

PEN International Resolution on Myanmar

Following the military's illegitimate seizure of power from Myanmar's democratically elected government on 1 February 2021, PEN International has been deeply disturbed by the appalling escalation of violent repression carried out by the military junta against unarmed civilians.

The coup d'état took place in the wake of [unfounded allegations](#) by the military of voter fraud during Myanmar's 2020 general elections, which resulted in the overwhelming rejection of the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party by Myanmar's citizens at the polling booth. Just a day before the coup took place, Myanmar's election commission flatly [rejected the military's claims of voter fraud](#).

In the face of widespread and largely peaceful protests that have taken place across Myanmar, the military junta has demonstrated a ruthless intent to crack down on any perceived dissent, using brutal violence against the very people it has a duty to protect. Within hours of the coup taking place, numerous writers and public intellectuals were detained, including Than Myint Aung, Maung Thar Cho, Htin Lin Oo, Mya Aye, and Min Htin Ko Ko Gyi. Forced to endure inhumane prison conditions, many of those detained have developed serious health conditions yet access to crucial medical care and family visits continue to be denied.

Since 1 February, the military junta has arrested over [7,400 civilians](#), with many detained in retaliation for their [participation at protest rallies](#) or for their [posts on social media](#). Many more have been targeted during night raids by junta forces, a tactic intended to instil terror by acting under the cover of darkness. Among those arrested in their home is comedian and poet, [Maung Thura \(pen name, Zarganar\)](#), who is widely celebrated for his use of satire to criticise Myanmar's military rulers. [Wai Moe Naing](#), an outspoken activist and member of PEN Myanmar, was viciously targeted by the military junta in broad daylight when armed men [used an unmarked vehicle](#) to ram him off his moped before detaining him.

Of greatest alarm is the military junta's willingness to torture and murder those who have shown defiance in the face of oppression. Since the coup began, the

military junta has been responsible for the deaths of more than [1000 civilians](#), including the outrageous murder of poets [Chan Thar Swe \(pen name, K Za Win\)](#) and [Myint Myint Zin \(pen name, Kyi Lin Aye\)](#), who were among dozens of unarmed protestors that were shot by junta forces during peaceful protests. [Harrowing reports](#) have also emerged of pervasive torture being carried out against those held at military facilities, including the shockingly depraved murder of poet [Khet Thi](#), who was reportedly tortured to death.

In an attempt to mitigate international scrutiny of the systematic human rights abuses carried out by the military junta, censorship and [propaganda activities](#) have dramatically increased, resulting in the forced closure of at least eight independent [media outlets](#), the ongoing detention of [dozens of journalists](#), and active arrest warrants for many more. Internet blackouts, which [previously targeted areas](#) with concentrated Rohingya populations, have now been implemented across the country, making it extremely difficult for anyone in Myanmar to share evidence of the military junta's repression with the outside world. The resulting information vacuum imposed by the military junta has allowed misinformation and rumour to thrive, and this has been further exploited through the military junta's use of disinformation campaigns which are intended to incite violence against anti-coup protestors by manipulating public opinion and exacerbating societal divisions.

Given the role of the military and the police in the perpetration of extreme violence against unarmed civilians, many have been forced to establish self-defence groups in a desperate attempt to protect their communities from further bloodshed. Many of these groups comprise of individuals who have historically rejected the use of violence through their participation in the Civil Disobedience Movement, but now find their lives threatened by the military junta as a result of their non-violent resistance.

Throughout Myanmar's history, poets have played a central role in the country's struggle for independence, using their writing as a source of resistance and solidarity in times of repression. Since the coup began, poets have once again been at the forefront of the resistance movement, their words representing the will of the people at tremendous personal cost. The deliberate targeting of poets and writers serves only to highlight the illegitimacy of the military junta's rule over Myanmar, which now threatens to push the country into a self-perpetuating cycle of violence with no end in sight, condemning an entire generation to a future without hope or opportunity.

The Assembly of Delegates of PEN International calls on the Myanmar military junta to:

- Immediately end the persecution of all writers, poets, journalists, and other public figures, including Than Myint Aung, Maung Thar Cho, Htin Lin Oo, Mya Aye, Maung Thura, Wai Moe Naing, and Min Htin Ko Ko Gyi;
- Unconditionally release all prisoners held for their peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression;
- Cease its efforts to silence independent media by reinstating effective press freedom protections, allowing for the reopening of independent media organisations, and to bring an immediate end to the targeting of journalists and other media workers;
- End its implementation of pervasive internet restrictions, which directly impact citizens' ability to communicate and engage in peaceful expression;
- Cease its efforts to censor online expression and to unconditionally release anyone detained for peacefully expressing their opinions online;
- Cease conducting any online disinformation campaigns that target anti-coup protestors, ethnic or religious minorities, and other vulnerable groups;
- Ensure the provision of adequate health care and the reinstatement of visitation rights for all detainees;
- Implement effective policy measures that protect internet freedoms while also countering the spread of misinformation.

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