



## Myanmar's Crackdown on Anti-Coup Demonstrations Escalates as Civilians are Killed During the Protests

The situation in Myanmar has deteriorated this week, with the ruling military junta taking several actions to worsen the conditions there. In recent days, security forces fired on unarmed anti-coup protesters while the country's ambassador to the United Nations condemned the coup and urged international intervention to restore the democratically-elected government. In several cities across Myanmar, at least 38 protesters are believed to have been killed yesterday in addition to the 18 other civilian fatalities from earlier in the week, with dozens more severely injured. The violence against civilians consequentially prompted Myanmar's ambassador to the UN to condemn the military's coup and their actions. Additionally, deposed state councilor Aung San Suu Kyi was charged with further criminal offenses, although the bureaucratic nature of the charges indicates the political motivation for her ongoing detention. Suu Kyi has been detained since the coup occurred on February 1st, despite international calls for her release.

Since Myanmar's military seized power through the coup on February 1st, sporadic protests have broken out in opposition to the junta. Recently, these protests have gathered momentum, with turnout steadily increasing. Earlier this week, Myanmar's security forces used live ammunition to disperse protests occurring around the country. In some of the most disturbing developments, videos this week show security forces firing slingshots at demonstrators, chasing them after they begin to flee, and violently beating an ambulance crew. More than 50 civilians have been killed in the preceding days, and dozens more have been injured. The United Nations called for the ruling military to immediately stop cracking down on citizens, although those demands were ignored. The Myanmar military, named the Tatmadaw, has forcibly suppressed pro-democracy protests in the past, most recently in 2007.

As the international condemnations for the military junta have grown, Myanmar's ambassador to the United Nations criticized the military for seizing power and encouraged the United Nations and other bodies to intervene in the country to restore the elected government. The military junta originally accused Suu Kyi and her party of winning power through an illegitimate election, although Myanmar's own election security officials have disputed this. The ambassador to the UN, Tin Maung Naing, has been recalled and replaced by one of his deputies, although he is refusing to concede his position because of the illegitimacy of the ruling government.

Protests broke out in force on Monday during Aung San Suu Kyi's latest hearing, when she was officially charged with additional criminal offenses. Suu Kyi is accused of violating import laws during the procurement of walkie talkies and violating a natural disaster law by holding a campaign rally during the coronavirus pandemic. These charges are largely believed to be politically motivated, with Myanmar's military searching for reasons to keep her arbitrarily detained. During her hearing, protesters across the country demanded her release and criticized the ruling General Min Aung Hlaing. In response, security forces used tear gas and riot gear to disperse the demonstrators.

The UN Security Council is expected to hold a closed meeting on the situation at the end of this week, however any coordinated action may be difficult to achieve if certain members decide to veto against it. Similarly, The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) – of which Myanmar is a member – has attempted to address the ongoing crisis but action from them could also be unlikely due to their tradition of non-interference in members' internal affairs.