

Local groups call for restoration of democracy in Myanmar

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Cambodian civil society groups petitioned the Myanmar Embassy in Phnom Penh on Friday to restore democracy after the military coup earlier this month. Licadho

Cambodian civil society groups and communities asked the Myanmar military to release arrested politicians and restore democracy in the country after armed forces deposed the recently-elected Myanmar government in a coup d'état on February 1.

The call was made by 60 local groups and communities, weeks after the Myanmar military, called the Tatmadaw, took control of Myanmar and detained senior National League for Democracy Party officials, justifying their actions with unsubstantiated claims of election fraud during the November ballot.

The Tatmadaw arrested State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi and President Win Myint in early morning raids, as well as civil society members. The military soon

declared a state of emergency and claimed it would hold a new election in a year.

The Cambodian groups demanded the immediate release of arrested individuals in Myanmar and for the Tatmadaw to respect democratic principles and the will of the people. Civil society representatives delivered the petition to the Myanmar Embassy in Phnom Penh Friday morning.

Heng Kimhong, program manager of research and advocacy's Cambodia Youth Network, said the Tatmadaw must return control to a civilian government, which was elected by the people of Myanmar.

"We do not support using any armed forces to grab power from winners of the election," he said.

He said the coup had resulted in the muzzling of civil society voices, which would impact the rights and freedoms of the Myanmar people, especially the youth who were enthusiastic about social justice and democracy.

The Cambodian government has remained silent on the coup because it was an "internal matter" of Myanmar, and has cited ASEAN's non-interference policy. But other ASEAN member states, like Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines, have released statements expressing varying levels of concern over the developments in Myanmar.

Prime Minister Hun Sen said on February 1 that Cambodia does not meddle in the affairs of other ASEAN states and would not comment on the military coup in Myanmar. However, he had endorsed the reelection of Aung San Suu Kyi after the November general election.

"Cambodia does not comment on the internal affairs of any country within the ASEAN framework or other countries," Hun Sen said.

Foreign Affairs Ministry Spokesperson Koy Kuong reiterated Hun Sen's comments and did not want to comment on the petition signed by civil society groups.

"The activities of civil society do not represent the stance of the Cambodian government," he said, declining to comment further.

Chak Sopheap, executive director at Cambodia Center for Human Rights, who was at the Myanmar Embassy, said it was important for people who value human rights and democracy to stand up for those affected by the coup in Myanmar.

"While, we do not know if our call will be successful, we will at least take comfort in knowing we have not remained silent," Sopheap said.

Details: <https://bit.ly/37g00VZ>