

La'ó Hamutuk

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Open Letter to

His Excellency Prime Minister of the Ninth Constitutional Government of Timor-Leste

About the Position of the State of Timor-Leste to defend the rights of the people of Burma

31 August 2023

La'ó Hamutuk applauds the State of Timor-Leste which has strongly condemned the action of the Myanmar military regime which expelled the Timor-Leste diplomatic mission because Timor-Leste defended justice and democracy for the people of Myanmar. We, as a civil society organization which defends democracy, human rights and solidarity in Timor-Leste and around the world, are very proud of the decision of our Government and the Prime Minister's urging the leaders of the ASEAN nations to speak out in support of human rights and democracy which were attacked by the military junta in Myanmar.

Timor-Leste's position shows the world our continuing consistency to hold high the principles and human values which have not yet enabled the people of Myanmar to emerge from their long suffering. As we all know, the conflict in Myanmar is against the people and the democratic system there; the entire population, including activists, children, women, minorities and vulnerable people have been suffering for many years under military dictatorship.

Sadly, the anguish of citizens in Burma (Myanmar) under repression began in 1988. In 2005, La'ó Hamutuk protested against the Shwe Gas Project which violated communities' rights.¹ In 2009, we supported Timor-Leste's UN Ambassador Nelson Santos when he voted to support human rights in Burma and, regrettably, was recalled by Dili.² We appreciate RDTL's current position – to push ASEAN members to support human rights in Southeast Asia (although in the past, ASEAN nations supported Indonesia's illegal occupation of Timor-Leste). A La'ó Hamutuk representative meet with Burmese refugees in Thailand in 2010, and in 2012, when democratic space had opened slightly, we presented at a workshop in Yangon about transparency in the petroleum sector.³ Unfortunately, Burma did not continue its progress toward democracy, and in 2017 we had to issue a Statement of solidarity with the Rohingya community.⁴ After the military coup in 2021, we, together with OilWatch, urged oil companies to pull out of Myanmar.⁵ Today, La'ó Hamutuk congratulates the Government of Timor-Leste for following the principles on which our nation was founded.

We understand that the people of Myanmar have greatly suffered under the dictatorship since 2021, enduring military action which has killed many people and forced others to flee the country

¹ <https://www.laohamutuk.org/Bulletin/2005/Nov/bulletinv6n4.html#Burma>

² <https://www.laohamutuk.org/reports/UN/06UNMITcreation.html#Burma>

³ <https://www.laohamutuk.org/Oil/EITI/Burma/12EITIBurma.htm>

⁴ <https://www.laohamutuk.org/Justice/2017/SolidarityTimorRohingya11Sep2017en.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.laohamutuk.org/Justice/2021/Statement%20WSEA18April2021.pdf>

in order to survive. The regime has taken all power, cancelling the results of a democratic election and creating humanitarian, economic and political crises. Although violations of human rights in Myanmar are already a worldwide concern, until now there has not been effective international action to prevent the military dictatorship from continuing to inflict them.

We are distressed with the practices of the military coup regime in a country which had nearly completed its democracy. In truth, in a democratic country everyone should be free to enjoy their lives, without threats from the government or state organs which contradict or undermine the rule of law. However, this ideal situation has never existed in Myanmar, and the long history of people suffering there continues to this day.

As a civil society organization which monitors issues of human rights and democracy, La'ó Hamutuk greatly appreciates the request of Timor-Leste's Government that ASEAN leaders confront the problem of human rights violations in Myanmar. Our Government's commitment to hold high the principles of democratic rule of law, including strengthening international solidarity, is clear in Article 10 of our Constitution, which says *The Democratic Republic of East Timor shall extend its solidarity to the struggle of the peoples for national liberation*. RDTL shall give political asylum, as the law states, to people from other countries who are persecuted for their struggle for national and social liberation, or for defending human rights, democracy and peace. We adopted these legal principles based on our historic victory over oppression, which the people of Timor-Leste have already won.

La'ó Hamutuk strongly supports Timor-Leste's Government's protest of the Myanmar military regime's expulsion of its Chargé d'Affaires in Myanmar, an example of how that regime ignores diplomatic norms.

We continue to ask the military dictatorship in Myanmar to stop inflicting suffering and torture on its people. Dictatorships always use power and force and never show good will; therefore to end the suffering, one must bravely change from this path to a more democratic one.

We ask the leaders of all ASEAN nations not to close their eyes and ignore the immense suffering of the people of Myanmar because of commercial or political interests. We urge the ASEAN community, the UN Secretary-General and major nations to act urgently and prudently to apply economic, diplomatic and political sanctions to support the National Unity Government (NUG) to restore democracy in Myanmar under the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Sincerely,



Marta da Silva



Jonathan Gonsalves



Celestino Gusmão



Charles Scheiner



Mariano Ferreira



Elizabeth da Silva



Elizaria Febe Gomes