

December 5, 2022

H.E. Fumio Kishida, Prime Minister of Japan

H.E. Yoshimasa Hayashi, Foreign Minister of Japan

Statement Calling for the Japanese Government to Stop ODA to Myanmar

ayus:Network of Buddhists Volunteers on International Cooperation

Friends of the Earth Japan

Japan International Volunteer Center (JVC)

Network Against Japan Arms Trade (NAJAT)

Mekong Watch

Since the attempted coup by the military in Myanmar on February 1, 2021, there have been numerous reports of murder, sexual violence, forced disappearance, and torture by the military as well as security forces under military command. As of November 18, 2022, at least 2,519 people have been killed by the Myanmar military <1>. This figure includes at least 191 children <2>. Further, among those who have protested the attempted seizure of power by the Myanmar military, more than 16,275 people have been arbitrarily detained or have had arrest warrants issued by the illegitimate junta <3>. Across Myanmar, there are an estimated 1.44 million internally displaced people (as of November 1), about one million of whom were newly displaced after the attempted coup <4>.

By 2020, the Japanese government provided JPY 356.51 billion in total in grant aid as well as JPY 109.94 billion in total in technical assistance to Myanmar, and promised JPY 1,378.47 billion in loan aid (figure based on loan agreements) <5>. Regarding its policy on these Official Development Assistance (ODA) after the attempted coup, on May 21, 2021, then Foreign Minister Motegi stated that “...if the situation continues in this way, it is possible that we will be compelled to review ODA and that companies may become unable to provide investment even if they want to,” and that “as a country that has provided various forms of support for the democratization of Myanmar, and as a friend, Japan believes that we must clearly convey such points to Myanmar, and we have actually done so.” However, since then, despite the worsening human rights crisis in Myanmar, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has simply repeated that it would “comprehensively consider what measures may be effective while viewing the situation of the efforts made by Japan and the international community” in response to questions in the Diet and inquiries from citizens for over a year and a half <6>, and has not taken any concrete measures to date.

A large part of ODA to Myanmar is loan aid (yen loans) for development of a special economic zone and surrounding infrastructure, construction of roads, and repairing railroads, as well as grant aid and technical assistance in the education, health, and agriculture sectors and aid provided through NGOs. It has been made clear by the UN Independent Fact-Finding Mission that in Myanmar that companies owned or controlled by the military conduct many business operations, and that revenues from those operations are a source of funds for the military, supporting their atrocities <7>. In consideration of such findings, since the attempted coup, civil society organizations have consistently urged the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) to investigate whether ODA projects are financing the military and to publish the findings from such an investigation. So far, a complaint by a local stakeholder has indicated that in the construction of Bago Bridge, a yen loan project, a company related to Myanmar Economic Corporation (MEC) is providing materials for the bridge <8>. MEC is one of the military enterprises that the above-mentioned Fact-Finding Mission recommended to the international community not to enter into or remain in a business relationship with. However, neither the Ministry of Foreign Affairs nor JICA has publicly explained the relationship between ODA projects and military-related enterprises. Because the Japanese government has continued ODA without any explanation, at the many protests that have been organized by Myanmar people living in Japan and Japanese civil society in front of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, concerns have been expressed regularly about how the flow of ODA funds may benefit the military.

Even when ODA projects do not have business ties to the military, infrastructure that is built by ODA such as roads may be used in Myanmar military operations. Karen Peace Support Network has demanded that construction of a bridge in a conflict zone in the East-West Economic Corridor be suspended <9>. Further, Human Rights Watch has pointed out that two out of three vessels provided under the 500 million yen Economic and Social Development Programme, signed on September 12, 2016 with Myanmar, was used for military purposes in Rakhine State on September 14, 2022 <10>. As long as armed clashes in the ethnic minority regions and crackdown on citizens continue, the economic ripple effect of large infrastructure projects such as those implemented by yen loans will not extend beyond a few companies, and there is little possibility that such projects will contribute to the improvement of living standards of the people in Myanmar overall. Given this, it lacks meaning to invest Japan's public funds in infrastructure projects in Myanmar under the current circumstances.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated in the Diet that as of April 2021, 34 ODA projects were being implemented, totaling JPY739.6 billion based on figures in loan agreements <11>. This was confirmed at a meeting with NGOs. We share the concern of Myanmar citizens that by continuing so many projects worth so much money even after the attempted coup, the Japanese government is giving

implicit support to the military junta <12>.

One year and ten months have passed since the attempted coup, but the Myanmar military continues to commit grave human rights abuses that amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. We express deep concern that Japan may be complicit in the human rights abuses by the military by providing ODA to the benefit of the military. We strongly demand that the Japanese government suspend all loan aid currently being implemented under the control of the Myanmar military and that it listens to the National Unity Government (NUG), Ethnic Revolutionary Organizations (EROs) and local Myanmar CSOs to effectively support the will of the people of Myanmar.

Notes:

<1> Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, "Daily Briefing in Relation to the Military Coup" (November 25, 2022): <https://aappb.org/?p=23538>

<2> Progressive Voice, "Military Junta: Threat to Myanmar Children's Life and Future" (Weekly Highlights September 12-18, 2022): <https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/2022/09/26/military-junta-threat-to-myanmar-childrens-life-and-future/>

<3> *Supra* note 1

<4> UNHCR, "MYANMAR EMERGENCY UPDATE as of 1 November 2022"
<https://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/myanmar-emergency-update-1-november-2022>

<5> ODA data by country (2021), Ministry of Foreign Affairs:
<https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/oda/files/100384974.pdf#page=30>

<6> Answer by HARA Keiichi, Deputy Assistant Minister of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to a question from SUZUKI Takako of the Liberal Democratic Party at a meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives (April 14, 2021);

Answer by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at a meeting of the Parliamentary Group Supporting Democratization in Myanmar and the Parliamentary Group Promoting "Human Rights Diplomacy" on Japan's ODA and OOF programs and economic activities in Myanmar (February 1, 2022);

Answer by HAYASHI Yoshimasa, Minister for Foreign Affairs, to a question from INOUE Satoshi of the Japanese Communist Party at a meeting of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defense of the House of Councillors (March 16, 2022);

Answer by MIBAE Taisuke, Deputy Assistant Minister of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to a question from TOKUNAGA Hisashi of the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan at a meeting of the Committee on National Security of the House of Representatives (April 26, 2022);

Answer by Mr. Kurimoto, Director of the Country Assistance Planning Division I, International Cooperation Bureau, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to a question from Mekong Watch at the ODA Policy Council meeting held on July 20, 2022 as part of the NGO-Ministry of Foreign Affairs Regular Consultation Meetings.

<7> Fact-finding Mission on Myanmar, *Economic interests of the Myanmar military* (September 16, 2019)

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/MyanmarFFM/Pages/EconomicInterestsMyanmarMilitary.aspx>

<8> Myanmar Now, "Japan must abandon project with military-owned company to build bridge in Yangon, say engineers" (March 26, 2021): <https://www.myanmar-now.org/en/news/japan-must-abandon-project-with-military-owned-company-to-build-bridge-in-yangon-say-engineers>

<9> Karen Peace Support Network, *SAC Regime Unleashes War Across the Southern Dawna Range* (July 19, 2022)

<https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/2022/07/19/sac-regime-unleashes-war-across-the-southern-dawna-range/>

<10> Human Rights Watch, “Myanmar: Military Used Japan-Funded Ships Tokyo Should Immediately Suspend Non-Humanitarian Aid to Junta” (October 10, 2022):

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/10/11/myanmar-military-used-japan-funded-ships>

<11> Answer by UENO Atsushi, Director-General for International Cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to a question from INOUE Satoshi of the Japanese Communist Party at a meeting of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defense of the House of Councillors (April 15, 2021).

<12> Progressive Voice, “Japan and Junta Make Dangerous Bedfellows”(Weekly Highlights July 11-17, 2022):

<https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/2022/07/26/japan-and-junta-make-dangerous-bedfellows/>

Endorsed by the following organizations:

- 1 Action Committee for Democracy Development (Coalition of 14 grassroots networks)
Myanmar
- 2 Asia-Pacific Human Rights Information Center Japan
- 3 Asian Community Center 21 Japan
- 4 Asian Health Institute Japan
- 5 Association of Human Rights Defenders and Promoters Myanmar
- 6 Burma Campaign UK United Kingdom
- 7 Burmese Relief Center Japan Japan
- 8 Burmese Women’s Union Myanmar
- 9 Campaign for a New Myanmar USA
- 10 Earth Tree Japan
- 11 Equality Myanmar Myanmar
- 12 ETOs Watch Coalition Thailand
- 13 Family Based Learning Network of Farmers for Agrarian Reform (FALFAR) Myanmar
- 14 Federation of Workers’ Union of the Burmese Citizen in Japan (FWUBC) Japan
- 15 Friends Against Dictatorship (FAD) Thailand
- 16 Future Light Center Myanmar
- 17 Future Thanlwin Myanmar
- 18 Gen-Z Myanmar Support Team Myanmar
- 19 Generation Wave Myanmar
- 20 Grass-root People Myanmar
- 21 Human Rights Foundation of Monland Myanmar
- 22 India For Myanmar Myanmar
- 23 International Campaign for the Rohingya USA
- 24 Japan Center for a Sustainable Environment and Society (JACSES) Japan
- 25 Japan Tropical Forest Action Network (JATAN) Japan

26	Kachin Women's Association Thailand	Myanmar
27	Karen Human Rights Group	Myanmar
28	Karen Peace Support Network	Myanmar
29	Karen Women's Organization	Myanmar
30	Karenni National Women's Organization	Myanmar
31	Keng Tun Youth	Myanmar
32	Let's Help Each Other	Myanmar
33	Metta Campaign Mandalay	Myanmar
34	Myanmar News Now!!	Japan
35	Myanmar People Alliance (Shan State)	Myanmar
36	Network for Human Rights Documentation Burma (ND-Burma)	Myanmar
37	Network for Indonesian Democracy (NINDJA)	Japan
38	No Business With Genocide	USA
39	Non-for profit Organization Music Dream Creation	Japan
40	Nyan Lynn Thit Analytica	Myanmar
41	Pacific Asia Resoure Center	Japan
42	Progressive Voice	Myanmar
43	Project SEVANA South-East Asia	Thailand
44	Save and Care Organization for Ethnic Women at Border Areas	Myanmar
45	Second Tap Root	Myanmar
46	Shan MATA	Myanmar
47	SHARE(Services for the Health in Asian & African Regions)	Japan
48	Sinapis	Japan
49	Sisters 2 Sisters	Myanmar
50	Southern Youth Development Organization	Myanmar
51	Spirit in Education Movement (SEM)	Thailand
52	Ta'ang Legal Aid	Myanmar
53	Tanintharyi MATA	Myanmar
54	The Free Burma Campaign (South Africa) (FBC(SA))	Myanmar
55	The Mekong Butterfly	Thailand
56	Thint Myat Lo Thu Myar Organization	Myanmar
57	U.S. Campaign for Burma	United States
58	WE21Japan	Japan
59	Women's Democratic Club, Femin	Japan

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