

My dear Friends,

I write these lines as a spiritual leader, empathizing with the sentiments of millions of people at this moment. I write to my dear people, the civilian leaders, the Tatmadaw (Myanmar army) and the international community. I have watched with sadness the moments of darkness in our history and watched with hope the resilience of our people in their struggle for dignity. We are journeying through most challenging times of our history. I write with love towards all, seeking a durable solution, praying for an end forever to the periodic darkness that envelops our dear nation.

1. To My Dearest People of Myanmar

I share deep fellowship with all of you in this moment as you grapple with the unexpected, shocking events that are unfolding in our country. I appeal to each one of you, stay calm, never fall victim to violence. We have shed enough blood. Let not any more blood be shed in this land. Even at this most challenging moment, I believe that peace is the only way, peace is possible. There are always nonviolent ways for expressing our protests. The unfolding events are the result of a sad lack of dialogue and communication and disputing of diverse views. Let us not continue hatred at this moment when we struggle for dignity and truth. Let all community leaders and religious leaders pray and animate communities for a peaceful response to these events. Pray for all, pray for everything, avoiding occasions of provocation.

We are living through a time of pandemic. Our courageous health workers have saved many lives. We understand your pain. Some have resigned as protest, but I plead with you do not abandon your people in need at this time.

2. To our Tatmadaw General and the Tatmadaw Family

The world has reacted with shock and agony to what has happened. When, in 2015, a peaceful transition to the elected government was effected by the Army, that won the admiration of the world. Today the world tries to understand what went wrong in the following years. Was there a lack of dialogue between the elected civilian authorities and the Tatmadaw?

We have seen so much pain in conflicts. Seven decades of shedding blood and the use of violence brought no results. You all promised peace and genuine democracy. Democracy was the streak of hope for solving the problems of this once rich country. This time millions voted for democracy. Our people believe in a peaceful transfer of power.

Now the Tatmadaw has unilaterally taken over. This has shocked the world and the people of Myanmar. Allegations of voting irregularities could have been solved by dialogue, in presence of neutral observers. A great opportunity was lost. Many leaders of the world have condemned and will condemn this shocking move.

Now you promise greater democracy - after investigation and another election. Myanmar people are tired of empty promises. They will never accept any fake protestation. You also promise to hold multiparty elections after one year. How will you gain the trust of our people? They will trust only when words are matched by sincere actions.

Their anguish and disappointment must be understood. Your actions need to prove that you love them, care for them. Once again I plead with you, treat them with great dignity and peace. Let there be no violence against our dear people of Myanmar.

Sadly, the elected representatives of our people belonging to NLD are under arrest. So are many writers, activists, and youth. I urge you, respect their rights and release them at the earliest. They are not prisoners of war; they are prisoners of a democratic process. You promise democracy; start with releasing them. World will understand you.

3. To Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and President U Win Myint and all our beloved leaders:

Dear National League for Democracy leaders: You are in this plight in your unending struggle to bring democracy to this nation. The unexpected turn of events has made you prisoners. We pray for you and urge all concerned to release you at the earliest.

Dear Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, you have lived for our people, sacrificed your life for our people. You will be always the voice of our people. These are painful days. You have known darkness, you have known light in this nation. You are not only the favorite daughter of the father of the nation, General Aung San. You are Amay Suu to the nation. Truth will prevail. God is the ultimate arbiter of truth. But God waits. At this moment I offer my personal sympathies with your plight and pray that you may once again walk amidst your people, raising their spirits.

At the same time I wish to confirm that this incident takes place due to lack of DIALOGUE and communication and lack of acceptance of one another.

4. To the International Community:

We are grateful for your concern and appreciate your sense of shock. We are grateful for your compassionate accompaniment at this moment. It matters a lot.

But history has painfully shown that abrupt conclusions and judgments ultimately do not benefit our people. Sanctions and condemnations brought few results, rather they closed doors and shut out dialogue. These hard measures have proved a great blessing to those superpowers that eye our resources. We beg you do not force concerned people into bartering our sovereignty. The international community needs to deal with the reality, understanding well Myanmar's history and political economy. Sanctions risk collapsing the economy, throwing millions into poverty. Engaging the actors in reconciliation is the only path.

What has happened is painful. It has shattered our people. I write this with a desire to console them. I write not as a politician. I believe all the stakeholders in this country wish the best for our people. I write with prayers and hope that his great nation, this golden land of a graceful people will enter into global stage as a reconciled community of hope and peace. Let us solve all disputes through dialogue.

Peace is possible. Peace is the only way. Democracy is the only light to that path.

Cardinal Charles Maung Bo

Archbishop of Yangon Myanmar

President of the Catholic Bishops, Conference of Myanmar

President of Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences

Patron of Religions for Peace Myanmar and Co-President of Religions for Peace International