



Human Rights Now Condemns the Unacceptable Execution of Four Persons in Myanmar

Human Rights Now strongly condemns the recent execution of four persons by the brutal junta in Myanmar in the first use of the death penalty in decades. Those executed included activist Phyo Zeya Thaw, who protested the military as a rapper and later became an MP with Aung San Suu Kyi's NLD party, and the activist Kyaw Min Yu, known as Ko Jimmy, who was a leader of the pro-democracy 88 Generation group which led protests for democracy in Myanmar in 1988, in 2007, and following the military's coup in 2021.

We echo the voice of UN Special Rapporteur for Myanmar Tom Andrews who expressed in a statement that he was "outraged and devastated" by the news of the executions and that the execution of opposition leaders, after years of widespread killings and other atrocities by the junta, demands an immediate and firm response by states.¹

The junta is an illegal power that has openly shot and killed peaceful protesters with live fire and destroyed entire villages and the people in them by artillery, air bombardments, and arson. It has neither the authority nor legitimacy to judge and punish pro-democracy activists working to protect the people of Myanmar. Since its illegal seizure of power in February 2021, at least 117 people have been sentenced to death, over 14,800 people arbitrarily arrested, and over 2,100 killed by the junta.² The military has also continued striking civilian-populated areas with barbarous and grossly disproportionate uses of force, including a three day blitz last month in the Sagaing region in which hundreds of homes in villages were burned across an 8 km stretch.³

The arrest and prosecution of the activists were arbitrary and without evidence or justification, punishing legitimate and protected speech, assembly, and opposition activities against the junta's illegal coup. The judgments also manifestly violated due process, denying the defendants an open trial, legal counsel, fair process, and an effective appeal,⁴ and they were openly politically motivated, displaying no independence by the court. The junta has also grossly and cruelly mistreated the families and remains of the bodies, not informing the families of the executions nor releasing the bodies or their location to the families.⁵

The use of the death penalty was also a clear violation of the defendants' right to life and demonstrates unmistakably that the junta does not have even the minimum of respect for the rule of law or the value of human life, despite universal condemnation by the international community. This murderous junta's resort to executions only further emphasizes its brutality and the lengths to which it will go to hold on to its illegitimate power after its illegal coup. Time and again the junta has proven its blatant disregard for human life and the necessity of restoring the legitimately elected government of Myanmar to power.

We condemn the Myanmar junta's killing of civilians and the recent executions in the strongest terms and call on the international community, including ASEAN, to take immediate and effective action to limit the junta's ability to continue its atrocities and to support the National Unity Government in its efforts to restore democracy to Myanmar.

¹ UN S.R. on Myanmar Tom Andrews, “UN Special Rapporteur appeals for strong international response in the wake of 'devastating' executions by Myanmar junta”, 25 July 2022, <https://twitter.com/RapporteurUn/status/1551409495817048065>.

² <https://aappb.org/>.

³ AFP, “Myanmar military accused of torching hundreds of homes in three-day blitz”, 4 Jun. 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jun/04/myanmar-military-accused-of-torching-hundreds-of-homes-in-three-day-blitz>.

⁴ Tom Andrews, supra note 1.

⁵ Zubaidah Abdul Jalil, “Myanmar: Military executes four democracy activists including ex-MP”, 24 July 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-62287815>; “AAPP Statement on the 25th of July Extrajudicial Executions”, <https://aappb.org/?p=22461>.