who were prevented from taking seats in the Union Parliament by the Feb. 1 coup formed a parallel government to rival and discredit the regime.

The Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH), comprising mainly National League for Democracy (NLD) MPs elected to the coup-dissolved Parliament, announced on April 16 that it had formed the National Unity Government (NUG), a shadow government set up to challenge the regime's legitimacy at home and abroad.

State Counselor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and President U Win Myint—who were ousted by the coup and have been detained since February—retain their positions in the NUG. Its 34 cabinet members are parliamentarians, technocrats, civil society leaders and activists of various ethnicities, comprising the most diverse, and gender- and generation-inclusive, government in the country's history. Duwa Lashi La, the president of the Kachin National Consultative Assembly, was appointed vice president but is serving as acting president, as the appointed president, U Win Myint, remains in junta custody. Myanmar people at home and abroad immediately embraced the NUG as their rightful government.

Since its formation, the NUG has been lobbying for international recognition while engaging with other countries as Myanmar's legitimate government. It has also been raising funds for striking civil servants and anti-regime resistance forces inside the country through its hugely successful lottery and bond sales. On Sept. 7, the NUG declared a "people's defensive war" on the regime to root out military rule [2], taking the ongoing armed struggle against the junta to another level.

Formed a few days after the coup, the CRPH has taken a leading role in the opposition movement as the country's legitimate parliament. It removed all ethnic armed organizations from the terrorist and unlawful associations lists to pave the way for broader participation in the revolution against the regime, while designating the military as a "terrorist organization." It also abolished the military-drafted 2008 Constitution and announced the Federal Democracy Charter, before forming the new government.

As the parliamentary wing of the NUG, the CRPH has endorsed the Myanmar people's right to defend themselves from the regime's violent crackdowns, among other things. The CRPH has vowed to continue working with all stakeholders to uproot the military dictatorship in Myanmar and return state power to its original owner, the citizens. The junta has branded the NUG, CRPH and their offshoot civilian defense forces as "terrorist groups" [3], issued arrest warrants against its members under harsh charges carrying terms of life imprisonment, and seized residences from several members.



Anti-coup protesters near the Central Bank of Myanmar office in Yangon call on staff to join the CDM in February 2021. / The Irrawaddy

Civil Disobedience Movement: Inspiring the World

No account of Myanmar's revolution against the military junta is complete without acknowledging the role of the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), whose participants have shown real heroism and comprise one of the key forces in the uprising. The movement was launched on Feb. 3 as a protest against the military coup by medical workers who refused to serve the military regime. They were quickly joined by tens of thousands of civil servants across the country who were unwilling to work for the generals. Teachers, university lecturers and education staff refused to return to classrooms and campuses; railway staff stayed home; tellers shunned their counters; and office workers from directors and managers to clerks and drivers at a range of government ministries and enterprises left their desks and work posts. Some members of the police and military also joined the strike, refusing to take part in the junta's atrocities.

Hailed as an exemplary response to a military power grab that could serve as an inspiration for other pro-democracy movements, the CDM was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize in late March. In an effort to break the movement, the junta has taken increasingly tough steps including pay cuts, temporary suspensions, dismissals, arrests, raids and forced eviction from government housing. When the CDM showed no signs of wavering, the junta even resorted to holding family members as hostages in a bid to get the strikers back to work.

Eventually, deprived of shelter and income, and living with the constant fear of arrest or the detention of family members, some people returned to work after months of striking. But many others remain adamant that they won't go back until democracy is restored, and have even found other ways to contribute to the revolution by joining the armed struggle or supporting local resistance fighters, despite already facing financial difficulties. Those taking part in the CDM are Myanmar heroes fighting the junta with weapons of peace.

The Irrawaddy

P.S.

- The Irrawaddy 30 December 2021:
<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmars-heroes-and-villains-of-2021.html>
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Footnotes

[1] <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-regime-airstrikes-break-international-law-nug.html>

[2] <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmars-shadow-govt-declares-war-on-military-regime.html>

[3] <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-junta-declares-national-unity-government-cmph-defense-forces-as-terrorist-groups.html>