ASEAN Regional Forum inviting terrorist Myanmar junta to workshop on countering the financing of terrorism by non-profit organisations

Representatives of the illegal Myanmar military junta have been invited to attend the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) Workshop on Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism this week, according to a Justice For Myanmar source.

The workshop is set to take place in Bali, Indonesia from March 8 to 10, 2023 and will be co-chaired by the European Union, Indonesia and Laos, with apparent financial support from the German development agency, GIZ. As part of the workshop, the EU is hosting a welcome dinner on March 8.

The ASEAN Regional Forum’s secretariat invited representatives of the Myanmar junta via its Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which then invited the junta’s Ministry of Home Affairs and Central Bank of Myanmar. The Ministry of Home Affairs houses the junta’s police force and prisons department and is directly responsible for ongoing crimes against humanity.

The EU has sanctioned the junta’s home affairs minister and deputy home affairs minister, as well as the junta’s State Administration Council.

The workshop aims to build knowledge and capacity to address the security risks of money laundering and terrorist financing, focussing on the prevention of the financing of terrorism by non-profit organisations related to the intergovernmental Financial Action Task Force (FATF) Recommendation 8.

FATF blacklisted Myanmar in October 2022 over serious deficiencies in countering money laundering, urging countries to conduct enhanced due diligence against the risks emanating from Myanmar.

A group of former United Nations experts, the Special Advisory Council for Myanmar, have established that the Myanmar military junta is a terrorist organisation under Myanmar law and as defined in international law, and it should be treated as such by the international community.

In 2021, the junta illegally declared the National Unity Government (NUG), which is the legitimate government of Myanmar, as a terrorist group. It also designated the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) and People’s Defence Forces (PDFs) as terrorist organisations.

Since the military’s illegal coup attempt, the junta has created a state of terror, committing deliberate killings, arbitrary arrests, indiscriminate airstrikes and shelling, rape and torture, using counter-terrorism as a pretext. The junta has killed more than 3,100 people, and arbitrarily arrested over 20,000.

As part of its attempt to gain control, the junta illegally introduced an organisation registration law in October 2022 to force non-profits to register with the junta, and disclose funding sources and details about their operations, under threat of imprisonment.
Analysis by the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) found that the junta’s organisation registration law is “wholly incompliant” with international law and standards, violating the right to freedom of association, assembly, opinion, expression, and political participation.

The junta has also increased surveillance of the financial sector. An August 2022 directive by the junta’s Central Bank of Myanmar to mobile money businesses requires users to register a photo of their face, their ID card and phone number, increasing the grave risks of retaliation by the junta to those making payments to the NUG, CRPH, PDFs, civil society and other forces successfully resisting the military’s attempted coup and providing humanitarian aid and basic services to the people.

Justice For Myanmar wrote to the co-chairs of the ARF workshop to express dismay at the invitation of illegal military junta members, to urge that they are disinvited and that an invite is instead extended to the National Unity Government, and to seek clarification on funding arrangements.

A representative of the EU denied responsibility for the Myanmar junta’s participation, saying that invitations for ARF activities are distributed through the ARF Secretariat, and clarified that the EU is not funding the participation of representatives from Myanmar. GIZ responded that they are not financially supporting participants to attend the workshop.

Meanwhile, no response was received from Indonesia or Laos.

Justice For Myanmar requests the co-chairs of the workshop to immediately disinvite the Myanmar military junta and to ban the junta from this and all future ASEAN Regional Forum workshops and events.

Instead, these invitations should be extended to the National Unity Government.

**Justice For Myanmar spokesperson Yadanar Maung says:** “It is nonsensical for ARF to invite representatives of the Myanmar junta, a terrorist organisation, to a workshop on countering the financing of terrorism. The invite not only legitimises the junta but also provides it with an opportunity to improve their understanding of measures to prevent money laundering and terrorist financing, which may help them to better circumvent these measures as part of their organised, criminal activities.

“By providing the junta with capacity to regulate the transactions of non-profit organisations, ARF is in effect supporting the junta’s crackdown on freedom of association, assembly, opinion, expression, and political participation, which violates international law.

“The invite also undermines the integrity of ARF’s important work to address the security and economic risks linked to money laundering and terrorist financing activities.

“The Myanmar junta is systemically corrupt and uses a vast network of business to fund its ongoing war crimes and crimes against humanity against the people. ARF should treat the junta as a threat to regional economies and security, rather than as a partner.

“JFM calls on ARF to immediately revoke the invite to the military junta, and instead extend an invite to the National Unity Government.

“The EU should use its leverage as a co-host to urge the exclusion of the junta in the upcoming workshop, the EU hosted welcome dinner and all other international meetings and events the EU is part of. Instead, the EU should support and recognise the NUG as the legitimate government of Myanmar.”
More information:

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Justice For Myanmar, a group of covert activists campaigning for justice and accountability for the people of Myanmar, is calling for an end to military business and for federal democracy and a sustainable peace.