

Editorial

Myanmar Junta's Executions 'Unforgivable'

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International sanctions and displays of concern mean nothing to the regime; only practical support for the Myanmar people's armed struggle will end their suffering.

The Myanmar regime has once again delivered an affront to the entire population, with the executions of four democracy activists: veteran pro-democracy campaigner Ko Jimmy, former National League for Democracy lawmaker Ko Phyo Zeya Thaw, Ko Hla Myo Aung and Ko Aung Thura Zaw.

Never missing an opportunity to show inhumanity to its opponents, the junta hanged the activists on Saturday without giving any prior notice to their families, then refused to release the bodies so that funerals could be held. In shock and denied physical evidence, some of the victims' relatives have been unable to accept the reality of the executions.

The previous affront to the country came in February last year with the military coup. The nation of 54 million people wholeheartedly rejected the takeover, initially by staging peaceful protests and then by launching the ongoing armed struggle against the regime. More than one year on, the junta is still struggling to control the country, humiliated in the eyes of the world as masters of a failed coup.

Then came the hangings.

The regime's Saturday executions were nothing but a blatant violation of the victims' right to life, liberty and security. For the majority of Myanmar's people, who have been suffering under the boot of the military regime, the hangings will be viewed as unforgivable. More than that, they will serve as the latest push factor increasing the people's determination to topple the regime by any means and accelerating the armed resistance against it. The hangings will simply spur those waging the armed struggle against the regime to intensify their efforts.

It is now clearer than ever that Myanmar is on the road to more bloodshed.

Internationally, the hangings were intended as a show of defiance by the junta to all those who dream of a just peace in Myanmar, which has been devastated by conflict since the coup last year.

Since the junta vowed in June to carry out the hangings, the world had followed the four activists' cases with concern, urging the regime not to execute the men. Junta ally China reportedly asked the regime not to proceed with the executions, as did Japan. Cambodia, which currently holds the rotating chair of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), of which Myanmar is a member, asked junta chief Min Aung Hlaing to reconsider the decision, saying the executions could cause "great concern among the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and its external partners."

With the hangings of the activists at Yangon's Insein Prison on Saturday, however, the junta has made plain to the international community that it doesn't give a fig what anyone in the outside world has to say.

For the West, especially the US, the executions should serve as a wakeup call that it is time for a harsher, more proactive approach, for real steps to punish the regime, and time to stop hiding behind the toothless ASEAN. After wasting more than a year supporting the bloc's failed peace plan for Myanmar, it's time they review their Myanmar policies—rather than simply continuing to impose sanctions and arms embargos against the regime—and provide practical assistance to the Myanmar people's ongoing war against the junta.

On Saturday, Myanmar lost four more sons to the brutal regime, which knows nothing but killing. Lest you forget, more than 2,000 others have already been killed by the junta. Myanmar's people are sick of your condolences for those who have been killed, and your condemnation of the regime on Facebook.

If the world don't want to see more violence and bloodshed in Myanmar, please act—and act now.

For Myanmar's people, there can be no turning away from the fight, as long as these inhumane old boys in uniform are in power.

The Irrawaddy, Editorial

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World Condemns Junta's Executions of Myanmar Democracy Activists

Ko Jimmy (Left) and Ko Phyo Zeya Thaw (Right)

The Myanmar regime's executions of four democracy activists over the weekend has attracted a torrent of condemnation worldwide, highlighting the deteriorating human rights situation in the Southeast Asian country devastated by last year's coup by the Myanmar military.

The military regime executed former National League for Democracy lawmaker Ko Phyo Zeya Thaw, veteran democracy activist Ko Jimmy, Ko Hla Myo Aung and Ko Aung Thura Zaw at Yangon's Insein Prison, after accusing them of masterminding armed resistance against the regime and being involved in anti-junta activities.



Ko Jimmy and his family.

Ko Jimmy spent nearly half his life as a prisoner, serving 21 years in Insein and Tharawaddy prisons from 1988 to 2005 and 2007 to 2012. He was first sentenced to 20 years in jail for his involvement in the student demonstrations and underground movement during the 1988 popular uprising, and was later given five years for his role in the Saffron Revolution in 2007.



Ko Phyto Zeya Thaw in the Union Parliament in Naypyitaw.

Ko Phyto Zeya Thaw, a hip-hop star turned politician, also became a symbol of resistance against military oppression. He served as a lawmaker for the National League for Democracy (NLD) from 2012 to 2020. His first imprisonment came in 2008 after he founded the Generation Wave underground youth group, known for using guerrilla tactics to distribute material opposing the then junta. The former rapper did not contest the 2020 election as he wanted to return to music. He immediately joined the anti-regime protests after the February 2021 coup. Following the junta crackdowns, Ko Phyto Zeya Thaw went into hiding and joined the armed resistance in Yangon.

Junta-controlled media reported the hangings on Monday. Relatives of the victims insisted that they were not informed that the executions would be taking place. Furthermore, the bodies of the victims were not released to the families for funerals.

Following the regime's announcement about the executions, condemnation of the junta has poured in from around the world.

United Nations (UN) Secretary-General António Guterres strongly condemned the hangings, saying that they “mark a further deterioration of the already dire human rights environment in Myanmar.”

United States (US) Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken said that the US condemns in the strongest terms the regime’s executions of pro-democracy activists, adding that the regime’s sham trials and the hangings were blatant attempts to extinguish democracy in Myanmar.

“These reprehensible acts of violence further exemplify the regime’s complete disregard for human rights and the rule of law,” he said.



Ko Hla Myo Aung (Left) and Ko Aung Thura Zaw (Right)

The High Representative for Foreign Affairs for the European Union and the foreign ministers of Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, Republic of Korea, the United Kingdom and the United States issued a joint statement condemning the executions, and urged the regime to seek peace through dialogue and not through further violence.

In the joint statement the foreign ministers said: “The Myanmar military regime’s executions of pro-democracy and opposition leaders are reprehensible acts of violence that further exemplify the regime’s disregard for human rights and the rule of law.”

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), a ten member bloc that includes Myanmar, said that it was “extremely troubled” by the executions as it has been trying to mediate peace in the country since last year.

ASEAN has proposed a peace plan, known as the Five-Point Consensus, for Myanmar that includes an immediate cessation of violence, but the junta has failed to honor the agreement.

Much to the ASEAN’s embarrassment, Hun Sen, the Prime Minister of Cambodia and the bloc’s current chair, personally asked coup leader Senior General Min Aung Hlaing to refrain from carrying out the death sentences handed to the four men.

Cambodia said on Monday in a statement issued by ASEAN that the implementation of the death sentences was “highly reprehensible”, as it created a setback to and presented a gross lack of will to support the effort, particularly by the ASEAN chair, in expediting progress on the implementation of the Five-Point Consensus.

Despite its failure to coax the regime into implementing the peace plan, Hun Sen said that ASEAN remained committed to the principles of the ASEAN Charter and the mandate of the Five-Point Consensus, while urging the regime to implement the Consensus.

Activists and right groups have long condemned ASEAN for sticking to the peace plan despite the lack of progress on it.

With the UN and ASEAN having made little headway on solving the Myanmar crisis, a group of

former UN experts said that the UN and ASEAN must stop shamefully failing the Myanmar people and finally take concerted action against the junta as the executions were “further abhorrent acts of terror by a military junta desperately trying to ensure its own survival.”

Although the Myanmar crisis was brought to the UN last year, the UN Security Council is yet to even table a single resolution on the country, partly because of resistance from the regime’s allies China and Russia.

The Special Advisory Council for Myanmar’s (SAC-M) Marzuki Darusman said that the junta acted with total barbarism and that the executions were intended entirely to drive fear into the hearts of anyone opposing the regime.

“That is an act of terror by any UN definition,” he said.

Another SAC-M member Yanghee Lee said that it was long past time for a new approach to the Myanmar crisis.

“Min Aung Hlaing and his illegal barbaric junta are not people that can be reasoned with. The UN and ASEAN must exert as much pressure on the junta as possible to bring this crisis to an end,” she said.

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