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OHCHR – UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Bachelet issues strong warning of imminent further bloodshed and suffering in Myanmar

GENEVA (11 June 2021) – UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet on Friday warned that a further escalation in violence is unfolding across Myanmar and must be halted to prevent even greater loss of life and a deepening humanitarian emergency. Reports indicate a military build-up, notably in Kayah State in the east and Chin State in the west of the country.

“As I had feared, armed conflict and other violence are intensifying in many parts of Myanmar, including Kayah State, Chin State and Kachin State, with the violence particularly intense in areas with significant ethnic and religious minority groups,” Bachelet said. “State security forces have continued to use heavy weaponry, including airstrikes, against armed groups and against civilians and civilian objects, including Christian churches.

“There appear to be no efforts towards de-escalation but rather a build-up of troops in key areas, contrary to the commitments the military made to ASEAN to cease the violence.”

Credible reports indicate that security forces have used civilians as human shields, shelled civilian homes and churches in Loikaw, Phekon and Demoso in Kayah State and blocked humanitarian access, including by attacking humanitarian actors.

“More than 108,000 people have fled their homes in Kayah State over the last three weeks alone, many into forest areas with little or no food, water, sanitation or medical care. These are people in urgent need of humanitarian assistance,” Bachelet said.

“Myanmar’s military, the Tatmadaw, have a duty to protect civilians. The international community needs to unify in its demand that the Tatmadaw cease the outrageous use of heavy artillery against civilians and civilian objects and respect the principle of distinction. The newly formed “people’s defence forces” and other armed groups must also take all feasible measures to protect civilians.”

The High Commissioner appealed for hospitals, schools and places of worship to be protected throughout the country. The Office has received credible reports of several incidents in which hospitals, schools and religious institutions have been entered and occupied by the Tatmadaw, fired upon and damaged in military actions.

Explosions that have occurred in or near schools are likely to dissuade parents from enrolling their children for the new school year. Thousands of schoolteachers have refused to return to work or have been suspended from their jobs by the military authorities. As a result, the vast majority of children will not be able to access their right to education.

Credible reports indicate that a minimum of 860 people have been killed by security forces since 1 February, mostly in the context of protests.

Meanwhile, sweeping arrests of activists, journalists and opponents of the regime have continued across the country, with credible sources indicating that at least 4,804 people remain in arbitrary detention. The High Commissioner said she was also deeply troubled by reports of detainees being tortured, and of collective punishment of family members of activists – one mother of an activist was sentenced to three years’ imprisonment in place of her son on 28 May.

“Rather than seeking dialogue, the military is branding its opponents as ‘terrorists’ and pursuing politically-motivated charges against the democratic leadership,” Bachelet said.

The High Commissioner encouraged the intensification of regional diplomacy, including by ASEAN and other influential States, to insist on the immediate cessation of violence and ongoing human rights violations. Dialogue is urgently needed with the National Unity Government and civil society stakeholders.

“In just over four months, Myanmar has gone from being a fragile democracy to a human rights catastrophe. In addition to the loss of life, people are suffering from severe impacts on the social and economic rights. The military leadership is singularly responsible for this crisis, and must be held to account,” Bachelet said.

The High Commissioner will be updating the UN Human Rights Council on the situation in Myanmar on 7 July.

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UN High Commissioner for
Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet,
warns of further escalating violence
as Myanmar's armed forces are
building up in Kayah and Chin
States

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