

# Media Release



## *Open Letter to Governments around the World*

To: Australian media

Date: Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> June 2021 (for immediate release)

Today 120 scholars and professionals from around the world have sent the attached Open Letter to request their respective governments to support and recognize Myanmar's National Union of Government (NUG).

Australian recipients of this powerful statement include the Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, as well as members of the Australian Parliament's Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade. The letter has also been sent to members of the Myanmar Parliamentary MPs Group comprising of about 30 federal MPs.

The Australia Myanmar Institute (AMI) supports this Open Letter. Our President, Christopher Lamb, is a signatory as are 15 other prominent Australians, including former Australian Human Rights Commissioner, Chris Sidoti, and over 100 academics and experts from around the world.

AMI supports this global effort and hopes our government and parliament will support the people of Myanmar and join other like-minded countries in recognizing the NUG as the established body that represents the wishes of the parliamentarians legitimately elected by the people of Myanmar in the November 2020 general election.

Recognising and engaging in discussions with the NUG will send a strong message to Myanmar's military regime that Australia respects the outcome of Myanmar's democratic process and wishes for a swift and peaceful return to democracy in their country.

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► **To the Members of the JSC on Foreign Affairs,  
Defence and Trade  
Parliament of Australia**  
Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600

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**Dear Members of the JSC on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade of the Parliament of Australia,**

I have the honour to send you this open letter signed by over 120 scholars and professionals specialised on Myanmar. In the letter, we argue that

- the illegitimate **military takeover in Myanmar is not a fait accompli**;
- Australia should **recognise and support the National Unity Government (NUG)** formed by the democratic forces in Myanmar as the legitimate government of the country;
- the NUG derives its **legitimacy from the November 2020 general elections**, but also through the broad coalition it formed amongst the people of Myanmar;
- this broad coalition also has **the potential to end the civil war** of over seven decades;
- any attempts at mediation or **“compromise”** to return to the status quo ante rely on **wishful thinking**;
- Australia should see this as **a historical opportunity for Myanmar** for democratisation, with positive effects for the whole region, and thus **support the democratic forces to succeed**.

We hope that our letter can help Australia formulate an informed response to the crisis in Myanmar. We also stand ready for a hearing/briefing by some of our signatories if that were of help to you.

For the signatories,



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**Georg Bauer**

VIENNA, 13 MAY 2021

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Dear Members of the JSC on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade of the Parliament of Australia,

We, scholars and professionals from around the world working on the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, are writing to you, as we believe the time has come for governments worldwide to effectively support the struggle for democracy in Myanmar by **recognising and supporting the newly formed National Unity Government (NUG)**.

On 1 February 2021, the Myanmar Military (the Tatmadaw) began its attempt to seize state power in Myanmar, thereby breaching the very constitution it itself had drafted. Despite its efforts to make up for its lack of legitimacy by brutally terrorizing the population into submission, the Tatmadaw has so far failed to establish meaningful control over the state. Due to the massive resistance by the population, the Tatmadaw has been unable to establish control over the public administration, economy, and population of Myanmar, and it has even lost further territorial control in the border areas. **The coup is thus by no means a fait accompli.**

Meanwhile, the “Committee Representing the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw [Union Parliament]” (CRPH) was formed by Members of Myanmar Parliament who were democratically elected in the elections of 8 November 2020. These elections were deemed credible by not only independent observers, but also by Australia. In a show of unity unseen in decades in the country, the CRPH has engaged in broad coalition-building, and joined hands with the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), strike committees, trade unions, civil society organizations, and political as well as armed representatives of the many ethnic groups of the country. On 16 April, a National Unity Government (NUG) was established on the basis of an interim Federal Democracy Charter. **The NUG thus enjoys legitimacy through not only the 2020 elections but also through the broad support of the people of the country and diaspora groups;** ethnic armed organizations (EAO) included in the NUG also exert autonomy and sovereignty over various regions/territory.

This is not a minor achievement. Myanmar has historically been plagued by divisions along ethnic, religious and political lines. And while we recognize the need for the NUG to itself evolve to include more diverse voices including those from the Rohingya, now there is a historic chance that the newfound incipient unity within the population can rid Myanmar of military rule and lead the country on **a path to a federal democratic order that can also end the civil war of over seven decades** – a process that should receive global support to ensure that promises of inclusivity and federalism made now will be kept later.

While this will be an uphill battle, it is also the only viable option at the moment. **Any attempts at mediation or “compromise” to return to the status quo ante rely on wishful thinking** and go against the expressed will of the Myanmar people. This will is represented by their elected

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government, the NUG, and illustrated by the massive mobilization of Myanmar citizens to demand democracy. The Tatmadaw has itself destroyed any remaining trust in its own “roadmap to discipline-flourishing democracy” by massacring its own population and has made no attempt whatsoever to de-escalate the situation and to find a compromise. In any case, Australia is certainly not in a position to be a mediator in a negotiated scenario in Myanmar. This should be left to the UN and regional actors.

Rather, democratic countries should expressly stand with the people of Myanmar in their struggle for democracy. We must go beyond purely punitive measures and find ways to actively support the democratic forces. **The best way to do so is by publicly recognizing and supporting the NUG as the legitimate government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.** As Australia has already condemned the military coup and called for “restoration of democracy”, recognizing the NUG should be a logical next step.


The position “We only recognize states, not governments,” should not be used as a rote excuse. Besides the fact that there are recent examples where countries have declared recognition of governments in contested cases, there will inevitably arise situations requiring an implicit recognition of either the Tatmadaw’s illegitimate “State Administrative Council” (SAC) or the legitimate NUG, as the recent crisis around the Myanmar embassy in London has shown.

**Time is short.** Over 840 people have already been killed, dozens of which were children. Neighbourhoods throughout the country are being terrorized by an army that behaves like a heavily armed, out-of-control criminal cartel. In the borderlands, the over 70-year-old civil war is escalating, with civilians being bombed by the Air Force, and thousands of refugees trying to escape to India and Thailand. **The coming weeks and months will determine** whether the country goes back to potentially decades of incompetent, brutal and devastating dictatorship under a military that stands accused of genocide and crimes against humanity by the UN, resulting in a genocide case before the ICJ, or whether the people of Myanmar will have the **opportunity to face their multiple challenges in a democratic manner**, and once and for all overcome the structures that allow the military elites to exercise undue influence across the country.

Australia, who has committed to advancing human rights globally, can and must play its part to support this momentous task, **which will have a positive effect for democratisation in the whole region.** The people of Myanmar will pay close attention and will always remember who is on their side right now.

We remain at your disposal for questions, including in a hearing/briefing if so desired, and send our best and hopeful regards,

For the signatories,



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**Georg Bauer**

VIENNA, 13 MAY 2021

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Signatories:

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