

Condemnation of death sentences against political prisoners in Myanmar

Dear President of the European Council Charles Michel,
Dear President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen,
Dear High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs Josep Borrell Fontelles,
Dear EU Ambassador-Designate in Myanmar Ranieri Sabatucci,
Dear EU Special Representative for Human Rights Eamon Gilmore,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

With this letter we express our deep concern about the escalating situation in Myanmar and the inaction of the European Union. In particular, we are calling on the EU to condemn the military junta's announcement that it intends to execute four political prisoners. We ask the EU to do everything in your power to reverse this verdict. Should these death sentences be carried out in Myanmar for the first time in 33 years, it is highly likely that there will be an escalation of violence like we have never seen before.

The symbolism of the death sentences speaks for itself: Phyo Zeya Thaw and Kyaw Min Yu are two of the most prominent politicians and human rights activists in Myanmar. Phyo Zeya Thaw was imprisoned in 2008 for founding the youth activist organization 'Generation Wave' and for his leading role in the Saffron Revolution. He was elected to parliament as the candidate of the NLD in 2015 and again in the 2020 democratic elections. Kyaw Min Yu, better known as 'Ko Jimmy', rose to prominence during Myanmar's 1988 student uprising against the country's former military regime. In the past weeks several European media outlets reported about the junta's intention to implement the death sentences "soon".

These death sentences would be the first known judicial executions since [1989](#) according to BBC Burmese. Although Myanmar has retained the death penalty in law, the country had been considered 'abolitionist in practice' for the past three decades. Since the fall of the democratically elected government last year, Myanmar has seen a sharp increase in the number of people on death row. At least 14100 people have been detained, of which 11043 people remain [in detention](#) to this day. Of those detained, the National Unity Consultative Council states that [114](#) civilians have been sentenced to death.

[Human Rights Watch](#) warned that the junta's intent to carry out the executions would be "equivalent to pouring fuel on the fire of anti-military resistance". It would be a provocation unlike any seen before. Given the high profile of the prisoners and the junta's willingness to go beyond what previous military regimes in Myanmar had dared to do, the planned executions could further entangle the country in a cycle of violence and tyranny that may be irreversible. According to the [Diplomat](#), a taboo would be broken. Myanmar is the second least democratic country in the world according to the [Economist Intelligence Unit](#).

Western governments such as Canada and France have actively positioned themselves against the planned executions, as has the current chairman of ASEAN, [Cambodia's Prime Minister Hun Sen](#), as well as 199 local civil society organizations, UN experts, and many human rights organizations.

So far, the EU has been quiet about the death sentences in Myanmar. During this current - very critical – time, the EU in Myanmar has not made any statements to highlight the EU's policy of opposing capital punishment. The EU is the largest donor in the fight against the death penalty worldwide. All EU countries have abolished the death penalty in line with the [European Convention on Human Rights](#). As a permanent observer in the UN, the EU is a vocal supporter of all measures to end the death penalty and the EU regularly adopts [resolutions](#) and hosts debates condemning the actions of countries that still use capital punishment. Yet, on Myanmar the EU is quiet.

We demand that the EU finally take a critical look at one of the worst military dictatorships in the world. We expect the EU to take a clear position on Myanmar, in particular with regard to the announcement of the death sentences. We request the EU to stand up for human rights for all the people of Myanmar and urge the EU to immediately condemn the planned executions.

We ask you to strongly oppose capital punishment according to the [European Convention on Human Rights](#), and to take a clear stand against the planned executions in Myanmar.

The Myanmar junta's actions require much more scrutiny than they currently receive in the EU. That is why we call on the EU to take a clear position on Myanmar before it is too late.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or would like to talk to us personally.

Mrs Elina Koski
Burman suomalaiset Finland
burman.suomalaiset@gmail.com
+358 503 571707

Mr Igor Blazevic
Educational Initiatives Prague
igor@praguecivilsociety.org
+420 775 860 368

Mr Nico Buchmüller
German Solidarity with Myanmar Democracy e.V.
buchmueller@solidarity-myanmar.de
+49 178 1400008

In solidarity with Myanmar democracy,
signed by:

Answer Myanmar, UK
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Burman suomalaiset Finland
Burmese Students in the Czech Republic
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