

BURMA: Open Letter to Members of the U.S. Congress to Pass the Burma Unified through Rigorous Military Accountability Act of 2021

October 06, 2021

To: Members of Congress of the U.S Senate and House of Representatives:

Subject: Joint Open Letter from Burmese diaspora, community based-organizations and Civil Society Organizations to the United State Congress to pass the Burma Unified through Rigorous Military Accountability Act of 2021 or BURMA Act of 2021

Dear Members of Congress,

We, the undersigned 242 Burmese diaspora, local CSOs inside Burma, community-based organizations, and civil society organizations both here in the U.S. and around the world welcome the introduction of the Burma Unified through Rigorous Military Accountability Act of 2021, or, the BURMA Act, and call on all members of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives to co-sponsor this crucial legislation and support its expeditious passage into law. As the situation in Burma worsens daily, U.S. action is vital to the millions of lives currently suffering at the hands of the Burmese military. The BURMA Act will provide much needed U.S. support for the realization of all Burmese peoples' aspirations for an inclusive, rights respecting democracy.

Since the February 1st coup, the people of Burma have seen increased human rights violations and militarization, and the situation is growing more dire by the day. While the number of people killed by the junta is significantly higher, there are over 1,100 confirmed deaths since February, including at least 75 children. More than 8,700 people have been arrested, of which an estimated 7,104 are still detained. 220,000 have been newly displaced, with 3 million in need of humanitarian assistance, according to the UN. The World Bank predicts an 18% drop in GDP for Burma this year, which, combined with slower growth in 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic, will leave Burma's economy 30% smaller than originally expected. The World Food Program estimates that food insecurity will have more than doubled since the coup by October 2021 to more than 6.2 million people.

Despite the Burmese military junta campaign of oppression to terrorize and demoralize the people, they have not won. In each of Burma's states, ethnic minorities are witnessing the worst of the Burmese military's violence and crimes against humanity. While it is clear that Burma's ethnic minorities are disproportionately impacted by violence from the Burmese military, the country's majority Burman group are also affected, representing the extent to which the junta's attacks are indiscriminate and truly affect all in Burma.

On September 7, the Burmese military used two farmers from Shan State as human shields to guard soldiers as they walked in front of a battalion. Similarly, in Karen state, reports of the Burmese military capturing and forcing women to be porters and human shields have been increasingly common. In early September, Kachin Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) were forced to return to their villages after being unable to find food in the IDP camps, despite their homes remaining in a conflict zone. Karenni state suffered from 21 clashes in August that led to an additional 5,000 IDPs to the 100,000 displaced in the state, which makes up nearly half of the Karenni population. Reports from Mon state in early September highlight the intensified militarization in many of the state's townships, where civilian arrests and security checkpoints have increased. In Rakhine state, close to 10,000 IDPs returned to their villages in fear of rising COVID-19 cases in IDP camps, despite the threat of landmines and zero humanitarian aid in their townships. An estimated 50,000 civilians and 5,000 IDPs living in southern Chin state are suffering from food shortages as the Burmese military blocks transportation routes into the area. From February to July,

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there were 3,601 attacks on civilians or armed clashes that failed to protect them, which is a 521% increase from the same months in 2020. These atrocities occurring throughout the country have been the lived experiences of marginalized communities for decades. Clearly, the situation in Burma necessitates U.S. action and will only continue to deteriorate the longer accountability and aid are delayed.

In July, Burma was hit hard with a third-wave of the COVID-19 virus. While the junta officially reported an estimated 6,000 deaths and 141,000 infections, many civil society organizations in Burma believe these reports grossly underestimate the actual number of COVID-related deaths, especially as cemeteries in Yangon received 1,500-2,000 bodies every day in mid-July. As thousands were dying of COVID-19, the junta cut off medical and oxygen supplies to the people of Burma. Many accused the junta of denying oxygen to private clinics and hospitals, instead funneling the available oxygen to military-controlled health facilities. The junta also shut down any charity supplies and blocked all initiatives created by community and civil society organizations to battle COVID-19. In an aggressive approach to deny access to lifesaving oxygen, the military fired into a line of people waiting to purchase oxygen tanks. In another case, witnesses stated that the military also lured medical professionals by pretending to be COVID-19 patients, only to arrest them and raid their affiliated clinics.

Even as the COVID vaccine was procured from China, the junta reportedly reserved the vaccine for its military and loyal allies before making it available to the public. However, it was also reported that due to the mistrust of the junta's intentions and the vaccine from China, many avoided vaccinations. It is clear from the actions of the junta and its military that they are weaponizing the virus and vaccine. While COVID-19 numbers have decreased since August, the people of Burma are still battling the COVID crisis while fighting the illegal junta for democracy.

Despite the violence perpetrated by the Burmese military, the Burmese people continue to stand resolutely against the junta's rule. Since February, the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) continues to be supported by over 400,000 civil servants without losing any steam. This movement started in central Burma and spread to major cities in the ethnic states. The people of Burma also launched themed protests, such as the hanging of sarongs, flashlights at night, and the clanging of pots and pans to display signs of dissidence. Members of the CDM also boycott military businesses and refuse to pay for military-controlled services like electricity bills, with estimates reporting that this loss of revenue will cost the junta up to \$1 billion per year. The CDM has grown past the borders of Burma to gain international support. The Burmese diaspora in other countries, such as the United States, Australia, and the UK, have come together to protest against the February 1st Coup and rally their respective policymakers to make a public stand against the military junta. For more than six months, the protest movement has remained undeterred by the junta's brutal crackdowns and arbitrary arrests. In addition to the CDM movement, civilians are joining the National Unity Government's People's Defense Force to provide safety and security that has been repeatedly denied by the Burmese military.

Given the Burmese military's unrelenting violence, it is clear that Congress must act now to support the people of Burma. The BURMA Act will showcase U.S. leadership in alleviating an increasingly dire situation and hold the Burmese military accountable for their illegal seizure of power. Justice and accountability are more important than ever, given the ongoing genocide against the Rohingya people - and the over one million Rohingya people who have been forced to flee their homeland over many decades and remain stuck in limbo in Bangladesh and other countries in the region with limited access to livelihoods or education and any chance to return home, integrate into their country of asylum, or be resettled to a third country. Checking the junta's power would ensure that the crimes they continue to commit against the Rohingya, other ethnic and religious minorities, and all civilians come to an end. The

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bill will additionally support a strategy for the U.S. to coordinate policy on Burma multilaterally; provide support for civil society organizations, democracy activists, political prisoners and independent media; and authorize sanctions laser-focused against the military, its economic interests, and its primary sources of remaining revenues, while minimizing a humanitarian impact on the people of Burma.

While we note and appreciate the action that the U.S. has taken for Burma so far, it is simply not enough. We thank Sen. Cardin (D-MD), Sen. Klobuchar (D-MN), Sen. Lujan (D-NM), Sen. Merkley (D-OR), Sen. Wyden (D-OR), Sen. Markey (D-MA), Sen. Murray (D-WA), Sen. Peters (D-MI), Sen. Padilla (D-CA), Sen. Sanders (D-VT), Sen. Rosen (D-NV), Sen. Feinstein (D-CA), Sen. Durbin (D-IL), Sen. Kaine (D-VA), Rep. Gregory W. Meeks (D-NY), Rep. Steve Chabot (R) (co-lead), Rep. Michael McCaul (R), Rep. Ami Bera (D), Rep. Karen Bass (D), Rep. Joaquin Castro (D), Rep. Ilhan Omar (D), Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick (R), Rep. Ted Lieu (D), Rep. Eleanor Holmes Norton (D), Rep. Suzanne Bonamici (D), Rep. Young Kim (R), Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi (D), Rep. Ro Khanna (D), Rep. Juan Vargas (D), Rep. Claudia Tenney (R), Rep. Grace F. Napolitano (D), Rep. Lois Frankel (D), Rep. James P. McGovern (D), Rep. Grace Meng (D), Rep. Peter Meijer (R), Rep. Kathy Manning (D), Rep. Earl Blumenauer (D) and Rep. Adriano Espaillat (D) for introducing the BURMA Act, and call upon all members of Congress to stand in solidarity with the people of Burma and co-sponsor the BURMA Act of 2021 to end the junta's campaign of violence and cycle of impunity.

Sincerely,

Signed by:

Burmese diaspora, community based-organizations and Civil Society Organizations

1. Action Against Myanmar Military Coup (Sydney), Australia
2. Action Committee for Democracy Development, Burma
3. Action Corps, USA
4. African Great Lakes Action Network, USA
5. All Arakan Students' and Youths' Congress, Thailand-Burma Border
6. All Kachin Youth Union (AKYU), Burma
7. All Young Burmese League, Australia
8. ALTSEAN-Burma, Thailand
9. Ameinu, USA
10. American Baptist Churches USA
11. Americans for Rohingya, USA
12. Anti-Dictatorship in Burma DC Metropolitan Area, USA
13. Arakan Rohingya Union, USA
14. Arakan Watch, Malaysia
15. Arizona Kachin Community, AZ, USA
16. Asian Community and Cultural Center, USA
17. Asian Student Union, KS, USA
18. Association of Human Rights Defenders and Promoters- HRDP, Myanmar
19. Australia Karen Organisation Inc, Australia
20. Backpack Health Workers Team, Thailand-Burma Border
21. Bakersfield Karen Community, CA, USA
22. Blood Money Campaign, Myanmar
23. Boston Free Burma, MA, USA

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24. Burma Action Ireland, Ireland
25. Burma Border Projects, MA, USA
26. Burma Campaign UK, United Kingdom
27. Burma Medical Association, Thailand-Burma Border
28. Burma Nationals Organization, USA
29. Burma Task Force, USA
30. Burmese American Millennials, USA
31. Burmese American women Alliance, CA, USA
32. Burmese Community Center for Education, USA
33. Burmese Community Support Group, Australia
34. Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK, United Kingdom
35. Calgary Karen Community Association (CKCA), Canada
36. California Kachin Community, CA, USA
37. California Karen Youth Forum, USA
38. Campaign for a New Myanmar, USA
39. Citizen of Burma Award, USA
40. Coalition of Rohingya Organisations in Malaysia (CROM)
41. Congregation Neveh Shalom, OR, USA
42. Crane Center for Mass Atrocity Prevention, USA
43. Da'wah and Empowerment Association of Rohingya (DEAR), Malaysia
44. Dallas Fort Worth Myanmar Ethnic Community, Burma
45. Dallas Kachin Community, TX, USA
46. Darfur and Beyond, USA
47. DEEKU-Karenni Community of Amarillo, TX, USA
48. Democracy, Peace and Women's Organization, Burma
49. EarthRights International, USA
50. Edmonton Karen Community Youth Organization, Canada
51. European Karen Network, UK
52. First Karen Baptist Church of Indianapolis, IN, USA
53. Florida Kachin Community, FL, USA
54. Free Burma Campaign (South Africa), South Africa
55. Free Myanmar Inc., USA
56. Freedom for Burma, USA
57. Friends of Rohingya USA
58. Friends of TCI Australia, Australia
59. Future Light Center, Burma
60. Future Thanlwin, Burma
61. Gender Equality Network, Myanmar
62. Georgia Kachin Community, GA, USA
63. Global Justice Center, USA
64. Global Movement for Myanmar Democracy (GM4MD), USA/Global
65. Good News Detroit Church, USA
66. Hanna United Methodist Church, IN, USA
67. Holocaust and Genocide Studies Project/Portland State University, OR, USA
68. Holy Family church, USA
69. Houston Kachin Community, TX, USA
70. Human Rights Foundation of Monland, Thailand/Myanmar
71. Indianapolis Jewish Community Relations Council, IN, USA

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72. Institute for Asian Democracy, USA
73. International Campaign for the Rohingya, USA
74. International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN), USA
75. International Karen Organisation, Australia
76. Iowa Kachin Community, IA, USA
77. Jewish World Watch, USA
78. Justice for All, USA
79. Justice for Myanmar, Myanmar
80. Kachin American Community (Portland – Vancouver), USA
81. Kachin Community of Indiana, IN, USA
82. Kachin Community of USA
83. Kachin National Organization USA
84. Kachin Peace Network, Myanmar
85. Kachin Refugee Council – India
86. Kachin Women's Association Thailand
87. Kansas Karenni Community, KS, USA
88. Kansas Zotung Community, KS, USA
89. Karen American Association of Wisconsin, USA
90. Karen Association of Huron, South Dakota, USA
91. Karen Baptist Churches USA, USA
92. Karen Community of Akron, USA
93. Karen Community of Canada (KCC), Canada
94. Karen Community of Czech Republic
95. Karen Community of Finland
96. Karen Community of Hamilton, Canada
97. Karen Community of Iowa, USA
98. Karen Community of Ireland
99. Karen Community of Israel
100. Karen Community of Kansas City (KS & MO), USA
101. Karen Community of Kitchener & Waterloo, Canada
102. Karen Community of Leamington, Canada
103. Karen Community of Lethbridge, Canada
104. Karen Community of London, Canada
105. Karen Community of Minnesota, USA
106. Karen Community of North Carolina, USA
107. Karen Community of Ottawa, Canada
108. Karen Community of Regina, Canada
109. Karen Community of Saskatoon, Canada
110. Karen Community of South Carolina, USA
111. Karen Community of Thunderay, Canada
112. Karen Community of Toronto, Canada
113. Karen Community of Windsor, Canada
114. Karen Community of Winnipeg, Canada
115. Karen Community Society of British Columbia (KCSBC), Canada
116. Karen Environmental and Social Action Network, Burma
117. Karen Human Rights Group, Thai-Burma border
118. Karen Organization of America, USA
119. Karen Organization of Minnesota, USA

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120. Karen Organization of San Diego, USA
121. Karen Peace Support Network (KPSN), Thailand/Burma
122. Karen Refugee Committee Education Entity, Thailand
123. Karen Society of Nebraska, USA
124. Karen Student Association at UNO, USA
125. Karen Swedish Community, Sweden
126. Karen Thai Group, Thailand
127. Karen Youth Education Pathways, USA
128. Karen Youth Networks, Burma
129. Karen Youth of Norway
130. Karen Youth of Toronto, Canada
131. Karen Youth Organization, Thailand
132. Karenni Civil Society Network, Thailand-Burma Border
133. Karenni Community of Arizona, AZ, USA
134. Karenni Community of Arkansas, AK, USA
135. Karenni Community of Austin, TX
136. Karenni Community of Bowling Green, KY
137. Karenni Community of Buffalo, NY
138. Karenni Community of Chicago, IL
139. Karenni Community of Colorado, CO
140. Karenni Community of Dallas, TX
141. Karenni community of Des Moines, IA
142. Karenni Community of Florida, FL,
143. Karenni Community of Fort Worth, TX
144. Karenni Community of Georgia, GA
145. Karenni Community of Houston, TX
146. Karenni Community of Idaho, ID
147. Karenni Community of Indianapolis, IN
148. Karenni community of Kansas City
149. Karenni Community of Massachusetts, MA
150. Karenni Community of Michigan, MI
151. Karenni community of Minnesota, MN
152. Karenni Community of Missouri, MO, USA
153. Karenni Community of North Carolina, NC, USA
154. Karenni Community of Portland, OR, USA
155. Karenni Community of Rockford, IL, USA
156. Karenni Community of San Antonio, TX, USA
157. Karenni Community of Sioux Falls, SD, USA
158. Karenni Community of Utah, UT, USA
159. Karenni Community of Utica, NY, USA
160. Karenni Community of Washington, WA, USA
161. Karenni Community of Wisconsin, WI, USA
162. Karenni Society of Omaha, NE, USA
163. Karenni-American Association, USA
164. Karenni-American Catholic Association, USA
165. Kentucky Kachin Community, KY, USA
166. Korea Karen Organization, Korea
167. Korea Karen Youth Organization, Korea

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168. LAI Baptist Church of Maryland, USA
169. Like We Don't Exist, USA
170. Louisiana Kachin Community, LA, USA
171. Lowell International Church, USA
172. Mae Tao Clinic, Thailand
173. Maryland Kachin Community, MD, USA
174. Metta Campaign, Myanmar
175. Michigan Kachin Community, MI, USA
176. Milwaukee Myanmar Christian Church, USA
177. Minnesota Kachin Community, MN, USA
178. Minnesota Peace Project, USA
179. Mon State Development Center, Myanmar
180. Myanmar Community Church, CA, USA
181. Myanmar Cultural Research Society (MCRS), Yangon
182. Nationalities' Alliance of Burma, Washington D. C., USA
183. ND-Burma, Canada
184. NeT Organization, Myanmar
185. Never Again Coalition, USA
186. New York Kachin Community, NY, USA
187. No Business With Genocide, USA
188. North Carolina Kachin Community, NC, USA
189. Nyan Lynn Thit Analhtica, Myanmar
190. Olive organization, Burma
191. Omaha Kachin Community, NE, USA
192. Oversea Karen Organization Japan, Japan
193. Overseas Burmese Christian Fellowship, USA
194. Pennsylvania Kachin Community, PA, USA
195. Progressive Voice, Thailand
196. Pyit Taing Htaung Social Club, Australia
197. Refugees International, USA
198. Rohingya American Society (RAS), WI, USA
199. Rohingya Arakanese Refugee Committee (RARC), USA
200. Rohingya Cultural Center of Chicago, IL, USA
201. Rohingya National League, USA
202. Rohingya Society of Greater Nashua, NH, USA
203. Rohingya students Unity Right, Bangladesh
204. Rohingya Women Empowerment and Advocacy Network, Bangladesh
205. Rohingya Youth Development Forum, Burma
206. Rohingya Youths for legal Action (RYLA), Bangladesh
207. RW Welfare Society, Bangladesh
208. Save and Care Organization for Ethnic Women at Border Areas, Burma
209. Saydanar Community Development Center, MA, USA
210. Shan MATA, Myanmar
211. South Carolina Kachin Community, SC, USA
212. St. Puis X Catholic Church, USA
213. STAND: The student-led movement to end mass atrocities, USA
214. Students for Free Burma (SFB), USA
215. Support the Democracy Movement in Burma, USA

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216. Ta'ang Legal Aid, Burma
217. Ta'ang Students and Youth Union - TSYU, Myanmar
218. Temple Adath Israel --Lexington, KY, USA
219. Tennessee Kachin Community, TN, USA
220. The Burmese Rohingya Association of North America, USA
221. The PLAN: Public Legal Aid Network, Myanmar
222. The Sound of Hope, USA
223. The Urban Village, USA
224. U.S. Advocacy Coalition for Myanmar, USA
225. U.S. Campaign for Burma, USA
226. Unitarian Universalist Association, USA
227. Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC), USA
228. University of Hartford Philosophy Club, USA
229. US Chin Coalition, USA
230. Utica Karen Community, USA
231. Utica Karen Wesleyan Church, USA
232. Virginia Kachin Community, VA, USA
233. Washington Kachin Community, WA, USA
234. West Virginia Kachin Community, WV, USA
235. Women Advocacy Coalition, Myanmar
236. Women Empowerment and Advocacy Network, Bangladesh
237. Women's Peace Network, USA
238. World Outside My Shoes, USA
239. World Rohingya Organization, Jackson Heights, NY, USA
240. Youths of Tomorrow, Myanmar
241. Zion Karen Baptist Church of Albert Lea, MN, USA
242. Zotung organization of America, USA