

Appeal to the Myanmar Peoples

(Charter 77-inspired Call for Grassroots Democracy)

EMBARGOED UNTIL 7 pm (Myanmar Standard Time), 7 April '16

We the endorers of this declaration are Myanmar individuals who want to see liberty, justice and human rights prevail in our multi-ethnic multi-faith Union of Myanmar. Today our country has begun to move along the path of democratization, peace and harmony.

1. However, our farmers throughout the country have been displaced from their land and are being put behind bars as they protest against land grabs. They are being forced to exist under conditions similar to the ones their fore-parents lived through under the British colonial rule during the Great Depression worldwide.
2. Likewise, the majority of our labourers work in hazardous conditions, with no living wage, workers' rights or social security - living the conditions not dissimilar to those that triggered the great nationwide Labour Strikes of the colonial era in 1936.
3. The non-Burmese ethnic peoples or the "minorities" are not faring any better. Those in active war zones live daily lives devoid of personal and communal safety, often on the run to survive. Inter-ethnic wars of varying degrees of intensity rage on as the Tatmadaw (the armed forces) has trampled upon the country's founding Panglong or Pin-lon principles of ethnic equality and self-determination.
4. Today the mistreatment and indictment of student activists who, in 2015 demanded education befitting a democracy, is more inhumane, repressive and violent than that the British colonial administration meted out to striking Rangoon University students in the Nationalist Student Protests of 1936.
5. Our country's Buddhist clergy and the majority lay Buddhist public too are being subject to various measures of manipulation, control and abuse through the government-patronized Sangha (or Buddhist clergy) organizations. Meanwhile our religious minorities face legalized racist discrimination, threats of violence, denial of the genuine freedom of religion including the right to repair or build places of worship.
6. Dejected and outraged by the lack of a professional future, our public servants with diverse technical expertise have long been denied autonomy, adequate salaries and opportunities for advancement, while the retired and in-service military officers are appointed to lord the former in fields about which these military men have little expertise.
7. Even our own rank and file members of the country's powerful national armed forces live with little economic security and few social safety nets, including those who have been injured and disabled serving in the Generals' wars against their own peoples.
8. Our business-men and -women operate in a climate of uncertainty while bearing the weight of the country's officially mismanaged and malfunctioning cut-throat economy.
9. Finally, our national community of creative minds, from literati and theatrical artists to musicians and other performing artists, have lost the

vital freedom of expression and freedom to create, bound by restrictive laws, official regulations and unofficial means of control.

We call on ***all Myanmar peoples*** to join hands in the birth of a new era filled with genuine freedoms and equality for all ethnic peoples and communities. We firmly and fervently believe that ***only We the People determine our own destiny***. We are - and we must be - the principal drivers for change. And we must act in unison now. We urge everyone to hold hands and work towards human rights, freedoms and genuine transition to a federalist democracy for all.