

FRIENDS OF MYANMAR



February 22, 2021

Dear President Biden, Secretary Blinken, and Members of Congress:

As Returned Peace Corps Volunteers who served in Myanmar, joined by the larger Peace Corps community, we write to urge you to do everything within the power of the United States government to hasten a return to governance by the democratically elected Myanmar parliament.

While we are encouraged by the Biden administration's actions in condemning the coup and imposing targeted sanctions, we urge Congress to pass S. Res. 35 without delay. We also implore the United States to encourage allies in Asia and Southeast Asia not to recognize the legitimacy of the military regime, and to work quickly with these allies to pressure the Tatmadaw to release all political prisoners and restore democracy. We fear that waiting for the military to change its course will result in great harm to, and quite possibly many casualties among, the people of Myanmar. It is imperative that the American, and international, responses serve to protect civilians in Myanmar.

For those of us who served in Myanmar, we know from our years in the education section, spanning 2016-2020, how fragile the country's democracy has been since the 2015 elections. The cohering and strengthening of Myanmar's democracy is the only viable hope for Myanmar's 53 million citizens to realize better, healthier, more fulfilled lives for current as well as future generations.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is an internationally recognized symbol of hope for a majority of people in Myanmar. Yet from our perspective having lived and worked alongside Myanmar's people in communities small and large across a broad stretch of the country, true hope is embodied in our Peace Corps counterparts – Myanmar's teachers. These public school teachers work in classrooms of students from mixed ethnic and economic backgrounds and are dedicated to updating curricula for the 21st century. We have seen firsthand how eager these teachers are to learn and practice new strategies to better prepare their students for success in a global economy. Myanmar students too are eager for an education that will help them reach their full potential as global citizens. Myanmar teachers and students embody the hope of Myanmar's people. They deserve to live and thrive under the government of their choosing. They deserve access to global education and to live without impingements on their freedom of information.

The people of Myanmar are shouting as loudly as they can. They are shouting to the world in ways small and large – posting to social media when they can so that the world sees what is happening there, and they are communicating directly with many of us with stories of what is happening in their communities. They do not want this future being forced on them by the Tatmadaw. We hear them. We hope the U.S. government hears them as well, and takes further action.

America is once again in a position to lead globally, and to set an example with our actions, our humanity, and our diplomacy. Let Myanmar be a deserving test for this new chapter of American diplomacy.

With deep sincerity and appreciation for your attention,

Returned Peace Corps Volunteers
Friends & Family of Peace Corps Volunteers
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