

September 12, 2017

**Open Letter from Myanmar Civil Society Organizations to the US Congress**  
**Regarding Military-to-Military Engagement in Myanmar**

We, the undersigned civil society organizations, representing various communities across Burma/Myanmar express our deep concern over the United States' current interest to expand and normalize relations between the Myanmar Armed Forces, or "Tatmadaw," and the United States Military.

Although Myanmar has seen democratic gains in the past few years, including national elections in 2015 and the general opening of civil society space, the Tatmadaw still retains unchecked power over civilian government. The Tatmadaw has a guaranteed 25 percent of seats in parliament which has allowed it to veto any democratic changes to the Constitution. Any positive political progress made in the country has been overshadowed by increasing military offensives, particularly in Kachin and northern Shan States. Multiple civilian injuries, human rights abuses, and deaths have been recorded since the Tatmadaw broke a longstanding ceasefire in 2011, and the number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) has continued to escalate. Just last month, in mid-August, 1,000 villagers in Kachin State were forced to flee their homes, adding to the more than 100,000 IDPs already displaced there since 2011.

In late 2016, military clearance operations in response to an attack on Border Guard Posts in northern Rakhine State by Rohingya militant group called Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), formerly known as al-Yaqin, led to the displacement of more than 87,000 local villagers. A February 2017 flash report by the UN Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights found "the very likely commission of crimes against humanity" by the Myanmar Army, leading the United Nations Human Rights Council to mandate a fact-finding mission into human rights abuses in the country.

Overall, the protracted nature of the country's conflicts has led to increased militarization in ethnic areas, dire humanitarian conditions, and political stalemate. Though the democratically elected government of the Nobel Peace Laureate, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, leads the country's peace process, the ultimate success of the process depends largely on the actions of the Tatmadaw. Thus far, the Tatmadaw has shown little good faith that it will transition to civilian control, and expanded engagement by the United States Military could likely embolden and give legitimacy to its entrenched culture of acting with impunity. Furthermore, such engagement could potentially undermine the civilian-led Government and fledgling Parliament whose biggest obstacle to further democratic progress is the intransigence of the Tatamadaw itself.

We strongly request that the U.S. Government seek to engage and expand relations with civilian authorities and rights-based civil society that would contribute effectively to establishing peace and democratic institutions and practices rather than the very institution that remains impervious to democratic progress.

*Due to the security concern and possible reprisal that might be targeted at the signatories to the open letter, names of the 85 organizations are withheld.*

**For more information, please contact:**

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