

UK Embassy in Yangon Commemorates Myanmar Activists' Execution Anniversary

July 25, 2025

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On July 24, 2025, the British Embassy in Yangon solemnly marked the third anniversary of the execution of four pro-democracy activists by Myanmar's military junta. The commemoration serves as a stark reminder of the ongoing struggle for freedom in a nation gripped by authoritarian rule since the February 2021 coup. The event underscores the UK's firm stance against the junta's brutal suppression of dissent, spotlighting the sacrifices made by those who dared to challenge the regime.

The executed activists Kyaw Min Yu (known as Ko Jimmy), Phyo Zeya Thaw, Hla Myo Aung, and Aung Thura Zaw were killed on July 25, 2022, in what marked Myanmar's first judicial executions in over three decades. The men, including a former lawmaker and a prominent democracy campaigner, were convicted in secretive military tribunals on charges widely condemned as fabricated. According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), the junta's security forces have killed over 4,000 people since the coup, with more than 20,000 detained. The executions, described by the UN as "depraved," drew global outrage for their blatant disregard for human rights.

The embassy's gesture, highlighted in a post on X by The Irrawaddy, reflects a broader international effort to keep Myanmar's crisis in focus. "We honour the courage of those who stood against tyranny," the embassy stated, avoiding direct criticism of any specific government but condemning the junta's actions. This aligns with the UK's consistent policy of targeting military-linked entities with sanctions, including measures announced in 2023 against firms supplying aviation fuel to the regime, as noted by then-Foreign Secretary James Cleverly.

The activists' deaths remain a rallying point for Myanmar's resistance. Ko Jimmy, a veteran of the 1988 uprising, and Phyo Zeya Thaw, a former hip-hop artist turned politician, were iconic figures in the fight for democracy. Their executions, alongside those of Hla Myo Aung and Aung Thura Zaw, both accused in the killing of a military informant, were seen as the junta's attempt to crush the spirit of the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM). Yet, as Thinzar Shunlei Yi, a pro-democracy activist, told the BBC in 2023, "The silent strike and protests show the military shall never rule us." Her words capture the resilience of a movement that continues despite relentless crackdowns.

The UK's involvement in Myanmar has been fraught with challenges. The current Labour government in London has not publicly commented on this anniversary, but its broader foreign policy has faced scrutiny for lacking the robust engagement of its predecessors. Critics argue that the UK must do more to pressure the junta, particularly as the regime's grip weakens, with reports suggesting it controls less than half of Myanmar's territory following rebel advances in 2024. The Arakan Army's recent capture of key border regions, as reported by the Special Advisory Council for Myanmar and verified by independent observers, signals growing resistance to military rule.

The embassy's commemoration also highlights the plight of over 20,000 people arrested since the coup, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP).

Among them were British national Vicky Bowman and her husband Htein Lin, detained in 2022 for alleged immigration violations but widely believed targeted for their prominence. Their release later that year, alongside nearly 6,000 others, was a rare concession by the junta amid international pressure.

As Myanmar's crisis deepens, with over a million displaced and poverty rates soaring, the UK Embassy's tribute stands as a call to remember those who paid the ultimate price for freedom. It also serves as a challenge to the international community to act decisively against a regime that continues to defy justice.