

Advisory Statement and Recommendations on Myanmar

April 23, 2021

Over 700 people have died in crackdowns by the National Army (Tatmadaw) and Police forces after widespread protests by Myanmar citizens against the military coup of February 1, 2021. Many refugees have fled to neighboring countries. This is causing concerns about a Myanmar domestic turmoil becoming an issue with serious regional and international implications. Despite harsh criticisms levelled against the violence and sanctions imposed by some international community members the Tatmadaw has shown no signs of easing the crackdown. The declared state of emergency appears likely to last longer than one year. The protracted conflict has already led to the disruption of national economic activity, destabilized people's lives and livelihoods, and fed concerns about the possibility of a 'failed state'. Furthermore, some protest leaders are reportedly seeking alliances with armed ethnic minority groups. If the armed struggle escalates between the Tatmadaw and these allied groups the danger of a civil war will likely increase.

To prevent Myanmar from falling into war or chaos, we strongly urge that the Government of Japan take immediate steps to further strengthen its diplomatic efforts to stabilize the situation. In the given circumstances supporting or partnering with ASEAN, of which Myanmar is a member, will be the best possible avenue to participate in a resolution to the internal violence and regional risks. Japan can and should do this given the ties and contacts it enjoys with the Tatmadaw, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, Myanmar's domestic political forces, and citizen groups. Japan also has a close relationship with other ASEAN members and neighboring Asian countries. Now is the time for Japan to reinvigorate its diplomatic initiatives to take advantage of its unique position.

The United Nations and ASEAN have attempted to address the Myanmar crisis. Yet there are apparently divisions among key members of the Security Council, and ASEAN is yet to take a position. As a result, no effective actions have been taken by these organizations. The current crisis in Myanmar is not caused by the intervention of foreign powers, but it is the manifestation of a confrontation of political nature between the armed forces and citizens seeking democratization of the country. Under these circumstances, although ASEAN maintains the principle of non-interference in domestic affairs it should find some effective and realistic response to help alleviate the situation in Myanmar since the conflict is already

impacting neighboring states and creates risk of broader harm. The ASEAN Special Summit is scheduled to take place in the near future. This would be a timely opportunity for the Government of Japan to be more proactive on comprehensive peace diplomacy to resolve the conflict. With this objective in mind, we wish to make the following specific recommendations.

1. Japan should continue to make good use of all communication channels at its disposal in addition to official diplomatic channels. The goals are to persuade Myanmar military leaders to exercise self-restraint, for opposition groups not to engage in armed conflict, and for all parties and actors to the conflict to be persuaded to act calmly, avoid more casualties, and prevent the country from falling into civil war.
2. Given the apparent deep distrust held by the Tatmadaw and others regarding the involvement of United Nations entities it is considered appropriate at this stage that Japan gives its full-weighted support to ASEAN's efforts to alleviate and resolve the situation. Japan should encourage and support ASEAN's efforts toward forming a unified, proactive position by consulting closely with the countries concerned. We also recommend considering the use of the existing "ASEAN Plus 3" framework which includes Japan, China, South Korea. The involvement of the broader community of Asian countries outside ASEAN will help alleviate the conflict-prone structures in the region and attract positive attention from the international community - particularly Europe and the United States.
3. The heavy casualties to civilians particularly children are undeniably a serious human rights and humanitarian tragedy. Urgent action is required to stop these actions. More fundamentally it should be recognized that the current Myanmar crisis stems from historic deep-seated political and other issues. As such, Myanmar's people must come together and create their own solutions. Therefore, a paradigm shift is needed regarding the ways and means by which the international community will extend its support. We recommend ASEAN take the lead in helping Myanmar to resolve its problems. However, in the case that ASEAN falls short due to divisions among its member states or other causes then it is recommended that other like-minded countries from the Asian region including not only Japan, China and South Korea but also India engage by peaceful means. For example a grouping of countries such as "Asian Friends for Sustainable Peace and Development in Myanmar" may be organized at an appropriate stage to support mediation and reconciliation efforts to resolve the situation. This would require initiative and vigorous diplomatic efforts from Japan, and the support and endorsement of ASEAN

and Myanmar. We recommend considering what preparatory actions could be taken now in anticipation of this possible outcome.

4. At an appropriate stage, when the situation in Myanmar stabilizes and UN operations would be called for, the UN could support implementation of any future agreement between the armed forces and civilian factions, for such activities as planning, holding and monitoring of elections. At that time establishing a new mechanism, such as a hybrid ASEAN-UN mission, may be palatable to Myanmar as an engagement of a wider international community to provide political support for sustainable peace and development in Myanmar.
5. Japan has made many efforts in assisting the development, stability, and prosperity of countries in Southeast Asia including Myanmar. Such efforts include active contributions for the resolution of conflicts and post-conflict peace and nation building in Cambodia, Timor-Leste and Afghanistan. We humbly submit that Japan can and should play an active role in helping overcome the stalemate in Myanmar. Japan is one of the few countries that many in Myanmar hold in trust, with no special agenda, hidden or otherwise, vis-à-vis Myanmar. It is urgent that Japan bring together its experience and diplomatic assets to make itself available for peace diplomacy and for the resolution of the ongoing Myanmar crisis. We are convinced that the proactive peace diplomacy of Japan on Myanmar will be fully compatible with the letters and spirit enshrined in our Constitution.

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