

## **Justice For Myanmar: Activists launch campaign to expose systemic causes of inequality, injustice, violence and crimes against humanity**

*April 28<sup>th</sup>, 2020, Myanmar:* A group of covert activists are joining forces in a campaign to improve the lives of all the people of Myanmar, while exposing the military's systemic oppression and cycle of violence for profit and civil war.

Justice For Myanmar is a campaign initiated by a team of human rights activists working for the protection of rights, equality, justice and accountability. It has been created to provide a platform for those unjustly persecuted by the Myanmar military – regardless of class, religion, gender or ethnic identity in their efforts to seek justice and end military impunity in Myanmar. The campaign will work to expose the Myanmar military's businesses' link to human rights violations across the country, that are in violation of international human rights and humanitarian law that amount to crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide.

Despite the COVID-19 crisis tearing through an unprepared health system in Myanmar, the Myanmar military has rejected calls from the United Nations\* and Myanmar's ethnic armed organizations and civil society groups for a nationwide ceasefire to allow the country to effectively fight the pandemic. Instead, the military went on to block local news sites, arresting journalists and charging them under terrorism laws – continuing to consolidate power and increase repressive measures against media, civil society and indiscriminately targeting civilians in conflict affected areas.

The conflict between the Myanmar military and the Arakan Army (AA) has intensified, displacing up to 150,000 people since the end of 2018, and according to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, at least 32 people have died in Chin and Rakhine States since 23 March 2020. Myanmar military's heavy artillery shelling in both Rakhine and Chin States has led to killing of civilians including children, nursing mothers and babies, as houses have been burnt to ashes leaving civilians displaced and vulnerable in the face of the pandemic. The 20 April attack on a World Health Organization (WHO) vehicle transporting COVID19 surveillance samples that killed the WHO driver has led to calls by civil society to allow UN investigators immediate access into the country. In addition, the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, has also strongly

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condemned the attack, calling for a full and transparent investigation and for the perpetrators to be brought to justice.

“The Myanmar military has maintained political control of the country through economic monopoly and control, force, violence and the constitutional regime they themselves created, and continue to commit grave human rights violations with total impunity. The UN Fact-Finding Mission and the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar describes this as amounting to genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. Their economic activities, outside of civilian oversight, reinforces their power and impedes democratization.” **Says Justice For Myanmar spokesperson Yadanar Maung.**

The work of Justice For Myanmar follows the 2019 United Nations Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar report, The Economic Interests of the Myanmar Military, which recommended that businesses cut all financial ties with the Myanmar military. Justice For Myanmar aims to ensure that the UN FFM’s and Special Rapporteur’s recommendations are implemented.

**Yadanar Maung explains:** “We are urging all governments that stand for justice and human rights to implement targeted sanctions against military leaders and their businesses. We want to see the military fully divested from the Myanmar economy, under democratic control and their conglomerates disbanded. Stolen assets, which the military accumulated through decades of corruption, must be returned to the people. We see these steps as an essential part of creating a federal democracy where the human rights of all people in Myanmar are protected and there is a sustainable peace.”

In the coming months, Justice For Myanmar will also be collaborating with journalists and civil society actors in fighting for justice and the safety for all peoples in Myanmar, and to hold the Myanmar military to account.

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## Notes to Editors

\*Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions specifically prohibits “violence to life and person, in particular murder of all kinds” of civilians and persons hors de combat. In addition, “willful killing” of protected persons is listed as a grave breach under all four Geneva Conventions, which Myanmar ratified in 1992. Thus, targeting innocent civilians, such as the airstrikes on villages, can be considered a serious violation of international humanitarian law and customs, which constitutes war crimes under the Rome Statute. UN Security Resolutions 1265 and 1296 address the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Resolution 1265 “Strongly condemns the deliberate targeting of civilians in situations of armed conflict as well as attacks on objects protected under international law, and calls on all parties to put an end to such practices” while also emphasizing “the responsibility of States to end impunity and to prosecute those responsible for genocide, crimes against humanity and serious violations of international humanitarian law.”