

Supporting Myanmar's Civil Society Protest Movement - practical actions for good governance and inclusive democracy (February 2021)

*Co-authored by a team of Myanmar researchers and UK academics based at SOAS**

On 1 February 2021 the Myanmar military (Tatmadaw) detained State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and other democratically elected civilian leaders after the National League for Democracy (NLD) won a [convincing victory](#) in parliamentary elections. It is almost globally agreed that this coup is a set-back on Myanmar's road to democracy and threatens future stability and good governance.

Myanmar is now at a vital juncture: in a well-organised [Civil Disobedience Movement](#) doctors, nurses, teachers, police and other civil servants, as well as private actors (e.g., in banks and telecom operators), are engaging in nonviolent opposition to the coup. Protests around the country are not NLD-led but comprise a [broad coalition](#) bringing together the Buddhist Bamar majority together with people in Chin, Kachin, Karen, Kayah, Mon, Rakhine, Shan and Tanintharyi states, and representatives of the Christian, LGBTQ, Muslim and Rohingya communities. CDM's aims extend beyond defending the results of the November 2020 election, to call for an inclusive federal democracy to be built with equality and self-determination at its heart. According to local researchers monitoring CDM, participants (and their supporters) have been subjected to 'armed raids by military and police on their residential compounds. During these incidents they have faced arbitrary arrests (without warrants), death threats and threats to personal safety...Many civil service people have gone into hiding due to fear of arrest.'

We welcome the [UK Government's official condemnation](#) of the coup, the killing of peaceful demonstrators and the unlawful detention of officials and people in civil society, as well as [Dominic Raab's statement](#) that the democratic wishes of Myanmar society must be respected. **We recommend the following practical measures:**

- *Immediate actions:* Recognising that opposition to the coup is broad-based and not only concerned with the welfare of Aung San Suu Kyi and her NLD party, the UK Government should articulate support for the CDM and make presentations on their behalf to respect their civil liberties and protect citizens from arbitrary arrest and violent crackdowns, asking the UN Human Rights Council to investigate violations that have already taken place. Extend targeted sanctions to all those with positions on the State Administrative Council, including payments of fees from them for their relatives to attend UK universities. Sanctions should deprive the military of funds, while not harming people in Myanmar, and UK contracts with Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited or other military interests should be suspended.
- *Short term:* Expressing public support for the CRPH (Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw [Union Parliament]), who are living in fear of arrest. Parliaments for Global Action, among other international bodies, [openly support the CRPH](#). The Committee has the backing of civil society leaders, and they are collaborating in several policy and advocacy areas. Members of the CRPH have enjoyed assistance from the UK Parliament and Westminster Foundation for Democracy since 2012. They should be recognised as the legitimate victors of the 2020 election and be offered practical support.
- *Longer term:* UK official development assistance should be directed away from direct engagement with the military, if they remain in place, and encourage a participatory and inclusive approach to bring about structural reforms that uphold human rights and democratic principles. This must include civil society participation in setting the strategies by which goals can be achieved, including the independence of the judiciary and reforming the security sector to enhance civilian control.

*If you would like a personal briefing or clarification on any of the issues raised here, please contact icop@soas.ac.uk directly to follow up, as precise names have not been included for consideration of the safety of colleagues involved, particularly those based in Myanmar.