



ASEAN Regional Forum must ban Myanmar junta from drone workshop and save lives

The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) has consulted and is set to invite the illegal Myanmar junta to a workshop on unmanned aircraft systems (UAS), according to a Justice For Myanmar report based on sources with knowledge of the plans.

The workshop is to be co-chaired by Australia, Singapore and the USA and is planned for 2026 or 2027 under the ARF's counter-terrorism cooperation framework.

Proposed by the USA, it would bring together practitioners in policymaking, law enforcement, civil aviation authorities, border security forces and international experts to discuss the "terrorist" acquisition and use of consumer and industrial grade UAS and ways to counter the free cross-border movement of readily available UAS technologies.

The workshop preparation comes as UN investigators have warned that the Myanmar junta has ramped up its campaign of indiscriminate airstrikes and its use of drone warfare against civilians in its ongoing deliberate attempts to crush the democratic resistance movement and seize territorial control of the country.

Junta airstrikes remained the leading cause of civilian casualties in 2025, according to another UN report, which reported at least 982 deaths from airstrikes, including 232 children, a 52% increase compared with 2024.

A July 2025 report on drone warfare in Myanmar by an independent monitor recorded more than 570 military drone strikes resulting in at least 158 civilian deaths.

Junta-operated UAS have been used in deadly attacks targeting civilian infrastructure including schools and places of worship, in blatant violation of international humanitarian law.

As recently as September 16, a junta kamikaze drone attack in Demoso township, Karenni State, killed a nine-year-old boy and injured three other children, one of whom was in a critical condition.

The Myanmar junta has also used drones to deliver improvised chemical weapons in Moe Bye in southern Shan State.

Alongside adapted commercial systems, the junta also employs domestically designed and assembled UAS that are largely constructed using commercially available, off-the-shelf components.

Inviting the junta to the ARF UAS workshop would therefore present a foreseeable and significant risk of unintended technology knowledge transfer to the junta.

The inclusion of the junta in the proposed workshop would also put the USA and Australia at odds with public positions they have previously taken against the military junta.

Australia and the USA have withdrawn from defence meetings and activities with the junta, including the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus Experts' Working Group on Counter-Terrorism when it was co-chaired by the militaries of Myanmar and Russia.

The co-organisers, including Singapore, have also publicly condemned the junta's attacks on civilians, including its use of airstrikes.

Singapore has a particularly significant responsibility. As a member of ASEAN, the ARF Chair and incoming ASEAN Chair in 2027, Singapore must use its position to ensure that the junta is not further emboldened by ASEAN's multilateral platforms.

ASEAN defence and counter-terrorism forums have previously been used by the junta to seek regional support for its campaign of terror, by falsely presenting it as "counter-terrorist".

Justice For Myanmar demands that the ARF bar the Myanmar junta from all meetings and activities, including the UAS workshop, and ensure that no technical or security-related knowledge is shared with it.

Justice For Myanmar spokesperson Yadanar Maung says: "It is deplorable that the illegal and illegitimate military junta is to be included in a workshop on drones while it is using that very technology for the commission of international crimes against civilians in Myanmar.

"The co-organisers of the ASEAN Regional Forum workshop must ban the junta's participation and ensure that it cannot access any knowledge, technology and tactics, which would only aid its campaign of terror.

"The inclusion of the Myanmar junta in ARF and ASEAN meetings and activities awards it false legitimacy and emboldens its capacity to further intensify its campaign of terror against Myanmar's people. This prolongs the Myanmar crisis that the military engineered and exacerbates mass scale suffering.

"Singapore as the incoming chair of ASEAN and ARF chair has a heightened responsibility to end ASEAN's complicity in the junta's international crimes.

"ARF members must comply with their international obligations and immediately take a stand to save the lives of Myanmar's people by banning the junta from the drone workshop.

"ARF members must also make concerted efforts to develop a concrete plan to cut the junta's access to legitimacy, funds, arms, equipment, technology and aviation fuel."

More information:

Read the report on how the ARF drone workshop risks boosting the junta's terror campaign [here](#)

Justice For Myanmar is a covert group of activists using research, data visualisation and reporting to expose the companies and criminals profiting from brutality, war crimes and mass-scale suffering.

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