

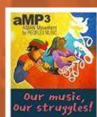
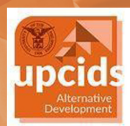


UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES
CENTER FOR
INTEGRATIVE AND
DEVELOPMENT
STUDIES

SOLIDARITY FOR THE PEOPLES OF BURMA/MYANMAR

SITUATIONERS, SOLIDARITY MESSAGES,
PROTEST SONGS, AND NOISE BARRAGE

PROCEEDINGS





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Rationale

The peoples of Burma/Myanmar are again held in darkness after the country's Tatmadaw (military) junta staged a coup to reject the results of the general elections last year. The outcome was a historic moment that confirmed the civilian candidates as winners in a landslide electoral victory.

By March 2021 and since the start of the Tatmadaw coup led by General Min Aung Hlaing on February 1, 2021, over fifty-four people have been killed, while 1,498 have been arrested and 1,192 remain in unlawful detention. These numbers have dramatically increased by the day. Grassroots leaders, duly-elected government officials, pro-democracy activists, journalists, and members of civil society became targets of the junta's brutal crackdown. It has disrupted various communication lines, defied the Geneva Convention and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), and effectively eliminated the shrinking democratic space in the country.

As an act of resistance to the looming return of draconian military rule, many people flooded the streets of Yangon, Mandalay, Nay Pyi Taw, and other key cities. They expressed their dissent through sustained peaceful protests and mobilizations under the loose coalition named Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM). The group effectively united and galvanized support for this anti-coup campaign amidst escalating violence of the military. Even the younger generations or the Gen Z assumed key leadership roles in the protest movement with strong support from various political groups.

Today, the CDM works closely with the General Strike Committee (GSC) and the Committee Representing the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH).

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Their alliance continues the daily protest in different cities within Burma/ Myanmar.

However, while the anti-coup movement was rapidly gaining traction, it was met with vicious military assault in Yangon, Mandalay, Pyin Oo Lwin, Myingyan, Monywa, Mawlamyine, Loikaw, Yay, Myitkyina, Hpakant, Pyay, Patheingyi, Taung Twin Gyi, Shwebo, Myan Aung, Salin Township, and other parts of Burma/Myanmar. The protesters faced enduring stun grenades, water cannons, smoke bombs, flashbangs, batons, tear-gas, rubber bullets, and even vehicles and live ammunition from the Tatmadaw.

After the junta detained national leaders and lawmakers and seized government power, transferring legislative, executive, and judicial powers to its Commander-in-Chief, people have utilized the streets as their space to fight for their fundamental freedoms by demonstrating civil disobedience. But such defiance has been met with tyranny. The Tatmadaw responded by transforming the thoroughfares into their shooting range and combat zone, ultimately perpetuating a culture of impunity.

Meanwhile, many issues about the country remain and need to be unearthed. What has been happening in Burma/Myanmar should be understood as a continuing struggle for democracy and justice.

The current political crisis is beyond the conflict between the Tatmadaw and the National League for Democracy (NLD). The discrimination and abuse of Rohingya peoples in Rakhine State, along with the enduring conflicts between the Burmese junta and the many ethnic armed organizations, are deeply-rooted in the protracted struggles of diverse ethnic groups living in various parts of the country.

The oppression of Burma/Myanmar's people is historically entwined with the volatile period of British rule that subjugated different ethnic groups. Subsequently, the colonizers left the country to the dominant *Bamar* (also known as Burmese) elite and its military arm. For these reasons, there is a growing need to understand Burma/ Myanmar better.

The University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies Program on Alternative Development (UP CIDS-AltDev) held a solidarity gathering for Burma/Myanmar on March 22, 2021 (Monday) from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. (GMT+8) via Zoom and Facebook Live. This event was co-organized with the 11.11.11 Coalition of the North South Flemish Movement, the International Peace Bureau (IPB), the Laban ng Masa (LnM), the ASEAN SOGIE Caucus (ASC), the Asian Music for Peoples' Peace and Progress (AMP3), the Focus on the Global South, the Sustainability and Participation thru Education and Lifelong Learning (SPELL), the Nagkaisa Labor Coalition (Nagkaisa), the Initiatives for International Dialogue (IID), the Save San Roque (SSR) Alliance, and the Burma Solidarity – Philippines (BSP).

The online solidarity gathering served as a platform for: (1) anti-coup protesters, especially the grassroots leaders, to share their ongoing fight to uphold democracy and end military rule, and (2) civil society groups and communities of alternative practitioners from different parts of the Southeast Asian region and beyond to express their strongest solidarity and support for the peoples' movement in Burma/Myanmar. Its objectives were to:

- ▶ Discuss the relevance of 'alternative regionalism' as well as the key points and messages of the joint statement "Military Junta, Withdraw from Burma Politics! Restore Democracy! End Elite Rule!" from the perspective of the grassroots and anti-coup activists in Burma/Myanmar;
- ▶ Amplify the voices of anti-coup protesters, grassroots leaders, and activists;
- ▶ Provide a space for a people-to-people interaction to express the culture of resistance and solidarity for the peoples of Burma/Myanmar;
- ▶ Generate a deeper analysis of the current political situation based on the collective experience of the peoples and scholar-activists in Burma/Myanmar; and
- ▶ Identify doable ways forward and concrete steps to remotely support the peoples' movement in Burma/Myanmar.

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Four speakers from Burma/Myanmar shared their experiences and insights during the solidarity gathering. They were Saw Win Kyaw of the Back Pack Health Worker Team, scholar-activist Sai Sam Kham from the Erasmus University Rotterdam's International Institute of Social Studies, Me Me Khant of the Virtual Demonstrations Movement (VDM), and drag artist Walkie Talkie of the LGBTQ+ group Rainbow Alliance.

Representing the Philippines' basic sectors, e.g., indigenous peoples, urban poor, and workers, three grassroots formations joined to express their utmost support for the peoples' movement in Burma/Myanmar. These groups were the: Save Our Schools Network – a makeshift school of indigenous *Lumad* youth who fled from their ancestral domain due to military harassment; SSR's urban poor and youth leaders; and the *Nagkaisa* (United) – one of the leading labor union movements in the country. Participants from social movements and organizations across Southeast Asia also gave their solidarity messages, namely: Saufina Maulida of the Milk Tea Alliance from Indonesia; Valentin Da Costa Pinto of The Timor-Leste NGO Forum (FONGTIL), and Marc Batac of the IID.

Sai Sam Kham discussed the importance of people-to-people solidarity. Towards the end of the program, Ryan Martinez from the UP CIDS-AltDev led the participants to a noise barrage using their pots and pans to symbolically express their continuing support for the Burmese resistance against the military junta. This act signifies a culture-based protest among the locals in Burma/Myanmar to drive away evil spirits in their respective homes and lives.

Introduction

The program began with a short video presentation that depicted the events currently unfolding in Burma/Myanmar. It showed the arrests of democratically elected leaders, the Tatmadaw's takeover of the government and militarization of city centers, the repression of human rights and civil liberties, the state-led violence and killings, and the rise and development of the people's movement in the country.

Raquel Castillo, who is the National Coordinator of SPELL based in the Philippines, served as the moderator of the event. She formally opened the program by giving further context to the video. She also explained the reasons behind the format of the activity, specifically: (1) the necessity to surface the experience in Burma/Myanmar from the lens of its most basic sectors, (2) the need to highlight the solidarity among grassroots formations and to advance people-to-people alternative regionalism, and (3) the importance of providing support to the people's movement from allies overseas.

Overview of the Situation in Burma/Myanmar

Dr. Walden Bello

National Chairperson of Laban ng Masa

In his presentation, Dr. Bello provided key insights on the eruption of protests in various parts of Burma/Myanmar. He stressed that the February 1 coup was not a show of strength, but an act of desperation. In spite of the growing number of deaths recorded because of police and military killings, protests have continued to escalate and draw in people from different walks of life, e.g., workers and peasants, students and professionals, parents and children. The people of Burma/Myanmar

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have paralyzed the economy in protest of the military takeover – a demonstration of their power against the guns of the military.

Dr. Bello noted that the National League for Democracy (NLD) government was not perfect. He described Aung San Suu Kyi's refusal to speak against the genocide of the Rohingya people as reprehensible. Despite this situation and the scattered accusations made by the military against the group, the NLD remained to be vastly popular in Burma/Myanmar.

According to Dr. Bello, the February 1 coup exemplified the military's desperation in halting the 'civilianization' of the government and re-capturing the seat of power from the NLD. The military had expected the peoples of Burma/Myanmar to stay mum about the ouster of the civilian government; the junta did not expect that the people would resist and fight for their liberation from military rule. The people protested because they believe that a military-controlled future is not a future worth living, and that they would rather die for freedom than live without hope.

Dr. Bello emphasized the important role of social movements outside of Burma/Myanmar. By isolating the military regime and depriving it of political, economic, and diplomatic support, allies can potentially aid the peoples movement in the country. He found the response of the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to be extremely disappointing because none of the nine governments demanded a restoration of the democratically elected government in Burma/Myanmar. He mentioned that China even blocked a United Nations Security Council (UNSC) joint condemnation statement on the coup by not supporting it. Japan's position, on the other hand, seems unclear.

Dr. Bello reiterated the need for continuing international efforts to isolate the military regime and deprive it of political, economic, and diplomatic support. Before ending his discussion, he stated again the five demands of the people of Burma/Myanmar to the illegitimate military regime: (1) end all violence against the people, (2) release all detainees,

(3) lift martial law and the nationwide state of emergency, (4) remove all telecommunications restrictions, and (5) stand aside and let the democratically elected government assume its rightful powers.

Impact of the military coup to community-based health workers as medical frontliners during the COVID-19 pandemic

Saw Win Kyaw

Director of the Back Pack Health Worker Team (BPHWT)

Working in the Thai-Burma border, BPHWT Director Win Kyaw shared his organization's experience. He talked about the situation of community health workers during the COVID-19 crisis and the resurgence of the military regime in Burma/Myanmar.

Win Kyaw clarified that the BPHWT has three (3) main programs: Medical Care, Community Health Education and Prevention Program, and Maternal and Child Healthcare Program. With the emergence of COVID-19, however, the BPHWT opted to provide other services to respond to the needs of the people during the pandemic.

As the violent crackdown intensifies in the urban areas of Burma/Myanmar, thousands fled from the cities to the Thai-Burma border to seek refuge in the region's rough and jungle-like terrain. Win Kyaw disclosed there were already 3,000 people who arrived in the Karen ethnic area. Among these citizens were high-level government officials as well as police and military deserters. Their number is in addition to the current population of around 3,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Northern Karen state as a result of sporadic fighting between the military and the ethnic armed group. Responding to this influx, the BPHWT openly welcomed the IDPs into their care and offered them food and shelter. He added that his organization did not only provide for the basic needs of the arriving IDPs, but it also ensured their safety and healthcare by employing a system that would allow their quarantine and isolation.

With the government hospitals and clinics shutting down as medical professionals in the country joined the anti-coup protests on the streets, the BPHWT prepared its clinics for the surge of citizens hoping to access healthcare, particularly maternal and child healthcare during this time. The team also readied contingency medicines, supplies, and equipment as well as dispensed primary care and intermediate secondary care. They coordinated with local authorities for the citizens' evacuation plan, conducted advanced first aid training to volunteer field health workers, and provided a steady supply of first aid kits. To augment these efforts, the BPHWT also set up a clinic near the urban centers.

Likewise, the BPHWT coordinated with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) based in Thailand because of the worsening situation at the borders. The Thailand government, on the other hand, also prepared for this border crisis by setting up quarantine and COVID-19 testing centers in its periphery. It was reported that it erected a settlement along the Thai-Burma border to accommodate around 30,000 displaced peoples. However, Win Kyaw clarified that most IDPs were rather forced back to Burma/Myanmar or sent abroad in other cases instead of getting a safe shelter in the Thailand side of the border.

Towards the end of his sharing, Win Kyaw asked the international community, including global agencies like the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), to: (1) support initiatives that aim to end the military coup and to call for a federal democracy in Burma/Myanmar, (2) provide cross-border aid and direct support, and (3) understand the real situation of the underground community.

Solidarity Message through Art: "The Birds Haven't Stopped Calling"

Joseph Purugganan

AMP3 and Coordinator of Focus of the Global South- Philippines

Representing the Asian Music for Peoples' Peace and Progress (AMP3), Joseph expressed solidarity with all the protests in Burma/

Myanmar. Music, as he recounted, has played a vital role in the continuing democratic struggles in Burma/Myanmar. Marching together at the frontlines with the youth and other sectors are musician-activists who continue to inspire the movement. He emphasized music's potential to be a strong expression of international solidarity.

Joseph explained that the newly composed song "The Birds Haven't Stopped Calling", penned and arranged by Thai singer-songwriter and AMP3 member Nitithorn 'Ae' Thongthirakul, was based on the poem written during the period of the 1973 democratic struggle in Thailand. The song is dedicated to the peoples' movement in Burma/Myanmar.

Solidarity Messages from the Grassroots in the Philippines

Video presentations from the Save San Roque (SSR) Alliance and the Nagkaisa (United) Labor Coalition

Despite facing militarization and the constant threat of eviction from her home, Estrelieta Bagasbas, the Chairperson of Kalipunan ng Damayang Mahihirap (KDM) - San Roque based in Metro Manila offered a message of encouragement and solidarity for the peoples of Burma/Myanmar in their struggle against the dictatorship of the military junta. She exclaimed, "*Laban lang! Wág kayong matakot. Go, go! Ipaglaban ang karapatan ng mga mamamayan upang magtagumpay!*" (Just fight! Do not be afraid. Go, go! Fight for the rights of the people towards victory!)"

For Estrelieta, the plight of the peoples in Myanmar is akin to what is happening in the Philippines where the military's dominance over the citizens has resulted in unrest. Thus, this condition needs to be resisted. "*Hindi sila nagdudulot ng katahimikan, kundi sila ang naglilikha ng takot sa ating mamamayan*" (They do not bring peace, but rather they sow fear among the people)," she added.

Democracy can only be won in both Myanmar and the Philippines by ousting military dictatorships. Estrelieta boldly declared, "*Pataksikin ang naghahari sa inyong komunidad o sa inyong bansa lalo na ang military...*"

at mas kayang-kaya ninyo na harapin itong mga militar na ito at patalsikin (Oust the reigning ruler in your community or in your country, especially the military...And you are more capable in confronting the military and ousting them)."

Community youth leaders named Jovelyn and Patty also gave words of encouragement and solidarity to the comrades in Burma/Myanmar. They said, "*Laban lang, mga kasama. Kaya natin ito* (Just fight, comrades! We can do this!)." They likewise expressed their sincere condolences to the families of slain protestors who are also known as the fallen heroes in Myanmar.

Following the solidarity message from the urban poor community of Sitio San Roque was Nagkaisa's video compilation on the protest mobilization in Metro Manila. It showed the solidarity messages given by two representatives of Nagkaisa in which they vehemently condemned the military coup in Burma/Myanmar. They also highlighted the importance of democratic spaces in the country and lambasted the ASEAN for its deafening silence over the emergence of military juntas in the region.

"Ang pakikibaka ng mamamayan ng bansang Burma ay pakikibaka rin naman ng manggagawa sa buong daigdig (The democratic struggle of the peoples in Burma is also the struggle of workers all over the world)," said the first Nagkaisa representative in the video. He remarked that all attempts to quash or diminish democratic spaces should be denounced and resisted, and that the victories of previous social movements should be protected. He also emphasized the need for a broad alliance and unity among progressive organizations to advance the interests of the marginalized.

The second representative from Nagkaisa conveyed that the military takeover in Burma/Myanmar is not new nor surprising. Recounting the country's history, he said, "*Mula noon, panahon palang ng Briton, panahon pa lang ng paghahari ng militar pagkatapos nito, lahat ng tangka at inisyatiba para magkaroon ng demokrasya ay pinipigil ng militar* (Since the time of the British, time of the ruling military afterwards, all attempts and initiatives to achieve democracy have been foiled by the

military).” Despite having a civilian government in place, the military has remained politically and economically powerful.

Diaspora Activism, the Role of the Labor Movement and Women Workers, and the Importance of Progressive and Multi-Ethnic Leadership

Me Me Khant

Scholar-activist from the Virtual Demonstrations Movement

At the start of her presentation, Me Me read the poem she personally wrote in honor of the 230 fallen heroes or those who died fighting for the country’s democracy for almost two months. Thereafter, she discussed the significance of different sectors, e.g., labor unions, ethnic groups, and diaspora formations, in the ongoing struggle for democracy in Burma/Myanmar.

Me Me explained the central role of women workers and the labor movement in the ‘Spring Revolution’. Female garment industry workers emerged at the forefront of the anti-coup protests, leading numerous large-scale demonstrations in the urban centers. Over the last decade and a half, the labor movement in Burma/Myanmar has been gaining momentum. She reported that while there has been quasi-democracy in the country for the past years, the crackdown on unions, labor groups, and activist organizations has not stopped.

According to Me Me, the labor movement was one of the firsts to mobilize when the revolution started. It was their first large mobilization in Yangon that gave strength and empowered people across the country to join the street demonstrations. However, due to their central role in the democracy struggle, the military junta made efforts to isolate them and declared martial law in ‘factory towns’ or townships adjacent to industrial zones where majority of the workers reside.

As for the ethnic groups, Me Me believed that the current political situation served as the Bamar majority’s wake-up call to the government’s historical marginalization of their sector in Burma/Myanmar. She further said that the people started to realize how the

experience of militarization, harassment, and intimidation had been worst for the rural ethnic population. She also noted that while there has been ‘progress’ in urban areas these past years, the rural areas—where numerous ethnic groups of Burma/Myanmar live—remain the same, i.e., still struggling from repression by the military junta.

Being part of the diaspora community of Burma/Myanmar, Me Me thought that people from different parts of the world, who are unable to physically join the protestors, can still provide them with auxiliary support. She cited various ways in which those in exile and other pro-democracy advocates can participate meaningfully in the democratic struggle: e.g., through online protests, fundraising, and awareness-building activities.

NAGKAISA (UNITED!) Labor Coalition

Nice Coronacion

Head of Women's Committee and Deputy Secretary-General of Sentro ng mga Nagkakaisa at Progresibong Manggagawa

Nice, a labor leader, expressed Nagkaisa's admiration for the courage shown by the peoples of Burma/Myanmar and conveyed the coalition's strong commitment to stand beside Burma/Myanmar's struggles. She observed, “What started as the intramurals between the military elite and the civilian elites boiled over.” She discussed how the military thought it could solve the impasse by taking exclusive power again and the counter response of the new generation who showed their willingness to fight for democracy.

According to Nice, the peoples of Burma/Myanmar were steadfast in their resistance against the military junta. Part of this resistance is the coming together of the trade unions that facilitated the success of the labor movement in paralyzing some businesses in Burma/Myanmar through their continuous strikes. With the intensification of dismay and resistance among the people, the military sought to collaborate with the Chinese Communist Party to crush the opposition movement by building a more effective internet firewall against the protesters.

At the international level, Nice stressed the importance of targeted sanctions from the West, and that these embargoes have to be ramped up. She shared that some people believe that the West may be misjudging the relationship between the generals and the economy; thus, it may be overestimating the importance of army-owned companies. Worse, the ASEAN is now complicit with the generals as they continue to hold on to their deranged idea that this is an internal matter.

Nice condemned ASEAN's position and considered it as a "stance that is a refuge of scoundrels and mass murderers like the generals of the Tatmadaw and Mr. Duterte." As a response to this situation, she laid out some actions that the Philippines can do to support the peoples of Burma/Myanmar, including the continuous mobilization to pressure the Philippine government and the rest of the ASEAN governments to do the right thing and to stand up against the Tatmadaw. She also added that those who are fighting on the ground must be fully supported. So, Nagkaisa stands behind the idea being promoted by the Initiatives for International Dialogue (IID), i.e., to press the Philippine government and the ASEAN to do better.

In her concluding remarks, Nice called for a more progressive agenda across all ethnic lines towards a fairer and freer society for the peoples of Burma/Myanmar.

The Political Economic Situation of Rural Burma/Myanmar and the Peasant Responses to the Military Coup

Sai Sam Kham

Scholar-Activist, International Institute of Social Studies, Erasmus University Rotterdam, and former Executive Director of Metta Development Foundation, Myanmar

During his presentation, Sai Sam focused on three things: (1) the current situation of the peoples of Burma/Myanmar and the possible outlook of the ongoing civil disobedience movement; (2) the political economy in the rural areas and its connection with the military; and (3) the social reproduction of dictatorship and conflict in the country.

Situation in Burma/Myanmar

Sai Sam discussed the overall situation and the outlook of the movement given the constant violent crackdown among the protesters and the displacement of people. He shared his recent online conversation with his friend who could not help but think whether the people should continue the non-violence response or should they pursue urban guerilla warfare that would make them use arms. There is a constant conundrum of what will happen next to Burma/Myanmar if people will use the more militant approach in response to the military coup: i.e., will it turn into a communist country or become something like Syria? Despite not wanting the cities to turn into battlegrounds, Sai Sam's friend told him that if people will use arms, then they should base themselves in the rural areas.

Among the young Burmese, there has been a lot of interest in the Left Movement, with leftist political ideologies now trending on social media. Reflecting on these particular interactions, Sai Sam discussed that there is a gap between the urban-based political activists and the rural areas. The urban population might have difficulty understanding the situation of the rural areas and the kind of challenges the rural population is facing when they talk about conflict. He pointed out that the people in rural communities have endured the burden of the 70-year long conflict in Burma/Myanmar and that they have been greatly affected by it.

Sai Sam also highlighted the roles of the younger generation in the revolution. But this focus on the Gen Z somehow puts a lot of emphasis on the urban, more educated, younger population. He stressed that when people are uprising in the entire country, it is not only the urban or more educated population who are getting involved but all people from across the strata of the society.

Citing information from his fellow speaker, i.e., scholar-activist Me Me Khant of Virtual Demonstrations Movement, Sai Sam noted that the most violent and serious crackdown in Yangon targeted those areas where factory workers live. Most of these working class people are migrants who started to return to their rural homes. However, this move somehow created a misunderstanding and misconception about

the rural population, particularly on social media. Some city-based Burmese blamed rural dwellers for not coming out en masse to join the movement. These rural communities have few residents though, so whatever they do becomes easily obvious to the military, exposing them to a higher level of risk and danger.

The influx of urban people into the provinces shows the largely semi-proletariat nature of the working class in Burma/Myanmar. Many factory workers have families residing in rural areas where some may even own lands and other properties that compel them to return.

Furthermore, Sai Sam explained the inextricable link between urban and rural areas in the sense that both provide refuge to each other. The urban areas provide refuge for the rural population because they can come to work as cheap migrant labor, while the urban population can take refuge in the rural areas. For instance, those who want to join armed insurgencies will go to the rural area, and many politicians have also fled to the rural areas when there is heavy repression, especially in the Karen National Union-controlled area.

Role of Military in the Political Economy of Myanmar and Impact in Rural Areas

According to Sai Sam, the military controls many business establishments across industries, from telecommunications to petroleum. It receives a lot of money from these companies. For instance, it partly owns the Vietnam military communications group called Viettel that also gets funded by foreign financial institutions like UK-based banks. This business projected an income of US\$700 million for the military within ten years. Further, data from the Myanmar Alliance for Transparency and Accountability (MATA) showed that the income from huge oil and gas corporations like Total, Petronas, POSCO, and Thailand's PTT Exploration and Production Public Company Limited (PTTEP) reached US\$696 million in 2017-2018.

Sai Sam added that land and other resources in rural areas are also important for the military's business operations. The agriculture sector is the main contributor to the country's gross domestic product (GDP)

which is about 60 percent. With the 70-year-long conflict in Burma/Myanmar, it is the countryside that is heavily affected. There are many different ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) and militia forces in the rural areas which are very much linked to the state building plan of the military that uses the latter in territories where they do not have controlling power. These armed groups engage in business and administration in remote rural areas, resulting in a lot of fighting and displacement of the people.

According to Sai Sam, majority of the rural population expressed that they do not support the military coup. However, in militia-controlled areas, it is difficult for people to show dissent. The 2020 national election proved that the local militia in these rural areas, such as in Shan State, backed up the military-supported Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP). There is also a difference between rural and urban politics and the militia's role in strongly promoting patron-client relationship.

Being part of the ethnic nationality and ethnic armed movements also plays an important role in the countryside. This explains why in the western part of the country, the place of the Rohingya crisis, the Rakhine population hugely supported the Arakan Army (AA). Now, AA is going towards the direction where it has been de-classified as a terrorist organization after the military coup council offered peace. Sai Sam explained that while this is upsetting for some, this is a characteristic of ethnic and rural politics where EAOs are very powerful.

A lot of people sympathized with the AA's decision because over 100,000 Rakhine population have been displaced by the conflict and they are suffering in IDP camps. Around one million displaced Rohingya people are also in Bangladesh. This kind of survival-oriented strategy or option chosen by EAOs is not new in Myanmar. The Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) has also taken this step. In 2011, over 100,000 Kachin people were displaced when the war resumed in the North of Myanmar.

Social and Economic Reproduction of Conflict

Sai Sam also discussed the important role of the countryside in the social reproduction of conflict and dictatorship in Myanmar. He said that it is important to understand how geographic politics plays a significant part in the ongoing conflict in the country. The rural population in the mountainous regions, the central part, and the lower part have their differences in terms of the crops they produce, their political economy, and their politics.

In the mountains, the agriculture focuses on other kinds of produce other than rice, the main crop in the lower part of Myanmar. The central region grows beans and pulses due to its dry and arid climate. Nevertheless, these places are similar because of their agriculture-focused economies as well as the prevalence of poverty. People tend to be more traditional and quite reactionary. The central and lower parts are more nationalistic and Buddhist-oriented.

In relation to the social reproduction of conflict and military dictatorship, many soldiers come from the countryside. The military recruitment is focused on the lower and central regions of Myanmar. Among the ethnic minorities, the recruitment for the armed insurgencies is in the mountainous part of the northern, western, north-western, and eastern sections of the country. But while these rural areas provide soldiers both for the military and the armed insurgency, these are also where many Buddhist monks live and the home to many factory workers laboring in the big cities. These circumstances reveal how the countryside affects the social and economic reproduction in Myanmar.

Sai Sam likewise stressed the role of powerful neighboring countries in shaping Myanmar's economic and geopolitical interests. China—through its Belt Road Initiative (BRI) that will traverse many rural areas in Myanmar like the Rakhine State—has been supporting the military for many years as evidenced by its refusal to condemn this coup. Myanmar's civil society has already expressed its concerns about the environmental, economic, and social impact of mega projects under the BRI on the countryside where many extractive industries are located. In contrast, the civilian NLD (National League for Democracy) government gave concessions to large mining companies from Australia

so that these firms could operate in the huge northern areas of Shan and Kachin States. Recently, a French energy company announced stopping its Shweli hydropower construction in Shan State.

In summary, Sai Sam pointed out that the political economies of rural areas are not homogenous. These regions have different characteristics, and the people also have varying reactions to the military coup. Largely, they oppose it. However, in certain sectors, there are many ongoing political negotiations based on the struggle and the survival of the ethnic groups in the countryside.

Response: Solidarity Messages through Art: "Gumising Ka, Kabataan" (Youth, Rise Up!), Philippines

Short intro by Joseph Purugganan of AMP3 and Coordinator of Focus of the Global South- Philippines

On behalf of his organizations, Joseph expressed solidarity with the new generation of Burmese activists who are at the frontlines of the struggles for democracy and freedom. He explained that the song entitled "Gumising Ka, Kabataan" or "Youth, Rise Up!" is a revival piece that dates back to the 1940s. It was revived during the First Quarter Storm (FQS) by students and youths who led the protests against the Marcos dictatorship in the 1970s. This current version of the song is a rearrangement and was recorded by AMP3 in 2020 for the 50th anniversary of FQS.

The song calls on the youth to rise up, unite with the masses, and bring about the systemic change and transformation that is so urgently needed. Joseph wished the youth of Burma/Myanmar to have more strength and courage in their struggle. He also expressed how artists draw strength, courage, and inspiration from the creative and spirited actions of the youth who resist authoritarianism.

Solidarity Messages from Different Countries

Friends from Cambodia

A group of allies from Cambodia signified their solidarity with the peoples of Burma/Myanmar through a video presentation.

The video is a compilation of photos of Cambodian supporters carrying banners that showed their call for democracy, the denouncement of the military coup, and the call to save Burma/Myanmar. Its background music is “The Village” composed by Filipino singer-songwriter Jess Santiago who is also a member of AMP3.

The video can be viewed through this link:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/15mn-JFKfWN0E9opLrhgzChpYdoUXfMAj/view?usp=sharing>

Save Our Schools Network/Bakwit School, Philippines

Jose Monfred C. Sy

Save Our Schools (SOS) Network and Project Leader, UP CIDS AltDev

The teachers from the Lumad Bakwit Schools of SOS Network, represented by Jose, communicated their strong solidarity with the peoples of Burma/Myanmar who are fighting against the suppression of democracy and the attack on human rights. They expressed how the fight for democracy of Burma/Myanmar even inspired the Lumad students. They identified some of the similarities of the current situation of the Burma/Myanmar peoples and the Lumad students in terms of the same forms of violence, attacks, and killings of activists by the military and other state agents. They also mentioned how the displacement of the Lumads from their ancestral domain relates to the situation of refugees and stateless peoples at the borders of Burma/Myanmar.

In response to the attacks from the state military, the Lumads have established “bakwit” or evacuation/makeshift schools. Although this is a victory for them, the SOS Network explained that there is a continuous targeting of Lumads by armed agents. Some students, teachers, and elders are being unlawfully detained and imprisoned. Because of this situation, the Lumads are also protesting in the streets and seeking support from allies and networks in the same way as the peoples of Burma/Myanmar.

The SOS Network called for the end of the crackdown on dissent not only in the Philippines and Burma/Myanmar but also across the Southeast Asian region: “The military junta must be so afraid of the power of civilians that they use weapons against us, unarmed activists.” Amidst similar situations between the Philippines and Burma/Myanmar, the people must continue to resist and fight for the future of all children and youth. As everyone says, “The people united shall never be defeated.”

Milk Tea Alliance (MTA), Indonesia

Safina Maulida

By expressing her sorrow because of how the military junta has undermined the peoples of Burma/Myanmar through the coup, Safina offered her message of solidarity. She conveyed her deep concern for the ongoing danger, inhumanity, and absolute brutality that the Burmese are experiencing. She also stressed that their fight and pursuit of democracy constitute years of life struggles. She stated that the MTA across the world, including Indonesia, stands with them in defending the truth and contending against dictatorship.

Safina also argued that the enemy of today is ignorance which many people have adopted and is already manifested in the ASEAN’s principle of non-interference. “The deaths of people are not mere numbers, but these are lives. They are the lives of our friends, sisters, brothers, daughters, sons, and our beacons of hope,” she explained. “These apolitical acts are definitely not unpolitical,” she further posited. She added that there should be no question of what is important today because the peoples of Burma/Myanmar and their rights are what matters most today.

In light of these conditions, Safina proposed that: (1) human rights should be the common ground of everyone; (2) fundamental freedom should be used as the landscape and should be achieved without bloodshed; and (3) subversive truth should be the center and the heart of human rights and the democratic climate.

Safina concluded her message by imploring that everyone's actions must go beyond solidarity. Quoting Simone de Beauvoir's lesson on truth, she hoped that every democracy defender in Burma/Myanmar may continue to love until the truth is revealed.

Forum ONG Timor-Leste (FONGTIL)

Valentin Da Costa Pinto, Executive Director, Fundasaun HTL

In sharing the solidarity message of FONGTIL, an alliance of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Timor-Leste, Valentin echoed the call of the civil society movement and their collective disappointment in the military coup led by Ming Aung Hlaing against the democratically-elected National League for Democracy (NLD). The military coup is a major blow to the decade-long democratic transition that the people of Burma/Myanmar have fought so hard for. Civil society organizations have been experiencing living and working under military rule as well as the challenges that it brings.

For FONGTIL, the situation in Burma/Myanmar can be related to the history of Timor Leste during the Indonesian occupation that also involved military aggression and human rights violations. Taking off from that experience, it strongly condemned the Burma/Myanmar military and its undemocratic actions. It demanded that the junta should return to the barracks and keep the borders safe for the peoples of Burma/Myanmar.

Valentin discussed that FONGTIL sides with Burma/Myanmar people who voted for NLD leaders in 2020 and demanded that their rights be upheld and safeguarded. He and his group also called on human rights defenders and all people, who wish to see the democratic path in this country, to condemn the brutal actions of the military. Their solidarity with the peoples of Burma/Myanmar goes beyond ASEAN

where Timor-Leste is not yet a permanent member. They are urging this regional inter-governmental body to decide on strong sanctions against the Burma/Myanmar military.

In addition, FONGTIL strongly supports the power of civilians to fight for their rights through demonstrations in all cities of Burma/Myanmar. It also calls for the release of arrested civilians and implores the international community to immediately intervene and support the democratic struggle of the Burma/Myanmar peoples.

Initiatives for International Dialogue (IID) – Philippines

Marc Batac

The IID has been a part of the decades-long solidarities of the international community with the democratic struggle of the peoples of Burma/Myanmar. Marc shared his organization's solidarity work and its commitment to continue their support for this cause.

The current situation in Burma/Myanmar since the coup in February 2021 is an intrinsic element of the military's counterinsurgency operation in remote towns, villages, and ethnic states. Hundreds of thousands of lives were ruined and claimed by the Tatmadaw for the past several years. Marc explained that this culture of wanton violation and brutality is witnessed in Timor-Leste, in Aceh, Indonesia, in Pattani, Thailand, in West Papua, in indigenous communities in the Philippines, and in many parts of the world where identities and dreams of the marginalized are set aside for the greed and whims of the elite. This makes one reimagine what standing in solidarity with each other means, what identities and borders mean, and what it means to belong to a community. He pointed out that the answer lies not in the state-to-state diplomatic relations but in the bridges built across communities and peoples.

To conclude his solidarity message, Marc quoted a phrase from the late Jose Diokno, a Filipino human rights defender: "All of us are siblings not because we are siblings in blood, but because we are all siblings in tears, not because we all share the same land, but because we share the

same dream.” He added, “The lives of our brave siblings in Myanmar will not be in vain because we will persist and resist together.”

Drag Political Performance

Walkie Talkie

Rainbow Alliance (An LGBTIQ Youth Organization in Myanmar)

Although not physically present in the solidarity gathering, Walkie Talkie – a human rights activist and artist based in Yangon and member of the Rainbow Alliance – was able to share a drag cover performance of “Show Yourself” from the animated film *Frozen 2*. Drag is a political art famous in the LGBTIQ community. It is a creative expression that pushes the boundaries of restrictive gender norms.

Across history, drag artists have been a part of activist movements for human rights and gender equality. And recently, as witnessed in the early days of the protest movements in Myanmar, they took over the streets to protest against the military junta. The short introduction of the performance highlighted the political participation of LGBTIQ and drag communities in the nationwide protest against the junta dictatorship.

Importance of People-to-People Solidarity – Other Ways Forward

Sai Sam Kham

International Institute of Social Studies, Erasmus University Rotterdam

To begin his summing up, Sai Sam expressed gratitude to the solidarity messages and cultural performances from peoples organizations, civil society, and non-governmental organizations around the world and in the region. He commended this action of progressive regionalism that takes advantage of technologies to build and strengthen networks of solidarities. He referred to the Milk Tea Alliance as an example and how it has grown from a collective towards solving the respective problems of its member-countries together.

Sai Sam stressed the importance of bringing class politics into political debates instead of ethnocentric politics which tends to focus more on ethnocentric conflicts and identities. He argued that this class politics clarifies the understanding of class and social structures, as well as the production and reproduction of the given social challenges in Myanmar and across the region.

For Sai Sam, it is also important to critically question the role of religion, citing the participation of the Burmese monks in the 2007 demonstration that led to many deaths when they bravely challenged the dictatorship. However, their participation lessened this time, with certain sections of the Buddhist community and even celebrity monks openly supported the military junta. Now, there is a growing consciousness in Burma/Myanmar about this change because people never questioned religious leaders before.

Sai Sam then examined the impact of the neo-liberal economy on Burma/Myanmar's democracy and fight for justice. This factor contributed to the succeeding political takeover of the military upon the aftermath of the 2020 democratic elections. He explained that while the recent election results should be respected, it will be difficult for the people to go back and restore the election results under the mandate of a repressive and undemocratic constitution. Nevertheless, he found encouragement from the fact that conversations inside Myanmar are now moving beyond this and becoming open where the young people expressed heightened political awakening and inclination towards a more progressive or leftist side of politics.

Likewise, Sai Sam stressed the value of rural democratization. He reflected on the ongoing political upheaval and argued that the democratic transition of Burma/Myanmar and even the region must come from the democratization of the rural communities. He observed that political debates in the urban areas center too much on electoral reform and reinstituting the NLD government into power while downplaying the importance of street politics and non-electoral demands for political change. He emphasized the importance of re-envisioning a post-Aung San Suu Kyi democratic transition; otherwise, the return of strong men dictatorship will happen again thereafter. The

conversations must look into the intersectionality of the movement in Burma/Myanmar like the involvement of LGBT groups, the role of culture (citing the use of women's skirts) in the resistance and in challenging patriarchy, and the courage of the younger generation in getting into the political space.

Despite the chaos and very depressing situation in his country, Sai Sam concluded that there is hope in the youthful revolutionary spirit of the Spring Revolution. He hopes that this revolutionary spirit will be shared among other peoples in the region and fuel their aspiration to challenge patriarchy, militarism, and dictatorship, as well as make them embrace progressive values, democracy, and freedom. He believes that the people in this solidarity movement will share such a spirit and altogether fight against dictatorship for the sake of freedom and democracy.

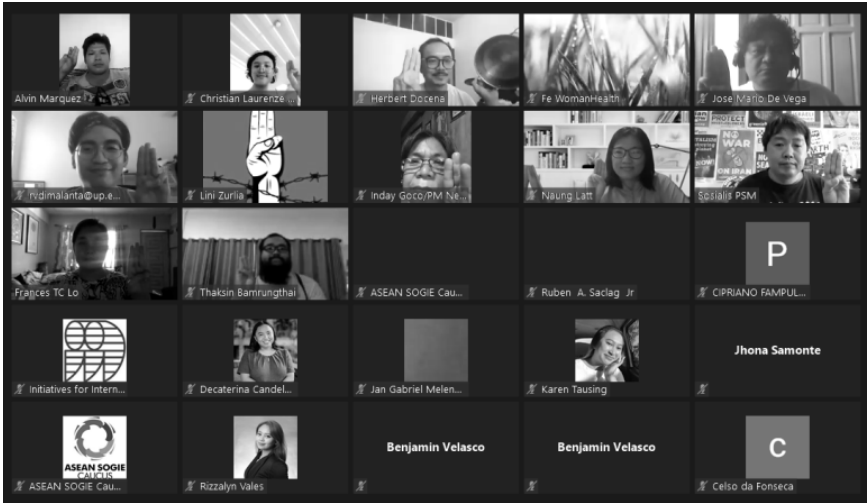
Pots and Pans Noise Barrage

Ryan Martinez

University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies – Program on Alternative Development (UP CIDS AltDev)



To conclude the program, Ryan from the UP CIDS AltDev led a five-minute noise barrage where the participants banged pots and pans. He reiterated the demands of the people of Burma/Myanmar to: (1) end all forms of violence against the people, (2) release all political detainees, (3) lift martial law and the nationwide state of emergency, (4) remove all telecommunications restrictions, and (5) stand aside and let the democratically elected government assume its rightful powers.



Prior to the noise barrage, Ryan further provided a brief explanation of the activity by which the pots and pans protest serves as a symbolic action of communities in lockdown to call for justice amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. A political and spiritually-rooted act led by the women of Myanmar, this has been their local expression of their cultural and political identities to drive away evil from their lands.

Annex 1: Solidarity Messages from the Zoom Chatbox and Facebook Comments

Zoom Chatbox

Jose Mario De Vega: I would like to thank Ms. Me Me for acknowledging the mistakes committed by the civilian government then to the various ethnic groups, specifically of the Rohingya!

Celso da Fonseca: Our solidarity from Timor-Leste to Myanmar. WE STAND WITH PEOPLE IN MYANMAR. ##Fight for democracy and human rights##.

Mary Hniangsung: Our sisters and brothers from around the world, thank you very much for your solidarity messages, prayers, and songs.

Priscilla Goco/PM Negros: For our comrades in Myanmar, we feel your sufferings. We are with you in your fight for democracy!

Lusia Sihombing: Solidarity from Indonesia!

Elpidio Maramot: Solidarity from SENTRO-CIU (Philippines)

Sosialis PSM: Solidarity from Socialist Party of Malaysia (PSM)

Patrick Bond: Solidarity from Johannesburg. Here, the Burmese liberation struggle educated so many of us over the past twenty-seven years, starting when one of the first errors of the new democratic government was officially recognizing the junta in June 1994 due to its lobbying and our movement's sloppiness. But since international sanctions helped end apartheid, we know there are

great lessons and linkages from SA to you, and back. And we have new junta-linked targets today operating here to discuss with the current generation's strategists.

(Mr. Bond is a member of Free Burma Campaign South Africa. He can be reached via pbond@mail.ngo.za).

From Facebook Live

Yuen Abana: Myanmar's ruling Junta is involved in crimes against Humanity. The women, workers, children, youth have been long suffering from abuses, repression, atrocities and continued denial of their fundamental rights. We call for an End to Military rule in Myanmar! Resist Dictatorship!

Benito E. Molino: Long live the struggle of peoples of Burma for freedom, human rights, and democracy...Salute to ALL Backpack doctors from Mae Sot and inside Burma... Mabuhay!

Annabelle C. Jayco: My heart goes to the people of Myanmar for their bravery! You have shown the world what courage means. PADAYON (moving on, scaling up)...Ruthless, cruel, brutal with no care for life. End fascism and hear people's sentiments and respect rights!

Jerry Clarito: We stand in solidarity with the people of Myanmar - Filipino American Human Rights Alliance-Chicago, Illinois USA

Lito C. Ocampo: In solidarity with the people of Burma/Myanmar!

Important Links and Announcements

From Me Me Khant:

This is a link with resources to help as well as to learn more about what is happening in Myanmar: <https://linktr.ee/whatshappeninginmyanmar>.

Thank you so much for this wonderful event. If you have questions or want to learn ways to support those in the country, you can reach

me at my Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/meme.khant> or mekhant@stanford.edu.

From IID

Revolution Day Global Protest

Please find the event page for March 27 here: <https://www.facebook.com/events/707372426599855/>

From: Cora Fabros:

<https://www.ipb.org/ipb-statements/ipb-calls-for-solidarity-with-the-people-of-myanmar/>

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