



Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP)

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COVID-19 , COUP AND MEDICS

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The people of Burma, already suffering under the hands of an oppressive military dictatorship, are now facing a third wave of COVID-19. Prior to the coup, during the first and second waves of the pandemic, volunteers, medical staff, and civilians organized under the civilian government were coordinating an effective response. Burma was one of the first countries in Southeast Asia to receive the vaccine, gaining international recognition for its pandemic prevention.

On 1 February, a junta seized power, and since then, the country's key sectors in economy, education, and health have all been deteriorating. The people of Burma face a pandemic but without adequate healthcare services. Across the country, testing facilities have been eradicated, the true number of civilians infected is impossible to calculate.

Basic medicine is now in short supply, prices are soaring. The military has imposed severe restrictions on the importation of essential medicines and medical supplies. In addition, the junta has been closing hospitals and clinics, and stopping civilians from being able to purchase lifesaving oxygen. This terrorism has resulted in escalating death tolls throughout the country. Much of this is going undocumented. The junta are withholding facts and figures, covering up cases and presenting only an insignificant number of cases.

From the very start of the coup, and throughout this third wave of the pandemic, the junta has been arresting, issuing arrest warrants, and conducting raids on the homes of doctors, nurses, and other medical professionals, who have been helping treat civilians affected by the junta's violence.

According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), (67) medical professional are currently detained, and nearly (600) are evading arrest warrants. In addition, 221 medical students have been arrested this coup, including 9 currently detained. A total 7 medics have been killed by the junta since the coup. This is just the number confirmed by AAPP.

Some medical professionals could not be contacted by AAPP, and their condition remains unknown. Below are some cases of medical professionals who have been affected by the junta's terrorism:

Dr. Kyaw Kyaw Thet

On the night of July 13, junta troops raided the home of Dr. Kyaw Kyaw Thet. He was beaten and arrested by the so-called police and junta soldiers. He is currently detained in the Mandalay Palace military base interrogation center, where he has been facing torture in interrogation for some time. Dr. Kyaw Kyaw Thet is also a close friend with Dr. Thiha Tin Tun, was shot dead by the junta on March 27. He also volunteered at a charity clinic and taught medical students.

Dr. Thet Htay

On July 16, Dr. Thet Htay, a well-known surgeon in Mandalay who worked at a charity clinic and in a hospital was detained, and beaten, when he was on his way back from treating a patient. Dr. Thet Htay is a doctor who has been active in treating civilians injured in the junta's brutal crackdowns.

Dr. Htar Htar Lin

The junta has also been taking hostage family members and friends of medical experts. On 10 June, Director of the National Immunization Program, Dr. Htar Htar Lin, was arrested together with her husband, son, her friend, and her friend's daughter. Dr. Htar Htar Lin played a key role in the NLD government's civilian COVID-19 vaccination program. During detention, she has become infected with COVID-19.

On July 19, Martyrs' Day, in North Dagon Township, Rangoon Division, junta forces pretending to be patients suffering with COVID-19 called up doctors known to be treating those affected by the pandemic. They then arrested these doctors and raided their clinics. The terrorist group arrested a total of 5 medical professional, they were 2 doctors giving medical advice to patients online, and 3 volunteer doctors who were going into communities to treat civilians. In addition to this, during the raid on the doctor's offices, five 40-liter oxygen tanks, which had been donated by civilians, along with eighteen 15-liter oxygen tanks, 1 sets of oxygen equipment, medicine, and all the doctors' PPE equipment, were stolen by the junta who claimed it was illegitimate material.

Regardless of the country, civilians should be able to have access to urgent healthcare. The junta is using the COVID-19 pandemic as a weapon to further torture the people and put civilian's lives at risk. The unlawful arrest, prosecution and torture of medical professionals are clear genocide and crimes against humanity. Targeting doctors, nurses, and medical students is a grave violation of international law. The international community has a specific responsibility to protect healthcare workers, who are being systematically detained, abducted and murdered by a terrorist group. 2016 UN Security Council passed Resolution 2286 in 2016 resolutely condemning attacks on medical personnel, hospitals, and medical supplies, maintaining "states to ensure that those responsible do not operate with impunity, and that they are brought to justice". But international inaction, and a lack of accountability in Burma has allowed these brutal crimes to continue with impunity.

Article 24 of the 1949 Geneva Convention, the pinnacle of international law states medical personnel, particularly those involved in the "transport or treatment of the wounded or sick, or in the prevention of disease... shall be respected and protected in all circumstances". The UN General Secretary also released a statement at the outbreak of COVID-19, "it is time to put armed conflict on lockdown and focus together on the true fight of our lives". Instead of initiating a ceasefire, the junta is methodologically using covid as a tool to inflict further violence upon civilians. The global community must adhere to these commitments made to protect the healthcare providers in Burma and no longer neglect these blatant crimes against humanity.

