



Security Council

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Letter dated 22 March 2022 from the Permanent Representatives of Ireland, Mexico and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Ireland and Mexico, as Co-Chairs of the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council and in close cooperation with the United Kingdom, would like to share the summary note of the following meeting of the Informal Expert Group on the situation in Myanmar (see annex).

We would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) **Geraldine Byrne Nason**
Permanent Representative of Ireland to the United Nations

(Signed) **Juan Ramón de la Fuente Ramírez**
Permanent Representative of Mexico to the United Nations

(Signed) **Barbara Woodward**
Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the United Nations



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Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council

Summary of the meeting on Myanmar held on 4 March 2022

On 4 March 2022, the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security held a meeting on the situation in Myanmar. The group was briefed by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Myanmar, Noeleen Heyzer. The meeting concluded with an overview of key recommendations provided by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and additional observations shared by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

Questions from Council members

Members of the Security Council asked questions about the role of women's rights organizations and human rights defenders among protesters and the pro-democracy movement, the planned joint platform of the United Nations and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) on women and peace and security, and the integration of gender issues and perspectives into the multi-track strategy of the Special Envoy, the five-point consensus of ASEAN and the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Council members also asked for ideas regarding ways in which the international community could support the work of women's organizations in the current environment, amplify women's voices in reconciliation efforts or political dialogue, address the continued reports of conflict-related sexual violence and violence against women in detention, and avert the regression of development gains and its impact on women's employment, education or food security.

Main points raised in the meeting

- In the year since the military takeover interrupted Myanmar's democratic transition, armed conflict has escalated across the country, and a decade of development gains has been reversed. The number of people in need of humanitarian assistance and protection has grown from 1 million to 14.4 million, and half of the country's population is now below the poverty line. Since the coup, more than 1,500 people have been killed, and half a million people have been newly displaced, in addition to nearly 400,000 internally displaced persons in Chin, Shan, Kachin and Rakhine States and more than 900,000 Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.
- Immediately following the takeover, women had a very visible leadership role in peaceful protests and the civil disobedience movement, largely initiated by health-care workers and other civil servants, most of whom were women.
- Despite provisions on quotas for women's participation in the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement of 2015, the number of women participating in political processes has declined in recent years. However, this trend has been reversed in the opposition movement after the coup. Some 30 per cent of high-level positions in the National Unity Government established in April 2021 are occupied by women, an increase compared with women's representation in the

Government led by the National League for Democracy before the military takeover.

- The Special Envoy has developed a multi-track strategy to deal with the multidimensional crises in Myanmar, focusing on the following four areas: (a) humanitarian and protection needs; (b) return to civilian rule; (c) effective and democratic governance (based on accountability and justice); and (d) durable solutions for the Rohingya. To achieve these objectives, she emphasized the importance of a Myanmar-led process, reflective of the will and aspirations of the people, supported by a well-coordinated international strategy grounded in regional unity, with ASEAN at the centre along with neighbouring countries.
- The Special Envoy has put women at the centre of all her efforts, including her extensive consultations with key stakeholders since taking on the role in mid-December, such as with women's civil society organizations, especially those most affected. In one of her consultations with more than 500 women community leaders in Rakhine State, many noted how they had come together across ethnic and religious divides to promote social cohesion, alleviate intercommunal tension and provide coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and humanitarian-related support to marginalized groups, collectively overcoming patriarchal barriers.
- The Special Envoy is also advancing the women and peace and security agenda through cooperation between the United Nations and ASEAN, including by co-facilitating a United Nations-ASEAN platform on women and peace and security with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia with a view to advancing the protection agenda at the local level, especially for women and young people most affected by the conflict, and amplifying the work and voices of local women's groups and women leaders, in line with ongoing policy discussions at ASEAN, the General Assembly and the Security Council, in order to sustain international attention and mobilize more political and funding support.
- In 2021, growing calls for inclusive, effective and democratic governance across gender, ethnic and religious divides signalled a generational transformation in Myanmar society. These signs of societal transformation were already evident among young people in urban centres but became much more pronounced across Myanmar, as seen in protests and the civil disobedience movement against the military takeover. Women have played a leadership role in these movements, and men have welcomed and supported women's agency, including by wearing women's clothes to demonstrate solidarity.
- However, prospects for inclusive and constructive dialogue, or even "talks about the talks", are unlikely in the current context. Positions have hardened, with all sides resorting to violence as the only perceived solution.
- The pandemic and the deterioration of the security situation after the military coup have had a significant impact on women's employment and on sectors in which women constituted the majority of workers or had a prominent role, such as the garment industry, the hospitality sector and the civil service. In addition, many girls have dropped out of school and may not return. Moreover, the trafficking of women and girls has increased sharply.
- A significant percentage of women's organizations have had to shut down owing to insecurity, repression, new rules and registration procedures, and the collapse of the banking system. Many of the women in organizations that were historically focused on advocacy had to flee or go into hiding, while those that stayed in the country focus only on service delivery and emergency response, with no ability or opportunity to participate in any political process or express themselves openly.

- The humanitarian country team in Myanmar has systematically integrated gender equality and sex- and age-disaggregated data into the humanitarian needs overview and humanitarian response plan, and the Myanmar humanitarian country team applies a gender marker to all its projects. However, implementation is a challenge, as the whole United Nations system is struggling to operate because of widespread insecurity and significant bureaucratic hurdles, including the lack of permission to operate in many areas or even enter the country in many cases.
- The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict has received reports of the use of rape, gang rape and penetration with objects in detention settings against political prisoners, participants in the civil disobedience movement and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex activists, and a continuing trend of conflict-related sexual violence by the Tatmadaw, including in recent clashes, with unwanted pregnancy resulting in certain cases. Reports of gender-based hate speech and reprisals against women human rights defenders have increased since the coup of February 2021, in a climate of shrinking civic space.
- Access to gender-based violence services and reproductive health care is more limited than ever. The authorities have not agreed to the proposed deployment of a Women Protection Advisor in line with Security Council resolution [2467 \(2019\)](#), and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) is therefore coordinating the monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements on conflict-related sexual violence. The authorities have disseminated an action plan to address such violence, pursuant to the joint communiqué of 2018, but the plan was not coordinated with the United Nations or civil society and is not guided by a survivor-centred approach, as a result of which, for example, safeguards for victims, witnesses and their representatives are absent.
- Patterns of sexual violence have been mentioned in the annual reports of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence since 2010, and the Tatmadaw has been listed as a perpetrator of such violence since 2018. There are reports that some of the same military divisions employed in Rakhine against the Rohingya in 2017 have been used to repress the pro-democracy movement across the country. The lack of accountability since 2017 has led to successive waves of violence and further displacement, and has inhibited voluntary, safe and sustainable returns.
- Meanwhile, Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, risk becoming “a forgotten crisis within a forgotten crisis”, eclipsed by other conflicts. Rohingya women cannot formally access employment, are largely excluded from camp leadership structures, are vulnerable to high levels of violence within the camps, including sexual violence, and have little recourse other than traditional justice mechanisms, which often result in victims being forced to marry the rapists, and children born of rape risk being left in legal limbo.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made by UN-Women, as the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group:¹

¹ These recommendations are suggestions from United Nations participants in this meeting, including the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, or from the background note prepared by UN-Women as the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group ahead of the meeting, rather than recommendations of the Informal Expert Group as a whole or Council members.

The Security Council should hold an open meeting and invite women from Myanmar civil society to brief members. In addition, if the Security Council proposes the adoption of a resolution or presidential statement, language such as the following could be considered:

- Recognizes the leading role of women in the peaceful protests following the military takeover, and the essential contribution of women's civil society organizations in relief and recovery efforts, and calls for women's full, equal and meaningful participation in all aspects of the political process.
- Strongly condemns the violence against peaceful protesters, including women and girls, and calls for the immediate release of all those that have been arrested because of their affiliation or role in the protests, including women human rights defenders.
- Calls for immediate and unhindered access for independent monitors to the territory of Myanmar, including for the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar.
- Calls for the lifting of movement restrictions affecting the Rohingya and for safe and unimpeded humanitarian access to all people in need, with due attention to the differentiated needs of women and girls.
- Calls for the full implementation of the joint communiqué of 2018 and the deployment of women's protection advisers, in line with Security Council resolution [2467 \(2019\)](#), to enhance collective efforts to address conflict-related sexual violence and hold perpetrators accountable.

In addition, Council members could:

- Provide long-term flexible funding to women-led civil society organizations, especially at the local level, and find channels to fund the informal women-led networks providing humanitarian relief.
- Consistently call out and condemn attacks against women human rights defenders and express solidarity and support.
- Engage meaningfully with women's civil society organizations in all discussions about ways to enhance accountability and advance international justice.
- Support the Special Envoy's efforts to support and engage systematically with women, especially at the local level, and collaborate with ASEAN and the United Nations on advancing the women and peace and security agenda in Myanmar.
- Urge ASEAN to prioritize women's meaningful participation in all diplomatic efforts to end the crisis, and consult widely on its joint women and peace and security platform with the United Nations.

The Co-Chairs thanked all participants and committed to follow up on the important issues raised at the meeting.