

## Transcript from the conversation



**CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE  
MOVEMENT IN MYANMAR**

**March 4th 10 am UTC**

### >> NANA DARKOA SEKYIAMAH:

Okay. Welcome, everybody. Welcome to a really important conversation. It's a conversation with activists from Myanmar about the current civil disobedience movement in the country. My name is Nana Darkoa Sekyiamah and I am the Director of Communications and Tactics at AWID. First of all I want to say a huge thank you to all my panelists for today's conversation. I know you are going through a particularly challenging period in the country and even in the midst of everything that is going on, you have taken time to be here to speak to feminist activists from all around the world to share what's going on in your various contexts. So, I really appreciate that.

And I'm going to start with very, very brief introductions because in a little while I'm going to ask you speak a little bit more about yourself. So in today's conversation we have and I'm going to introduce like the folks who I can see on the camera and who I can't see on the camera but I know you are here. We have got Hla Myat Tun who is the Deputy Director at Colours Rainbow, thank you for being here. And we have Tin Tin Nyo who is Chairperson of the Burmese Women's Union, also Managing Director of Burma News International. Thank you so much for being here. We have got Nandar who is the director of the Purple Feminist Group. Really appreciate you being here. And we also have May Sabe Phyu who is the director of the Gender Equality Network. Thank you so much, May, for being here.

And I also know that in terms of what's happening in Myanmar right now, the situation is also a little bit different dependent upon which part of the country you are based in,

which locality you are based in. I'm going to start with you, May, actually. If I can ask you to say a little bit more about yourself, your work and if you can speak to what's happening in your context, I'd appreciate it and the same to everyone. So I will start with May.

**>> MAY SABE PHYU:**

Okay. Good afternoon, everyone. Very nice to meet you all. And thank you so much, AWID, for organizing this event. And as Nana have already introduced, so I am May Sabe Phyu, director with Gender Equality Network. And I am also working as a steering country member and cofounder of Alliance for Gender Inclusion in the Peace Process . And I am a mixed blood of ethnic Chin and Burma. So I came from the northern part of the country which is called Kachin State. And although geographically Kachin State is at the northern part of Myanmar, but we also consider some parts of the northern state area as Kachin region as well. So my blood is related not only to Kachin but also some part of northern state areas. And right now not only the political crisis and instabilities, some parts of the northern state region, they also continue armed conflict and more people are forcibly displaced from their origin villages.

So I mean as being an ethnic Kachin we have been so far not just now, not just from now, actually they are political oppression, and, you know, continue civil conflicts in our regions since 2011. So it's more than nine years now. Now the COVID pandemic as well as the political crisis because of the military coup on the 1<sup>st</sup> of February, people who are living in the Kachin region, they are suffering triple crisis, triple problems. It is really terrible situations that we are all facing right now. So I will stop here because there are a lot of questions we can still discuss. And this is me and my work. So being a Kachin activist I cofounded the the Kachin Peace Network (KPN) and Kachin Women Peace Network (KWPN) in order to advocate the Kachin conflicts around the world. My involvement is not only as a women's rights activist but also a peace activist for the Kachin region as well.

**>> NANA DARKOA SEKYIAMAH:**

Thank you. We do have interpretation in three other additional languages. We have interpretation in French, Spanish and Myanmar language. We also have captioning subtitles in English. So you can click on the live transcript button and also get that.

Thank you so much, May. I would like to hand over to Hla Myat Tun to tell us more about yourself and your activism and what's happening in your context as well.

**>> HLA MYAT TUN:**

Hello, everyone. Thanks for letting me participate in this webinar. Thanks, everyone.

My full name is Hla Myat Tun, but people call me Hla Myat and I'm with Colours Rainbow, serving as Deputy Director, as well as Co-Director with &PROUD Colours Rainbow is mostly working on LGBT rights, advocating for LGBT rights and legal reform and capacity building for the LGBT community. &PROUD, which I cofounded in 2014, is mostly working on art and culture to promote the rights of LGBT and visibility in the country. &PROUD and Colours Rainbow we have been doing annual Pride festivals since 2014. And this year, actually February 15<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> was supposed to be our Pride this year

last month, but because of the coup on February 1st we couldn't do it. But instead of celebrating Pride in the LGBT community in Myanmar, also around the country we are doing the protest here and there, especially we are organizing a series of protests, rainbow protests in Yangon. LGBT involvement in the protest at the moment is quite visible. And we got more media attention. And I will talk about it a later. So yeah, we're in the middle of the fight and luckily today is not really -- how do you call it? Really hard for us today. But yesterday we had a lot of people killed not only in Yangon but also in other areas. In Mandalay, in Monywa a lot of young people were killed. And there are some LGBT included in the list of fallen angels, fallen heroes.

So we are -- we are really sad at this moment. But we are using this as strength to be more united to fight against this military regime. So I will talk about it more later. So let me stop here.

>> **NANA DARKOA SEKYIAMAH:**

Thank you so much. It is really hard to hear about all those who are fallen, especially all the young people. May their souls rest in peace. I would like to pass it on to Tin Tin. Please go ahead.

>> **TIN TIN NYO:**

Thank you so much. Thank you to AWID for organizing this very important live conversation. And it is a chance for us to message the situation in Burma to all our feminist sisters and also brothers, and also anyone who is listening to this webinar. This is a great chance for us. So as Nana introduced my name is Tin Tin Nyo. I was working for women's human rights and advocating for peace for many years. I am based in borders since 1990 until now. Although there was some kind of democratization and so-called transition happen the last ten years, we were so cautious of the transition that gone under 2008 constitution which gave the military regime the highest power. So that's why we are working -- our work inside Burma, when we increase our work inside of Burma at the same time we continue to stay around the borders to be able to speak up about any wrongdoing of the military and also any dictators, even if they are coming from the civilian government.

So for my life, I have been under the military dictatorship. When I got to know-- this because I grow up in the jungle and did not have a good education because of this Civil War, military dictatorship in our country. But why we are having some kind of hope for our country, but it has returned again to the previous time, to the darkness time.

So we were very sad and very shocked to see that many people are killed, like animals on the streets, dragged, tortured. So all of our hearts are really filled with sorrows and also like -- sort of cut. Because I'm also a victim and survivor of Civil War, so I will speak more.

>> **NANA DARKOA SEKYIAMAH:**

Thank you so much, Tin Tin. Much appreciated. And now to Nandar, please go ahead.

## >> NANDAR:

Thanks, Nana. And thank you for having me. And it's lovely to be speaking along with other activists who have been doing amazing work in Myanmar and outside. Like Tin Tin said, it has been an enormously hard time right now to talk about the whole thing. I'm going to introduce myself and give a little bit of background of the work that I do. And then share the situation that I'm experiencing here.

I'm Nandar. I'm a feminist advocate who writes, who translates and who has created two podcasts. I run two podcasts right now and I'm the founder of Purple Feminist Group, which works to advocate on equity and gender-based violence as well as promote feminist literature in Myanmar. And we amplify women and girls' voices through our medium, writing as well as the podcast. I have been a feminist for as long as I can remember, but I didn't know the name for the kind of work that I have been doing. Until recently I found there a name for the work that I am doing. I claim myself as being a feminist. There has been a lot of difficulty adjusting to the world that I live in because Myanmar is a country where we uphold patriarchal value in our culture and day-to-day life practice. So it is a very challenging time to be a feminist. But because of the sacrifices and the activist work that our older generation, the women who came before us have done, it was a little bit easier to have the conversation around sexual harassment and assaults and rape and other things that women have to go through. So the -- the voices of women in our situation were easier to be heard compared to the older generation. And that was a good thing. But at the same time because of the social media, there were even more easier way to be victimized, like -- sorry, victim blamed to other people when they are sharing their stories. So women voices were in a way easily limited by people on social media who did not have a face or name in attack. An old problem with it but a new problem appeared due to the social media.

On top of all these things that women are facing, on February 1st the military took over the country and the darkness has been overwhelming since then. We have been grieving. We have been sad. Following three weeks after that the violence began. They have been attacking people, arresting people. And they have been doing all these nasty things that you can think of. And this week has been particularly more intense because more deaths are confirmed and more people are arrested and more people are brutally beaten and we have lost more lives. So yeah. It has not been an easy month or weeks for us. But I think it also is a very important thing to have conversation around this so that we can spread the awareness to the people outside of Myanmar to support us, to help us get through this. So thank you for having us.

## >> NANA DARKOA SEKYIAMAH:

Thank you so much, Nandar. And you are absolutely right, it is important for us to have this conversation. So I'm going to go right in to it, but I also want to let everyone who is listening know that if you have a question you can use the Q and A function. Pop your question in there. I'm going to do an introductory round of questions to the panelists and we will answer the questions to the people who listen to the live or are part of the Zoom conversation. So I will start with you May Phyu. Myanmar has had some hard-won wins

for gender equality and for LGBTI rights. How is that threatened by the current situation, by the military takeover? Can you speak a bit to that?

>> **MAY SABE PHYU:**

Yeah. Myanmar's military forceful takeover the civilian government and subsequent violent crackdown on peaceful protesters are of course a dangerous setback for attempts to install democracy and the rule of law in Myanmar. These actions are especially devastating for women and LGBT and threaten to reverse significant progress made over the past decade towards ensuring that women in Myanmar have more opportunities, power and influence in society. So using democratic institutions, women's civil society organizations such as like us, Hla Myat Tun, Tin Tin, Nandar, we had begun to dismantle barriers to achieving gender parity and had started to weave important concepts regarding gender equality, women's empowerment, LGBTQI rights into the political, economic, social and cultural fabric for this society. This progress is gravely threatened by a return to military rule and reversion to a patriarchal political regime, as Nandar has already mentioned. And women have historically been excluded from the Myanmar military and no women in any positions of influence in the government. By gender, it is almost entirely male. It is not surprising actually. The violent response to peaceful protests has already resulted in the death of at least six innocent women and girls, including a 19-year-old girl yesterday shot by the police, without provocation. I mean all are really a sight to see. This is not a dispersal of the crowd at all. This is a massacre of the unarmed civilians. And this is state sponsored terror to all of us.

The military has also been implicated in other instances of violence against women, as you know, reported by the UN independent fact-finding mission on Myanmar. Simply put, militarized Myanmar is a threat for women's rights and LGBT.

Since day one tens of thousands of peaceful protestors acting in disobedience have flocked to the streets in cities across Myanmar. These peaceful demonstrations to protest the illegitimate seizure of power by the military has been faced with increased rates of intimidation, harassment and potential legal prosecutions under section 144 of the Criminal Code for unlawful assembly. And we just got messages from our colleagues that, you know -- that three of the LGBT friends who got arrested they are sued by the Article 505 which is defamation of the state.

As you may have already heard that as of yesterday 3rd of March about 1,200 political leaders, activists, social influencers and protestors have been arrested. According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, among them women included 30%. We assume that more than 60% of the protestors are women.

And also like more than 60% of the civil servants who joined the civil disobedience movement are women as well. So if this militarization and if military is going to control the country, and if they are in power as I already said, it is a nightmare for us. And, you know, it will destroy all of the efforts we have been building up for ten years. And we have to start from zero and it is just a terrible situation. And as we said, we have to win this time. Otherwise there will not be a future for all of us.

Thank you, Nana.

>> **NANA DARKOA SEKYIAMAH:**

Thank you, May, for this important question, for this important context. And Hla Myat, I wonder if you can weigh in. You spoke earlier about the rainbow parades. Can you speak a bit more to the particular vulnerabilities that members of the LGBTI community are facing at this time?

>> **HLA MYAT TUN:**

We have to start from zero, but I think we have to start from minus. For us as we started our LGBT advocacy movement in 2013 only. And we have been doing this for seven years. And we have come this far and we progressed a lot. And we were really looking forward to something positive happening or positive change in the next five years with government we elected. But now it's like May mentioned we just heard that three of our colleagues were charged under Section 505 which is targeted by the authorities or by the military.

Because they are -- LGBT are very visible in terms of their -- how do you call it? Visibility is very high. And when we go out, when they go out on the street, when they go out on the street people are there and people cheer us up because we are very colorful and there. And so that is why three of them were arrested while they were not on the street protesting, but while they were home, staying in and the police broke in and arrested three days ago in the morning, in the daytime.

So it is -- I would say it is targeted because of the visibility again here. So there are a lot of LGBT folks around the country at the front line doing protests, joining protests, organizing protests. And also serving as front line defenders at the protest as well because in Yangon now there are a lot of -- how do you call that? Protests everywhere, sitting protests or marching everywhere. There are some places that have high tension between the police and the protestors.

So they use tear gas, they use sound bombs and they use rubber and real bullets as well. There are a lot of people, including LGBT drag queens at front. They are protecting their own community at their different areas in Yangon and in other areas. So we are really -- how do you call that? We worry about them but we are really supporting them from the back and trying our best to really help to be safe -- trying our best to support as much as we can.

And we heard that just this morning and we heard that there are a lot of young people shot dead yesterday. And some of them are LGBT community members. So we are very saddened to hear that those kind of atrocities happen in the country. We don't really know why this kind of brutal -- why the military is really doing such brutal things against civilians.

We don't really know why they are doing this. Is it because of the power? We don't know. We don't really know where they are going and where they are heading to politically.

So it's a bit really -- a big question for us as well. And we are -- a lot of us are expecting help from the foreign countries, especially from the U.S. and also the UN envoy as well. We don't know what will happen. But we are really looking forward to people of other

country who can help us out with this situation. And we are also protecting ourselves and every day, every single day and every single minute. And no one's life is safe at this point. Thank you.

**>> NANA DARKOA SEKYIAMAH:**

No one's life is safe, that's a really somber note. Thank you for providing us with that context, Hla Myat. I wonder Nandar, if you can weigh in here. Hla Myat was speaking about the activism of the young people, including LGBTQ activists. Can you tell us a bit more about how the youth have organized in this moment? How young women have been responding in this moment?

**>> NANDAR:**

Thanks, Nana. Yeah, from the first week we have been protesting and we have been going out. And when you go out you will see that women as well as LGBTQI people are in different lines of these protests. And they have been the voices of democracy and they have been standing up for democracy, risking their life. And it's amazing to witness, like this unity among all of us despite the fact that we are different. We come from a different religion. We come from a different background, different ethnicity. But we are together for this one goal to achieve democracy, to remove the dictatorship and that's been very empowering to witness. But at the same time, because they are in the front line of these protests it also puts their life at higher risk of damages. That's why if you count the number of people who have lost their lives so far, you will see the younger people are outnumbering so far.

I also want to specifically focus on the struggle of women even in the midst of protest because that's something I hear a lot as a feminist activist. Particularly a lot of women would send us texts or send us video telling us this is the particular gender-based violence that's committed by the police. Even among the protestors they have this unintentional -- like unintended word or behavior which has consequences like sexual assault or sexual violence.

There are three things. One is police in Myanmar, if you see and on social media you will see they are misogynistic. They have learned only to carry the bodies of men. And they don't know how to respectfully, even when they are arresting, they don't know how to respectfully hold a woman's body. One of the protestors, when she was getting arrested there were like six police surrounding her, and while pulling her clothes were all uncovered and her private body parts were shown on camera, on the video. And that's what I consider sexual harassment. There has to be a female police to arrest a female protestor. That has to be a basic thing to do as a government, even if they want to arrest people for standing up for themselves.

On top of that recently we have been finding more protestors using female bodies to degrade the dictatorship. I think that's not okay. Of course, we are facing, experiencing political crisis. And -- but it is also very important to not create more problems while solving important problems. That kind of awareness has been also somehow limited. And

that's kind of encouraged people to think it's okay to use that kind of language in order to degrade a dictatorship. Of course we must take down the dictatorship, but there are proper procedures and ways that we can choose, not just these ways. There was a famous photo of a pregnant woman who was treated badly by the police. And that is something that a woman has to go through that I would say is a specific kind of gender-based violence. Even among protestors, as I was mentioning, women are judged for how they are dressed during the protest by male protestors. [They are] being questioned about how they are dressing while protesting. I think these are irrelevant questions to be asking while standing up for democracy. You are not supposed to question a female body, whatever she is wearing or however she is protesting. It's solely her body. There has to be freedom for women to be themselves and to protest. So I think this is something women have to go through, specifically for being women. These problems should be highlighted by the media as well. And I think there is a lack of those kind of problems mentioned in the news as well.

So these are the certain things that have been noticed and have been informed by the fellow protestors as well as something that I have noticed while protesting as well.

**>> NANA DARKOA SEKYIAMAH:**

Thank you so much, Nandar, for bringing in those perspectives. Super important. I want to come to you, Tin Tin, because women human rights defenders have made a number of demands, especially to the international community. Can you speak to some of these demands and what you need the international community to do?

**>> TIN TIN NYO:**

Thank you. Sorry that I was a little bit emotional before.

**>> NANA DARKOA SEKYIAMAH:**

Please don't apologize. This is the time for emotion. All the emotions are valid. Thank you.

**>> TIN TIN NYO:**

Since the beginning of our time fighting for gender equality and social justice, we always say that because we are under the military dictatorship, so how are we going to fight against this mindset and attitude change? Because the country is overwhelmingly governed by male patriarchy. So by the time that a leader change comes, so we have a glimmer of hope to expand our advocacy for gender equality and social justice through our feminist leadership transformation. But it is -- it was very difficult to change one's mindset and also attitudes. Because like everything they consume, I mean including education, and the religion, everything prolongs and repeats the discriminations of women, and LGBT and others [such as the] disabled, elderly, widows -- all are being discriminated.

So however, we women groups, women human rights defenders, while we are defending and protecting ourselves from the Army, which has guns, we also have to fight against the social discrimination against women coming from all different parts of the society.



So we also work hard to come up with law and also policy that can protect and also a mechanism adopted and affirmed by the government. But during these ten years we didn't get it. And then -- during the 2020 election, although I myself did not vote -- I don't really have anything to say with NLD -- but we advocate what to vote, who to vote, people to get -- a good sense of what kind of government they want to get. So that is what we do. But still with the results we can see that they have increased women participation, an increase in women, how do you say, parliamentarians who were elected in the 2020 election. We are hopeful because we would like to use those women elected, how do you say, representative, to push for a law, a policy and gender budget to make our work to be more effective.

But that dream, that expectation, also we completely lost it because of the military coup. So I also explain a lot. As I said that, you know, to change people's mindset, attitudes is so difficult. And even like among women, there are many women who actually, maybe intentionally or unintentionally or cautiously or uncautiously, are prolonging the patriarchy system and they are passing to the new generation as well. We also have to change the mindset and attitudes of the women as well and not only the men because that's how the society is being formed.

So but now it is like we will have to say, "Oh, what are you talking about [with] women's issues?" In every situation we don't have a Day One or Day Two agenda. Every agenda is a Day One for us. So during the women's arrest in that crackdown during these times, you know, they were harassed and molested and also like especially threatened by the police. They said, "I'm going to rape you if you don't listen" or something like that. This can really traumatize a young woman. So I think we heard that those police are being trained by the EU for so many years. But why are they out of principle? Why are they out of any -- anything that is respectful because the police have to protect the people. So I don't have anything to say about Army because the Army is being trained to kill and to rape systematically.

So for police I have a little bit of hope but now, of course, no more hope from them. Because the way they treat the women, the way they torture the people, the way they kill and destroy the houses, people's properties. Even children, they are just shot with a sling shot when children are standing outside on the road. Military personnel and police are -- yes, because it is not wrong to say they are terrorists. They are actually terrorists. That's how they are acting. The future of the women and all others are really unimaginable for the coming months. We don't know what's going to happen. During these times we have to make sure that we protect, we help, we support any women who are on the front lines fighting against the military coup because they can be -- how do you say? They can face any kind of -- not only torture, any kind of other unwanted human rights violation because of their gender. So now there are some women who have disappeared and also some arrested. And they are out of contact with their family and lawyers.

So we do not know how they are treated in the prison or where they are being detained. So that's why we are so worried about them. And also it seems like everyone are being, how do you say, targeted and being targeted to kill. So we people are the only helping hands and we have to help each other. And we have to suffer. We have to be killed

all together or like that. We are on our own because there are no other groups to help.

I know that there are international groups who stand with the people, fight against military coup. They have come up with quite strong, how do you say, condemnation as well as action, but we think it is not enough. If something happens we don't know what to do anymore because there is no security mechanism that can protect the people. So I -- last night even like I felt like really helpless. We don't know what to do anymore. Because we have been fighting against military regime with nonviolence way, especially our women groups. But now they are using the weapons. We are using our determination and our commitment and our mouth. We cannot just apologize. The people are not going to do it. The people have their own self-dignity because what they are doing is the right thing. So they will continue to do it.

And I feel so sad to other groups that we have to support, like the mothers and the wives who have been left behind because their loved ones have been killed and who are in a critical situation. There are many single mothers, many women who become widows because of that. So we also have to help them. We have to find out ways to help them because most of them who were killed, they are so poor, extremely poor. But they have a very high morality to work for their own country.

The third group that we have to help...We have been saying that the Civil War has not stopped even though there was a so-called civilian government which came out. So the Civil War continues. Like starting from 2008 in Rakhine it has created 230,000 IDPs [internally displaced persons], now they stay at the IDP camps and they are in need of humanitarian aid. No one pays attention to them anymore. Recently in Karen State, the different state by the Burma Army happened. And many thousands became IDPs and refugees. So they need help and support. And also in the Kachin State, recently just weeks ago the fighting happened again and that's created other groups of IDPs again. So for women, no matter where they stay or people, no matter where they stay, even in the ethnic populated areas or now in the main city they are all subjected to many forms of violation, crimes against human treatment, war crimes. So that's why, who has the responsibility to protect these people? That's the question we have to ask. And I would like to request our feminist women around the world to stand for us, to fight for us. And also to come up with any kind of analysis, maybe words, messages, send it to the world who can take action, you know, to save us from the current like terrorist groups inside Burma. Thank you.

>> **NANA DARKOA SEKYIAMAH:**

Thank you so much, Tin Tin. So we have quite a lot of questions. And I think what I'll do is I will read out a couple of questions and then we will do another round. And then any of you can speak to the aspects of the questions that you want to speak to.

So one question is outside Burma, the strategy of targeting women and girls in attacks in ethnic areas is persistent during this crackdown on the civil disobedience movement. Women also seemed to be targeted for violence during protests and specifically for sexual harassment during detention. Should the feminist movement be pushing the UN Security Council to address this gender-based violence? So that's one question. I'm going to read

out like five questions and then we can have a round.

And then someone wants to know if the situation in Myanmar, was it this way before the military takeover or is this a new phenomenon? Another question, one person is asking that they hear reports of higher targeting of LGBT activists and organizations by the police and military. Is this accurate and deliberate? Those are the questions in the Q and A section. There are a lot more questions in the chat. Let's do a round starting with you, May, then Hla Myat Tun, then Nandar and Tin Tin to answer this first round of questions. And then I will go through the other questions in the chat. May, over to you.

**>> MAY SABE PHYU:**

Though we are still trying to identify and confirm the sexual harassment cases when women and girls are detained, I mean there are some reported cases, like already confirmed. And we are trying to trace the sources for getting more confirmation. So by today at least we are hearing from two women that they are sexually assaulted when they were detained. And there will be more. And, you know, since virginity is of high value in our society in Myanmar, and, you know, like peoples are always ashamed to speak out if they are sexually assaulted or if they get raped, it is very difficult to encourage people to speak out.

So as GEN, together with the other women human rights defenders, we are planning to set up our emergency hotline in a few days. So that, you know, it will be publicly available. And we will encourage women and girls who have experienced any forms of sexual harassment or sexual assault. And to provide necessary services like psychosocial counseling, and health care and also like if needed, you know, like cash transfer and some safe space, you know, for them.

So we have started to prepare, you know, like how we could support those women and girls who are in need already. And I fully agree, you know, this -- I mean the culture of impunity should end now and UN Security Council, I mean although the Chinese and Russians always block the way, but this is the time. They really have to take strong actions to end the impunity that damages all that has been committed over more than 40 years to their own civilians.

**>> NANA DARKOA SEKYIAMAH:**

Thank you so much. Hla Myat Tun, do you want to jump in?

**>> HLA MYAT TUN:**

Yes. I would second May. And we are also trying to confirm the number of LGBTQ people who got arrested and who got killed during this period. So we don't really know how many we lost from our community and how many we have in the prison now. So we are -- we are also trying to -- it's -- we have some -- how do you call that? Raise awareness among the protestors as well. So because the other days the protestors are shouting words or we say it is Burmese rap, and some use a rap kind of like against the Army or police they said. You are using arms against us, so are you faggots? And those are the words they are using, the protestors. We are in there in the group, the crowd. So we just stood up. We shouldn't

say that. We are here and we are gay and lesbian, we are transgender people. And we are here with you and we are not afraid of this kind of -- how do you call that? -- violence. We are here fighting together. We shouldn't do that. And they -- the protestors are folks, they immediately changed the words and they respect. And this is something kind of, how do you call that? We can see how united we are. We were never this united before. So we are really -- I would second Nandar as well, we are really targeting only one, focusing on one goal which is to fight against this military, reaching military coup. So this is something we as a LGBT community have to really struggle with or to really raise awareness among this community. So it is, like I said, we are really united and we must win.

>> **NANA DARKOA SEKYIAMAH:**

Hla Myat, on one hand it is heartbreaking to hear that queer activists have a job of education to do during the protests while everyone's lives are in danger, but on the other hand, it's heartwarming that the protestors actually responded and changed the chants. Thank you for sharing that. Nandar and Tin Tin, before you come in, I wanted to add another question that's been coming up. Folks want to know, what kind of documenting is happening right now? How is the activism being documented? So even whilst you responded to some of the earlier questions, because you are both storytellers, because Tin Tin you are the managing director of Burma News International. I wonder if you could speak to that as well. So maybe, Nandar, you start and then Tin Tin?

>> **NANDAR:**

Thanks, Nana. I think I would like to emphasize on or answer the question about the situation in Myanmar. Was it like this before the military takeover, or is this a new phenomenon? I want to express the internal struggle of this takeover as well. As much as we -- we are available to tell people or show the world that this is how many dead we found or how much injury the military has caused, all these things. But the hardest part of convincing people this is a terrible thing is the internal suffering that we have been collectively feeling since day one of the military takeover. And to answer that question, if Myanmar was like this before the military took over, in a way, in ethnic armed conflict areas I would have to say yes, but for the most part I would have to say no. So in a big city like Rangoon [Yangon] or Mandalay or the big city parts we have lived in a peaceful way to some extent. So we didn't have this chaotic lifestyle every day that we are having right now. We didn't have to go out and protest every single day risking our life. But internally what's also more damaging is that before the military took over we had hope. There is this hope that this could be better, this could like -- we would have justice and we would live in a more fair and just world. But that hope has been taken away from us. And I think that is the most terrible thing to do to a person.

There is one protestor who was yelling saying that even though our bodies are not in jail, we -- our minds are in jail. And I think that is the picture of how all of us are feeling collectively. As much as we are outside and like standing up for democracy and justice, deep down we know that we are doing the justice -- to carry that hope, to plan that hope, you know, to not let that hope die, that this will take us somewhere. It is not really

because we believe that military will see us collectively and give up their power. We know that is not going to happen, but despite that we chose to risk our lives because we believe that this will keep us alive in some ways, you know.

And I think to answer that question back, I would say no. Our hopes were not taken away from us, at least before the military took over. We were able to do our work even in the midst of some challenges. For the first time in my career, in my life...I have never felt this hopeless. Like I'm a very passionate feminist advocate in my entire life. And this is the first time I have ever felt like that. Whatever I do will not matter because as long as this military rules the country, it's gonna be their way. And our voice is not going to matter. And our work won't matter. That sort of feelings are overwhelming. And when you limit someone internally you don't have to arrest them. You just -- you are already making them stop to do what they are passionate to do. It is like you succeeded already. So I think there has been the -- for me at least as an activist as a person living in Myanmar is the hardest thing to process and to feel I would say. So no. It has been really intense due to this takeover internally and physically.

>> **NANA DARKOA SEKYIAMAH:**

Thank you so much, Nandar. Tin Tin.

>> **TIN TIN NYO:**

Thank you. I agree with Nandar also. Yes. So I'm not going to say it anymore. So that's how we felt. For these times I think we all are so overwhelmed with the protests, the crackdown, the killing, that we kind of miss to plan, strategize for the short term, long term for the fight against this military dictatorship, including collecting information. So we have been very active in sharing news, writing our feelings, and also like -- but we didn't really have time to, you know, systematically document all the cases, all the human rights violation cases, especially for us as women, of course, and the other LGBT and other issues. But there is AAPP, Assistance Association[for Political Prisoners] for Burma. So this group has been active since the first of February. They have been collecting all the information including the detainees, and the torture and also the killing, but it was all like generalized. It wasn't really coming up with the data based on gender or the age like that. So that's why like just a few days back and in my organization, we start talking to work on this.

So my organization we have done women's media. There has been more focus on writing like in-depth articles. The purpose is to change people's mindsets and attitudes toward more empowering societies with a feminist perspective. But this time it seems like we have to, how do you say, as much as we can to publish some cases, different cases, that's happening around the country, especially for women. But that was also more to do with publishing, not very much to do with collection and data analysis. So I encourage again, okay, our documentation department have to work on that. So we are in the process of like working on that for in terms of the women participation in this women constitution, in this fight for the military coup. But for the media groups, which I'm working for the -- for our media there are 16 members based in different ethnic states. So they are mainly

ethnic and local independent media outlets. So they are also pretty much focused on writing, covering and publishing the news. Not very much to do with like collecting the information.

So I think collecting information, data analysis, I think that's the part that our groups, the groups, different groups or maybe the group, especially working on monitoring and then documentation they have to -- if they can have like a good data, that would be good. Even yesterday I saw that like, you know, one of the famous media TBB, they have been asking if we have any like raw video footages that is showing special cases. Special cases means like the torture and arrests, everything that is so phenomenal in a bad way. People have to provide this. Because there is no such group that collect this kind of information and send it. I think that everyone is becoming citizen journalists in these times of crisis and then all are posting and making live video and send it out. We try to share. And that's what we have been doing right now. And also for the media group at this time it depends on where they are based. If they are based in a more remote area where only small media outlets are based, they are very much targeted by the police and the armies. So they are ordered not to do live broadcasting. And if they do the live broadcasting then they are shot intentionally with rubber bullets in this time. And then so that has been like a very difficult and challenging and threatening situation for all the journalists who have been covering the different crackdowns and demonstrations and night-time arrests. We have very limited media houses, too, because many are already arrested, even at nighttime brutally. Less and less journalists are there. There are not enough anymore. That's why we are requesting more international media to cover the situation in our country.

Maybe they can connect to some of the very active civil organization activists, women's rights activists, or other issue activists so that they can provide more credible and verified information. So I think -- and also like through the international media and also domestic media and also like different monitoring groups, hopefully I would like to speak about the women. We may be able to somehow quickly protect them from any forms of sexual violence, rape or harassment, degrading, humiliating because these are all tactics that the security forces are using. That's what I can say right now.

**>> NANA DARKOA SEKYIAMAH:**

Thank you so much, Tin Tin. We have a few more questions, but I'm also going to make this the final round of questions because we are at time. And I want to be respectful of your time as panelists. I will read out the final questions and then we will do another round. And you can answer whichever question you want to answer, but if you have any final words you want to say please use that opportunity to say it, yes. So here are some of the questions.

Folks want to know how can we support your community care, mental health, emotional well-being and safety and security practices?

Someone also said we have heard it is an unfair battleground for the people of Myanmar against the military coup since the seizure of power of the country. What current people's administration committees create opportunity for more inclusive democratic governance structures at multiple levels? What are the current threats to the people's proactive

initiatives? And how could those be safeguarded by the people of Myanmar and international communities? Somebody else also wants to know: Within a patriarchal society, how can there be justice for the women who are sexually exploited? Will there be support for that? Somebody else wants to know: Have you tried writing to the authorities for dialogue? And I see one more question. How has the internet shutdown affected the movement in Myanmar? Has there been any support, for example VPN shared amongst feminists and LGBTQ networks? I know it's quite a lot. Maybe, let's take a round of questions and then we'll come back for final words. It's too much to ask you to do the same. I'll start with May, then go to Hla Myat, Nandar, and Tin Tin. So May Phyu, do you mind starting us off, please?

>> **MAY SABE PHYU:**

Will there be another round?

>> **NANA DARKOA SEKYIAMAH:**

Yes. I'll do a final round where you'll say your final words. I realized I was trying to cram too much, I'm sorry.

>> **MAY SABE PHYU:**

The questions are mixed. So I will just respond to what I could. So military has weapons, guns and they don't care what the international community is telling them. If you look back in the past, they always get impunity from the crimes they have committed. They think that nobody could do anything against them since China and Russia are strongly backing them up, as I mentioned before. So this time, the war needs to make sure that there will be no place to hide for the military's criminals and the war will punish them. Otherwise we people of Myanmar has to suffer more in their hands. This is 21st century. And the world should not just sit back and watch while the people are killed by the military's hand. So I mean like you can support us, you know, in many different ways. Of course, you can support us for the mental health and the security measures that we could take because our battle will be long. And we don't know when it will end -- when it will be ended.

So I mean there are a lot of support, I mean when I talk about support, you know, it is both moral and, you know, like financial. And I mean even a word, a message that's -- that will help to continue our work. And, you know, like it is -- it will be work to take risks that had us. So I will stop here.

>> **NANA DARKOA SEKYIAMAH:**

Thank you so much, May. Hla Myat?

>> **HLA MYAT TUN:**

So there are a lot of different ways that people outside Myanmar can help. For instance, you can inspect the news around the world or you can write to your state officials in your own countries. You can write to the embassies or you can write to anyone in your own

country. And the other thing is use your social media effectively because there are news everywhere and we are using hashtag on -- especially Burmese people -- and also we are on Twitter. We use a lot of hashtags, for instance #whatishappeninginmyanmar, which is the most prominent one we are using. You can follow the news and posts are from people on the ground. Another thing is the internet can affect -- can affect what kind of effect we have. So I think this is something not really we should assess because no one has a right to cut our internet or right to cut our information. They are saying they will cut internet for two weeks. It's now over two weeks. They can't even keep it off for two weeks. How can we believe them? There is no way to believe them. There is no way to trust them. No way to -- for anything. So I would say -- people outside Myanmar can help us in many different ways like I mentioned and May Phyu mentioned. We have a lot of -- we have been working with a lot of partners, donors in the U.S. and in the EU countries, in the Scandinavian countries -- and they are really helping us a lot. And we really do appreciate it at this moment because we really need it.

And another thing is we have been talking to a lot of ex-police officers and the government officials about this police treatment against civilians. So now the police, we see that they are wearing police uniform but we don't know whether they are real police or soldiers wearing police uniform. We don't know, but a lot of people are saying that there are soldiers, military, army wearing a police uniform which are tan. So one thing we are sure of is that those police are on the street killing people--

**>> NANA DARKOA SEKYIAMAH:**

Hla Myat, sorry to interrupt you. But your connection has become -- has changed and people are finding it hard to hear you. I want to give you a minute to see if there is any way you can fix it. But please put the hashtag you mentioned in the chat and I will come back to you again. Somebody has put that in. I'm so sorry. Nandar, please go ahead.

**>> NANDAR:**

I'm sorry, I didn't hear what Hla Myat said. Is my voice clear to you guys? I just need one person. OK, cool. I think there are several ways to support the movement in Myanmar and the people of Myanmar. And there is no specific one instruction that we can provide to you guys here who are willing to support. If you are a journalist, it is important for you to amplify voices that have not been amplified yet. If you are a donor, philanthropist it is important to distribute the grant or money that have been -- you have to make sure that the money has been allocated in a different field not just in Rangoon or a big city. It has to go beyond Rangoon because there are so many damages that happen beyond Rangoon and Mandalay as well. And those also need support, like financially and medically and it's important to make sure that the money are not just allocated in a big city that you see on -- on news. So that is also important.

And thirdly, resources, you know, for example, how to keep yourself safe and that kind of strategic planning on how to keep yourself safe in the midst of war would be helpful to get from an expert. If you can hire an expert or if you can buy resources that can be useful and translated into Myanmar language and distributed to the people of Myanmar, that



would be also helpful. Also another important question I think someone asked is about how can they support the mental health of the people who are on the ground working so they can keep going on like this. I think maybe having a psychologist to come up with a list of exercise or strategy on how to keep yourself sane in the midst of this or even doing a webinar for activists on the ground, to talk about the struggle and to talk about their traumas and those sorts of things can happen while these things are happening as well.

So I think there are so many ways to help depending on the availability, the resources that are available to you. You can support and help people of Myanmar and please, please consider helping people outside of Rangoon and Mandalay as well. This is something very important to me because I come from Shan State, a small village. It is a place where the help and support go really slow, even if it goes, it goes really slow and they are the places that are really most needed as well. And I want to quickly share one experience that I'm experiencing right now. As you know, Shan State is one of the ethnic armed conflict ongoing areas. A lot of us assume that since the military took over, we assumed that the ethnic armed conflict would come to a pause and there would be no conflict within the ethnic group while this is happening. But we were wrong.

Last week in my village the ethnic armed conflicts started. My family, along with other villagers, were seeking refuge in the monastery and temples within the village because there were two bombs exploded in the middle of the village. People were injured and two of them were women. Yesterday one person got shot while picking up the flowers in her field. These things are not just happening when the military is taking over. It is happening when they are not taking over as well. It is important to consider the situation of people outside of this big city that you don't see, you don't normally get to see on media as well. And, of course, people all over Myanmar are suffering due to this dictatorship, but at the same time we need to make sure that as someone who is sharing resources, collecting resources, we need to make sure that it is allocated equally and distributed equally in those areas that are most needed as well. So I would like to really urge people to consider that.

Thank you.

>> **NANA DARKOA SEKYIAMAH:**

Thank you so much, Nandar. Tin Tin?

>> **TIN TIN NYO:**

Thank you. I think I also mentioned quite some already about how we can help each other. For us it is like, you know, in these struggles the most important is the CDM, the civil disobedience movement. This needs to go on. And this needs to be stronger. But at this time because the very strong military crackdown maybe, even if there are other people who would like to do CDM, it becomes a threat to them, too. And because like the military security is using all different tactics to oppress and get back at CDM as well. We can also see that very, very strong people are still choosing to take CDM and some who took CDM during the early time they continued and they paid with their life. They were arrested and tortured, too. So I think like in order for this CDM movement to continue, I think the

support needs to go to them as well.

Because now is where we can see and what we are doing is we try to fundraise among ourselves and to our friends. We haven't gathered any support from any donors yet, only within ourselves, and helping as much as we can but it is not that effective. Because there are so many thousands of people who take civil disobedience movement in different parts of the country, the need is enormous. So that's why I think the international community can also show support for the CDM movement. I mean like the different people who take CDM to be able to hide or to be able to eat and to be able to support their family. So that like we can -- we can hold the CDM movement longer.

And then the second thing I think one person also asked about the -- the administration, regarding -- so I wanted to talk a little bit about the CRPH. It's the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, the CRPH. There are many discussions going on. Some support, some against or some have questions. Some have suspicions. These all like suspicions and controversy come as a result of the not well management of the NLD government in the past five years. So especially for the ethnic people, they have very, very less trust or not at all trust to the NLD, how do you say, that government? But right now, CRPH what they have to do is, we recognize their role because they are legitimate. Because they are elected MPs from the 2020 election. And some of them are still -- they have to serve their unfinished term. But I think they will have to -- how do you say? -- invite MP, members of Parliament, from the other ethnic parties who are elected as well. So it will not be successful if only the NLD members of Parliament are in the CRPH. This will mean that it is not inclusive. They will have to make it more inclusive so they will get more legitimacy. And they will get huge support from all walks of life or different backgrounds. So that's -- I also want to suggest on that. And also I would like to see that while recognizing the existence and the work of the CRPH but they also have to prioritize. And currently they have been doing what they can, like they have been engaging with many international actors, including UN Security Council. So yeah, it will be -- it will be slow when it comes to the UN and also like any other government. Of course, there are so many procedures. And for UN it is -- the main hindrance is China and Russia. So we all know.

That's why I also agree that talk about changing the structure of the UN because like why these people have the right to veto all the times which is really unfair, to the people who has been killed. So -- yeah, that's why I would like to say about this thing. And also people has -- how do you say? -- talk about the other groups, like ethnic armed organizations. So why don't they do anything in this type of situation? With this fighting they are also like defending. But aside from, you know, some statements that they are against the coup, there is no other action. So for us, to talk from a very simple and ordinary point of view, we don't know what are -- how do they say? -- the political restrictions or restraints that they have. So I think this is the time that they have to communicate with the people and also I think like it would be good if CRPH also talked to the ethnic armed organization and find out some other ways that they can work together to solve the current problems. Otherwise, we know that we cannot wait for the UN Security Council. We don't want to see like a Syria or Iraq. The governments are so huge. We have to find other possibilities to help.

And I'm also -- I also kept saying that our aim is not to describe the whole Army institution, but we would like to completely remove the top leaders, especially Min Aung Hlaing. Is there any way in the world mechanism to actually prosecute him? Don't just follow other UN procedures. He has to come out. He will never come out this time. Is there any way that we can just prosecute this person or remove this person? The world leaders will hopefully find out ways to do that. That's one thing.

And also like some mention about internet shutdown or Hla Myat also talk about that. For the country now the internet is open and people are also using the international roaming SIM card. Even with the internet shutdown, there is still using, but pretty much limited access to information. But daytime, nighttime where everyone watching, the world is watching, this terrorist group can, you know, do everything. They can kill. They can arrest. They can torture. Openly. They don't care, anyone. And so if the internet shutdown happen, then it will be -- the situation will become worse, triple. So that is why it is very important that we have to make sure there is no internet shutdown, 24/7. So that's what we are expecting.

**>> NANA DARKOA SEKYIAMAH:**

Thank you so much. And I know that we are past time. Hla Myat, is your connection back? I think so. I'm going to give people the opportunity to say any final words. And then we -- and then we end. So maybe Hla Myat we'll start with you and then Nandar because I know you have to go soon, then May Phyu and Tin Tin.

**>> HLA MYAT TUN:**

I want to link to what Tin Tin just said. The international community is following international procedures, codes of conducts and everything. But the military that we are facing every day, they don't have any code of conduct. We don't know anything and the police are treating us with -- they are in the background and are killing --

**>> NANA DARKOA SEKYIAMAH:**

Sorry. I'm so sorry. People can't hear you anymore. I don't know what's happened to your connection. So maybe share any like websites or information if people want to know more to connect with your work in the chat. We really appreciate it. Nandar, final words.

**>> NANDAR:**

I wanted to say thank you, Nana and AWID for organizing this and hearing our voices and being collectively with us. That is very important. Also at the same time, to all the people who are listening to this conversation, I would really like to urge everyone to listen to the stories of people and the struggle of people outside the media as well. I know media play an important role in distributing the information, spreading the awareness. But at the same time you must understand that whatever story that you hear from media cannot be a complete one. So it is important to listen to as many different voices as possible in order to -- for you to support and help collectively and in solidarity to inclusively be there for us.

So I want to encourage everyone to talk to the people that are on the ground and listen to them, listen to their stories and support the way they want to be supported, not in a way you think it would be helpful. And I think -- if you can do that, it would be a great heard.

Listening to people's voices and needs and helping in a way that they want to be helped, not in a way that you think is helpful. So thank you very much for listening and for being here. I need to leave. So I'm going to say good-bye to you all. Thank you again, Nana, and every activist that are here and to listen and to amplify the voices.

>> **NANA DARKOA SEKYIAMAH:**

Thank you so much, Nandar. May Phyu, do you want to share any final words?

>> **MAY SABE PHYU:**

Okay. So my final words to all of you is hear our voice. And I would like to repeat the question, that to ask for yourself, to your government, and to the UN because this is the question that people have posted on social media these days. I would like to just repeat that question. So how many dead bodies do you need to take strong action for helping Myanmar from this horrible situation? Ask this question to yourself, to your government, and to the UN. Don't allow the military to get impunity for their crimes against humanity. And use all pressures with the ability you have to punish them. The future of Myanmar is in the hands of Generation Z and people's power. We trust the leadership of CRPH, the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, and we'd like the world to endorse them as the legitimate body representing the interests of Myanmar people. If we fail this time, there will not be a future for us. So we have to fight until we win. And we hope you all will be with us. Thank you.

>> **NANA DARKOA SEKYIAMAH:**

Thank you, May. We're with you. Tin Tin?

>> **TIN TIN NYO:**

Thank you so much. I have been speaking a lot already. And I'll just say one point, I saw one question, which seems a bit important because the CDM movement, for them it is to complete abolish the military dictatorship. There will be different understanding. Some of them may want to just return to [how it was] before the coup happen but some of them may have more deeper understanding of the political situation in Burma. So I think the protests, aside from the protests and people are convincing each other that we have to abolish the military regime. We have to clearly understand that the 2008 constitution needs to completely disappear in the country because we don't allow any military dictating our country in the future, too. So this is in the process and hopefully in the near future everyone will have the same understanding. And we will go to a future federated democratic country of Burma. Thank you so much for all your support.

>> **NANA DARKOA SEKYIAMAH:**

Thank you so much. Thank you so much May Phyu, Nandar, Tin Tin. Thank you Hla Myat. Do you want to try again? Shall we have one more go and see?

>> **HLA MYAT TUN:**

Do you hear me well?

>> **NANA DARKOA SEKYIAMAH:**

It is better than before.

>> **HLA MYAT TUN:**

Maybe I should turn off my computer to secure my voice.

>> **NANA DARKOA SEKYIAMAH:**

Yes, it is much better now.

>> **HLA MYAT TUN:**

I was saying that the military or the police are now treating us as if they are in the battlefield. They do not really follow any code of conduct. So while the international community really cares about the procedures, protocols and code of conducts, people are dying every day. And so that's the message that I want to really give. The police and military are not following any code of conduct that you see everywhere in social media. Please help us as much as you can from every different angle. I know you are capable of a lot of things. And we do appreciate that. And please keep helping us and supporting us as much as you can. So I would second May Phyu's words. So, thank you.

>> **NANA DARKOA SEKYIAMAH:**

Thank you so much for those important words and thank you to each and every one of you for making time to be here in spite of what's going on in the country, in spite of the risks to your own personal lives and security. Thank you for all the activists who have joined this conversation, whether you're listening live or you will be listening later, you have heard the demands from the activists in Myanmar. They are very clear on what they want us to do. We should all do what we can in our own small or big ways, whether that's sharing the messages on social media. Whether you are a donor and the call is to give and to give beyond the big cities, to the small cities to support the civil disobedience movement. Thank you so much. Please check out [www.awid.org](http://www.awid.org). We will share the recordings later and we welcome you to join the AWID membership body and to participate in such future live conversations. Thank you, everybody. And have a good rest of your day wherever you may be.

>> **ALL:**

>> Thank you.

>> Thank you.

>> Thank you.

>> Thank you so much.

>> **NANA DARKOA SEKYIAMAH:**

Good-bye.

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