

**Testimony of Ambassador Atul Keshap
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Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
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Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, Members of the Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to be here today. It is my honor to speak with you about recent events in Burma, the State Department's response, and our efforts to ensure the safety of our personnel and American citizens.

The United States has condemned in the strongest possible terms the military coup in Burma on February 1, the horrific and lethal violence against protestors, and the ongoing detentions of State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, President Win Myint, and other democratically-elected government leaders, as well as more than 2,000 civil society actors. We denounced this takeover, which rejects the will of the people of Burma as expressed in their November 2020 elections, and worsens pre-existing crises, including the ethnic cleansing of Rohingya and the nearly one million Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.

For the past eight weeks, the people of Burma have taken to the streets to protest peacefully and voice their aspirations for a return to democracy and rule of law. We have seen civil servants and medical personnel, Buddhist monks and Catholic nuns, 88 Generation activists and young students, trade union leaders, farmers, and ethnic community leaders -- all uniting in Burma's largest street protests since the 2007 Saffron Revolution, and largest civil disobedience movement since the 1988 democracy uprising. We have seen enormous bravery and enormous sacrifice.

We have also seen the regime's brutal response in an ongoing attempt to overturn the results of the November election. Prior to the coup, military leaders had claimed widespread fraud in a meager attempt to mask this power grab in some sort of constitutional legitimacy. Since then, Burma's security forces -- at the behest of military leaders -- have intensified their violent repression, killing at least 275 people since the coup and injuring hundreds of others. We condemn these

horrific attacks. We also condemn the junta's attempts to block access to information.

Since February 1, the United States has taken swift action to do two things: promote accountability for the military regime and support the people of Burma in their efforts to reestablish and safeguard their democracy. We have done this through a whole-of-government response that includes close coordination with international partners.

First, we have worked to galvanize the international community to condemn this coup and exert diplomatic pressure. Through two G7 statements, two UN Security Council statements, and many joint and individual statements from partners and allies, we have signaled to the regime that its actions have consequences. In public and private messaging, we have conveyed to military leaders that they must restore the democratically-elected government, cease attacks on peaceful protesters, release all those unjustly detained, and respect the outcome of the 2020 elections. We are working to maintain the broadest coalition of partners, including ASEAN members.

Second, we have quickly adjusted our diplomatic and assistance responses, and taken strong actions to promote accountability. President Biden announced February 10 an executive order that authorizes targeted sanctions in connection with the coup. Since then, we have sanctioned 14 current and former military leaders, two military units responsible for related violence, and three military-controlled entities in the extractives sector. We also sanctioned Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing's two adult children and six entities they control.

In addition, we have strengthened our export control posture towards Burma to ensure the junta cannot benefit from sensitive U.S. goods or services, including by adding Burma to the Military End User List and adding the Ministries of Defense and Home Affairs, as well as Myanmar Economic Corporation (MEC) and Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited (MEHL), to the Entity List. And, of course, we continue robust enforcement of our longstanding arms embargo.

While the military coup triggered a statutory restriction on foreign assistance to the Government of Burma, only a small fraction of U.S. assistance before the coup benefited the government, instead supporting local organizations, civil society,

democracy promotion, and life-saving healthcare and humanitarian relief. Nevertheless, we have undertaken an interagency review of our assistance, and de-scoped certain U.S. assistance away from work that engaged the government and toward work directly benefiting the people of Burma. Our support to civil society is more important than ever.

Third, we are working harder than ever to support the people of Burma wherever they are. We provided Temporary Protected Status to individuals from Burma in the United States, as we recognize the catastrophe caused by the coup prevents them from returning home safely. We are also expanding support for Burmese civil society leaders, activists, and journalists under duress. And we will continue to support and engage with the Committee Representing the Union Parliament (CRPH), National League for Democracy (NLD) leaders, ethnic party representatives and organizations, and others supporting the restoration of democracy, as they work to unify and maintain their movement. Any solution to this crisis must include them.

In addition, we again thank Congress for enabling the United States to be the global leader in responding to the Rohingya crisis. The coup does not change our commitment to supporting justice and accountability for atrocities against the people of Burma and to providing humanitarian assistance for vulnerable populations, including Rohingya.

Fourth, our Embassy team in Rangoon and Ambassador Tom Vajda have been performing heroically to keep personnel, their dependents, and U.S. citizens informed and safe, including by supporting the departure of American citizens. We are continually assessing the security situation to determine if a change in posture is needed.

Finally, this is not the Burma of the 80s, 90s, or even 2000s. A broad and impressive coalition of civil society actors of all ages, ethnicities, faiths, and regions have united and are pushing back on this coup. Though Burma's transition to democracy was far from complete before February 1, the people of Burma each day are showing their overwhelming preference for a civilian, democratic government.

I have been struck, in particular, by how protesters have adopted the three-finger salute from *The Hunger Games* – a popular American book and movie series, in which the people rise up against repressive, violent rule. No doubt most of the generals have missed this reference, in their focus on a misguided myth of Burma's military serving as the savior of the people. To the contrary, young people across Burma are looking forward, uniting like never before in a struggle to restore democratic governance. The people have made their voices heard. They will not abide this takeover. To them I say: we hear your voices. We and others must continue to act.

The people of Burma yearn to be part of the free and open global community, and we will continue to work with our partners in Congress to thwart the military's efforts to return the country to its isolated and repressive past. Thank you.