

# The Teaching of Civil Disobedience through Letters from Burma's/ Myanmar's Generation Z

by Ei Thin Zar and Jennifer Otting

## Abstract

The military coup in February 2021 disrupted a decade of democratic educational and social change in Burma. After the coup, students across the country penned letters describing their feelings of and actions in the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM). These letters were collected and developed into a lesson by the students who joined the movement and founded the non-government media-platform People's Radio Myanmar. This lesson is targeted for high school students outside of Burma, in social studies, history, and language arts. It aims to engage students with possibilities for individual and

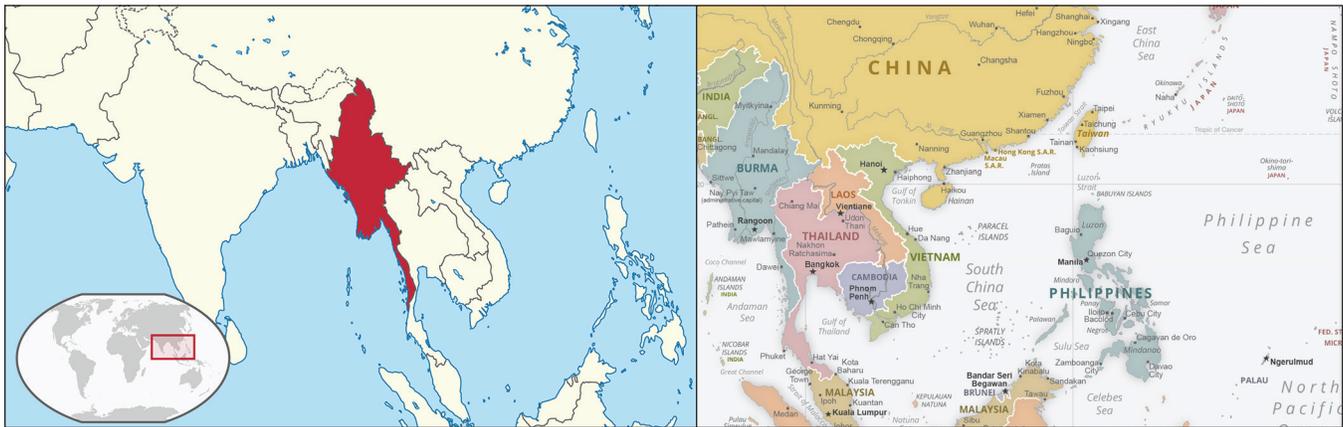


collective action to address local, regional, and global problems, to build students' cross-cultural awareness in order to enhance solidarity around issues impacting all young people, and to familiarize students with Burma. This lesson showcases an original story of a Bamar girl's experience highlighting Burma's past and present, authentic letters from students detailing the civil disobedience movement, and ideas for activities and discussions that encourage self-reflection, complex reasoning, and action-steps. The letters, written by Burma's generation Z during the military coup, not only provide a window into a historical moment, but they capture both the spirit displayed and action taken by young people in moments of crisis, lending itself as a valuable teaching instrument.

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# An Introduction to Burma/Myanmar



## General Information

- A country in Southeast Asia
- According to the 2014 census, the total population was just over 51 million
- Comprises 135 ethnic tribes grouped into eight major ethnic categories: Bamar, Chin, Kachin, Karen, Karenni, Mon, Rakhine, and Shan
- About 68% of the population identify as Bamar
- Religious breakdown according to the 2014 census: 88% Buddhist; 6% Christian; 4% Islam; 2% tribal religions and/or Hindu
- Official language: Burmese
- Currency: Myanmar Kyat

## Brief Post-WWII Historical Timeline

- 1945: The Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League, headed by General Aung San, formed to resist colonization from Japan and Britain and fight for independence
- 1947: General Aung San assassinated; New Burma constitution written
- 1948: Gained independence from Britain
- 1948–1962: Parliamentary government formed by Prime Minister U Nu
- 1962: Military coup led by General Ne Win
- 1962–1988: Established a one-party socialist state controlled by General Ne Win
- 1988: Pro-democracy uprising led by General Aung San's daughter, Aung San Suu Kyi
- 1988: Military coup forcing out Ne Win
- 1989: Military changes the country's name from "Burma" to "Myanmar"
- 1990: Democratic elections held and the National League for Democracy (NLD), party of Aung San Suu Kyi, wins the majority of votes
- 1990: Military refuses to give up power; Aung San Suu Kyi is placed under house arrest
- 2008: Military ratifies a new constitution
- 2010: Military carries out elections; quasi-civilian government in power (military still has significant power in the new government)

- 2015: Democratic elections; National League for Democracy wins majority; Htin Kyaw becomes President; Aung San Suu Kyi becomes State Counsellor
- 2017–present: Rohingya genocide; military launches a brutal operation against the ethnic minority Rohingya displacing over 700,000 people
- 2021 (Feb): military coup; widespread Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) formed
- 2021–present: Military airstrikes, forced displacement in many ethnic regions including Karen, Kachin and Shan states
- 2024–present: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre reports about 3.5 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Myanmar
- 2024–present: Forced Conscription Law. The military forces people to join the military

## Introduction

This lesson was inspired by the spirited and courageous young people in Burma/Myanmar who participated in the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) following the 2021 military coup, and it is meant to encourage teachers, everywhere, to help students think about possibilities for engaging in individual and collective action to address local, regional and global problems.

## Origin of the Lesson

After the February 2021 military coup in Burma/Myanmar, undergraduate-level students across the country penned letters describing their feelings of and actions in the Civil Disobedience Movement, a movement that fought back against the military’s takeover. Rather than discard the letters, many students and teachers in the movement felt that they captured not only the historical significance of the moment but also the spirit and action of young people in crisis. The students’ letters were collected by the educational non-profit media platform, People’s Radio Myanmar, and developed into a valuable teaching lesson centered on students’ responses to and actions towards the social upheaval in Burma/Myanmar.



The Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM).

## **Use of Burma/Myanmar**

From British colonial rule (1824–1948) to the 1988 military coup, the official name of the country was Burma. In 1989, the military officially changed the English name from Burma to Myanmar, signifying a move away from its colonial history. Both the names Burma and Myanmar have political and cultural significance, as Myanmar is widely used in an international context and Burma is used to refer to political dissent by governments and activists. Within the country, you will hear both names used which is why this lesson uses both names.

## **Target Audience**

The suggested lesson activities and reading materials have been designed for grades 8 or 9, as it correlates to particular subject standards.

## **Subject Areas**

Social Studies/Global Studies and/or Language Arts

## **General Standards Alignment**

- Assess options for individual and collective action to address local, regional, and global problems by engaging in self-reflection, strategy identification, and complex causal reasoning
- Analyze causes and effects of historical events and their impact on populations and environments
- Analyze cause and effect in global conflicts, revolutions, and movements
- Demonstrate an understanding of how language functions in different cultures, contexts, and disciplines; apply this knowledge to comprehend more fully when reading and listening, and make effective choices when composing, creating, and speaking

## **Lesson Timeframe**

Two class periods (total of 90–120 minutes).

## **Lesson Objectives: At the end of this lesson, students will**

- Be familiar with the country of Burma; they will have a cursory understanding of its postcolonial history and current political events
- Understand how students in Burma are feeling and reacting to events in their country
- Be aware of resistance movements occurring in Burma and relate it to past and current resistance movements across the world

## **Lesson Format**

This lesson has several different reading components and suggested speaking and writing activities. There are multiple activities provided for using the student letters from Burma/Myanmar. This lesson contains:

- A pre-reading activity: the three-finger salute
- Reading Activity One: An original story providing a brief history of Burma/Myanmar entitled “Bamar Girl” written by Ei Thin Zar and Jennifer Otting, along with follow-up questions
- Reading Activity Two: The letters from the students from Burma/Myanmar
- An individual writing activity and/or classroom discussion activity

## Lesson Materials

- Pictures for the pre-reading activity
- The story of “Bamar Girl”
- The student letters
- A map of Burma indicating the origin of each letter
- Additional pictures to show with the “Bamar Girl” reading
- Suggestions for additional resources

## Pre-Reading Activity: The Three-Finger Salute

To introduce students to protests and resistance movements, particularly to the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) in Burma/Myanmar, show them images of the three-finger salute. This particular gesture may seem familiar to students as it was the same three-finger salute portrayed in the *Hunger Games* movie when the residents flashed the three-finger salute as a sign of respect to the heroine Katniss Everdeen. Different symbols and/or gestures have historically been used as a group rallying cry to either support or oppose something. The three-finger salute was used during the 2014 anti-authoritarian protests in Thailand and then throughout the 2021 anti-military protests in Burma/Myanmar, and the Civil Disobedience Movement united around this symbolic gesture.<sup>1</sup>

## Activity Format

- Begin by showing students a picture of the three-finger salute and asking them if they have ever seen this before, and if so, where
- In order to help students think about how images/symbols help unite and provide groups with an identity, ask students what they think this gesture means and why people might make it
- Finally, ask students if they have ever heard of the country Burma/Myanmar? Briefly explain that this salute was used recently by protestors in Burma
- Watch this video from BBC to learn more: <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-asia-56289575>



The three-finger salute.

# Reading Activity One

## A cursory Introduction to the History and Culture of Burma/Myanmar

Instead of using a formal PowerPoint presentation to introduce the history and culture of Burma/Myanmar, ask students to read the story, *Bamar Girl*. This original story, written by Ei Thin Zar and Jennifer Otting, is intended to provide a cursory introduction to Burma's/Myanmar's history, culture, the 2021 military coup, and the tensions between ethnic groups from the perspective of a university student. The story's content is based on historical texts as well as the real-life experiences of university students in Burma/Myanmar.

### Activity Format

Have students read the story. (As the story references people banging pots and pans during the early days of the resistance, appendix 1 includes pictures that can be shown to students). After reading, there are follow-up questions to help students think about the challenges facing young people from Burma/Myanmar.

## Bamar Girl

### An Original Story by Ei Thin Zar and Jennifer Otting<sup>2</sup>

Every day in the early morning, I woke up to street vendors calling for people to get a bowl of noodle soup, a dish in Burmese called *moh-hin-gar*. Usually, I would get ready to take the bus to Yangon University, as I was finishing my junior year as an English major student. However, with COVID-19, the university had been closed for most of the year, so instead, I logged onto my phone and checked my Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Mobile Legend game.

On the morning of February 1, 2021, I woke up to silence. Opening my phone, I realized there was no phone connection or internet. I heard my father's angry voice, so I ran into the front room and asked what was happening. My father told me it was a coup.

"Coup," I repeated, "I don't understand. Is this why my phone isn't working?" I asked.

My mother, who was usually soft-spoken, addressed me using my name: "Ma Khin, how can you think only of your phone when the world is burning. The military has taken over the country. Now, no one has access to a phone connection or internet." Everyone around me was saying history was repeating itself, but at first, I wasn't sure what they meant.

As an average student in class, I had just memorized the history and never really paid attention to the actual stories and events. I was taught a little about the culture of my country, Myanmar, also known as Burma. I knew my country was a Southeast Asian country neighboring Thailand, India, China, and Bangladesh and that it was composed of 135 ethnic groups belonging to eight major ethnicities: Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Chin, Mon, Bamar Rakhine, and Shan.<sup>3</sup> In school, I learned that my country was a historically Buddhist kingdom built by heroes from three grand Bamar empires. After the Anglo-Burman wars of 1824, 1852 and 1885, the British annexed my country. My teachers spent a lot of time teaching us how the Burmese people revolted against the British. In the 1920s university students led the first nation-wide protest and it was during this period that our heroic leader, General Aung San, emerged. In the early 1900s, General Aung San and his comrades traveled to Japan to study military tactics and then returned to Burma to fight for independence from Britain. Eventually, in 1948, Burma gained its independence; sadly, General Aung San was not there to witness it as he had been assassinated a year before.<sup>4</sup> After independence, Burma had set up a constitution with a parliamentary democracy<sup>5</sup>. However, growing tensions in the country



Nationwide protests.

led to a military coup in 1962 where the military leader, General Ne Win, took over the leadership of the country. General Ne Win's rule lasted until 1988 when the military took over complete control of the country. In 1988, the people, especially the youth, took to the streets to fight for democracy as they no longer wanted to be ruled by the military. Sadly, the dream for any type of democratic rule would not materialize for twenty-two years.<sup>6</sup>

I was born under military rule in 2001 in the capital city of Yangon and am from the Bamar ethnic group, which makes up almost 70 percent of the population. My parents are lower-middle-class people who want their children to get an education. I am the youngest of three. My eldest brother graduated from Yangon Technology University with a degree in mechanical engineering. He is working as a migrant worker in Singapore. My middle brother is a senior at Yangon University studying political science and he actively works on political issues with the student union. My parents are both Buddhist Burman and own a garment shop in Bogyoke Market, in downtown Yangon. While I can't say life has always been easy, I can say that my family has been safe. In 2011, when the military stepped aside and allowed elections, there was a small feeling of hope in the country. In 2015, the elections brought the National League for Democracy into power which was headed by General Aung San's daughter, Aung San Suu Kyi, who had become a national hero.

On the afternoon of February 1, 2021, I wasn't thinking about my country's past, but rather about its future. When the phone lines had been reconnected, I immediately reached out to my university friends. When I started my first year of university, I met some friends from other ethnic areas, Mi Non from Mon state, Naw Phaw from Karen state, Naw Htoi from Kachin state, and Saw Hla Phyu from Rakhine state. They sometimes talked about how difficult it was to get an education in their areas, how they had to hide in the bomb shelters because of the civil wars, and how much they had to bribe the military officials to get national identification cards because of their ethnicity and religion. These were all new stories to me. I never thought these problems existed here in Burma. I thought wars only happened in Iraq or Syria or other foreign countries because I saw them on TV. I never read or saw the news about wars happening in

Burma on our national TV. It was difficult for me to imagine there were people that had to struggle to even live in my country. In the summer, while my friends went back home to volunteer to teach English in their villages, I was privileged to attend English classes at the elite, private American Center institution.

Even though I had heard about my friends' lives, I never really understood, until this moment, when the military started arresting government officials in the capital city of Naypidaw. To take back control of the country, the military closed roads, shut down the internet and blocked the phones. I was disoriented and fearful of the events that were happening around me.

Yet even though people were scared and unsure about their future, they found the courage to fight against the coup. Two days after the military took over, thousands of protesters took to the streets. Nights were filled with people from across Burma banging pots and pans, a tradition believed to dispel evil (See appendix 1). Since February 1st, my brother and his friends from the university student union have been protesting on the streets. On Easter day, my friends and I drew three-finger signs on Easter eggs and gave them to people. People throughout Burma joined what was called the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), a social movement that aims to disobey unjust laws and orders from the military. Similar to the actions of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement in the United States, the CDM in Burma sought to disrupt the military's plan to thwart democracy. As young people poured out onto the streets to protest, public servants, like teachers and doctors, refused to go to work.

Even though the protesters have been peaceful, the soldiers and police have arrested, tortured and killed many. At night the soldiers walk through the neighborhoods to harass and threaten anyone who dares to resist the military. What is happening to my country has made me sad and angry, but it has also made me question everything that I learned. I began to think about how I never really learned about the lives of my ethnic minority friends in school; I realized that I only heard the story of the Bamar people and their heroes in my history class. As everything in my life seemed upside down, it made me think about how ethnic minorities must feel daily. I finally began to understand what my ethnic minority friends had been trying to tell me. Perhaps, my own personal revelation is part of the larger story of change needed for my country. While I am scared, sad and angry knowing that the revolution will be tough, I am hopeful.

### **Follow up Questions**

1. Why do you think that Bamar Girl did not understand her ethnic minority friends' life experiences? Have you had a similar experience where someone did not understand your background/life experience or vice-versa?
2. According to the story, what resistant activities did the students participate in? Have you ever participated in resistance movements? What types of issues are young people fighting for in your community and/or country and what do they do to fight for these changes?

## Reading Exercise Two

### Actual Letters from Students in Burma

After the coup, students from different ethnic groups living in Burma/Myanmar and outside of the country penned letters describing their feelings of and actions in the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM). Some of the letters illustrate the events that happened during the early days of the coup, others depict students' emotions, while others appeal for help to international audiences. The letters, which provided a platform for young people to both deal with their fears and frustrations and inform people outside of Burma, were collected by the students who joined the movement and founded the non-profit media-platform People's Radio Myanmar. Even though some of the letters have been translated from Burmese to English, we have tried very hard to honor the authenticity of the students' writings, which is why letters originally written in English have not been altered.

There are twelve letters in total. A map showing the region in Burma/Myanmar where the letter is from is included in Appendix 2. As a follow-up to the *Bamar Girl* story, you can introduce the letters from the perspective of Bamar Girl.

*Dear Students:*

*I would like to share the letters from my friends from different parts of Burma, so you also hear their voices. These letters were written by students a month after the military takeover. They wanted to share their experiences with what is happening and their hopes for the future.*

*Sincerely, Ma Khin (aka Bamar Girl)*

#### Suggested Activities for Using the Letters with Students

- *Option One:* An individual writing activity. The student can choose one letter to read and write a letter responding to the student in Burma.
- *Option Two:* Individual compare/contrast writing. The student can choose two/three letters and compare and contrast the content of the letters and then write a response letter to each of the students in Burma.
- *Option Three:* Group work. Each student reads a letter and then shares it in a group. Teachers facilitate a group discussion where students share a response to the letters and help students draft either an individual letter to a Burmese student or a class letter to the Burmese students.

#### Letters from the Students

##### 1. Letter from a Mon Gen Z

*I feel angry and dissatisfied right now. Since the military took power and announced it would govern for one year, there is no mobile internet, no freedom of speech, no safety, no future, and nothing at all. We have lost over 400 lives in two months, lost our future plans, lost our education, and lost our time to enjoy life. We are living under the fear of going outside, and we are having meals with the sound of gun fires. We don't want this kind of life. We want democracy, we want justice for our generation, and we want our rights back. Therefore, we protested and demanded peacefully but they shoot, catch, and torture us until some of us are murdered during the demonstrations. We would like to continue our education, our normal lives, and to have our peaceful Myanmar back. The dictatorship must end in Myanmar.*

## **2. Letter from a Kachin Gen Z**

*It would be a long passage if the events happening recently in Myanmar are described in detail. Therefore, this message will go briefly to describe our Kachins' experience of the military coup. In summary, most of the Myanmar citizens have been boycotting nationwide to gain authentic federal democracy against dictatorship since the junta staged a military coup on February 1, 2021. However, we Kachins have been struggling for federal democracy for over six decades. What the inhumanity of the junta upon its citizens is that the unarmed protesters have been persecuted and killed by the military despite demonstration of the strikers peacefully. In addition, their families and even relatives have been undergoing severe intimidation. Honestly, these kinds of brutal tortures and heavy losses have been happening to the Kachins for decades due to the Myanmar military army fighting to possess indigenous properties of the Kachins. As we have huge experience of losing loved ones and our properties, we feel identically sympathetic with those who are in physical and mental sufferings during the terrible circumstances.*

## **3. Letter from a Karenni (Kayar) Gen Z who is now in Yangon and can't go home**

*In all honesty, I am feeling fear about upcoming unexpected situations, sad for the people who were killed due to this military coup, and guilty because I haven't actively participated in protest as others do. Moreover, since I am living in Yangon which is the riskiest city, I am worrying for my safety and on the other hand, I hope my family is keeping safe. I deeply expect to win this Spring Revolution, including the rewriting of the constitution and new Government where all the ethnic groups are included. And I would like to ask foreign countries to offer special scholarship opportunities more than before for Myanmar citizens. And in the future, it will be great if NGOs and INGOs are still running the programs without stopping the projects and programs by donors.*

## **4. Letter from a protestor in Kachin ethnic area**

March 8, 2021. Myitkyina, Kachin State

*Some of my friends got up around 6am this morning, eager to go get some shields in place of protection for the protesters up front. As they returned, they came across some police and they had no choice but to run away into an RC (college building) and finally hide themselves inside, surrounded by the police on the outside perimeters.*

*Around 9:00 am, a friend and I wanted to see what was happening, so we decided to patrol the neighborhood on a motorbike. Under a big, shady Nyaung tree, we noticed some people starting to gather for the day's fight for democracy. We parked the bike nearby and joined the group and started to march. By then, only one police car was left spotted in front of the RC. The vicinity was filled with protest-filled shouts from the marching group of people, who also put some Hta-main (lower wear used mainly by females in the country) along the road as the sign of expressing their wishes and feelings peacefully.*

*As we gathered, shouted and protested, shortly after, more police arrived. Apparently, there were about ten on police motorbikes, one police car, and another group of police on a Mitsubishi Pajero vehicle. They came furiously to break up the group as the crowd started dispersing and running away from the police. Myself and about six other people also did the same thing, as we ran and finally hid in a small apartment not so far away from the scene. That day, there were fifty people arrested, including women, and taken them directly to the military court. They couldn't meet their families.*

## **5. Letter from a Lahu Gen-Z, Shan area**

*This is to express my thoughts and feelings about what's been happening in Myanmar since 1st Feb when my beloved country, Myanmar, was forcibly taken over by the military. I, as a citizen of Myanmar, have been deeply sad and concerned with the current situation of my country. More than 700 innocent people including the kids have been killed and many other people including the leaders of our officially elected government, activists, celebrities, etc have been arrested. As someone who has been abroad for more than a decade, I have been feeling helpless at times not knowing how to help my people and my country effectively. Within more than two months, we have lost so many things that cannot be restored in just a few months or years. The country was just about to start recovering after being subjected to COVID-19 when the coup happened. It was like crushing the dreams of millions of people struggling to survive amidst the pandemic. The lives of so many people have been affected. Some people have lost their loved ones forever. Some people have lost their futures. Some people have lost educational opportunities. Some people have lost their livelihoods or properties. It is so heartbreaking to see the photos and read the news of what's been happening on a daily basis. Sometimes, it becomes so overwhelming that I have to give myself a break from using social media. Due to the recent unavailability of the internet, there are less photos/news of the atrocities committed on the ground. But, the ruthlessness continues behind the curtain. Thankfully, we have a newly formed government body called NUG now. It is composed of individuals from different ethnic and demographic backgrounds who are capable of making a change in our country. It gives us hope and strength to carry on with the movement. We are also very thankful to the international community for their continuous support in this time. Please continue to support us so that we can reclaim our democracy. We will continue to express our love for human rights and freedom no matter what it costs. Together, we shall overcome!!*

## **6. Letter from a Burman Gen Z who is volunteering to provide food to protestors and CDMers in Yangon.**

*5:00 am of February 1, 2021, my phone rang from my mum, and her voice was shaking, she said: "A group of the military takes ASSK." I immediately called some of my close friends and woke them up. Most of them couldn't believe what happened. I got dressed right after, drove around to see the situation, went to an ATM machine, and withdrew some cash. As a digital educator, I was always keen to use digital services, wallet payments most of the time, as I usually don't have more than \$50 cash in hand.*

*At 7:30 am, most of the people in Myanmar started to find out, ATM machines are down; people are panic-queuing at markets, gas stations, everywhere. We heard that most government officials lose contact with their families. It was a horror day.*

*A thought came through in my mind that I always had a choice to leave this motherland. I have many reasons to do so, but why do I always come back??*

*I grew up hearing about how cruel they are, but now it is happening right in front of me. How could this happen in the 21st century? We are already living in the darkest day of our lives for more than 70 days now; more than 600 lives are lost, including children as young as seven years old and even grandma, who is 78 years old, people across the country.*

*Looking back to January 2021, most of us here in Myanmar were starting to feel hope that the economy will recover again very soon as our first batch of vaccines has arrived in Myanmar. We were hoping that schools, universities would be open again. I could do more social projects, which I have been holding to travel to reach underprivileged digital financial literacy training areas.*

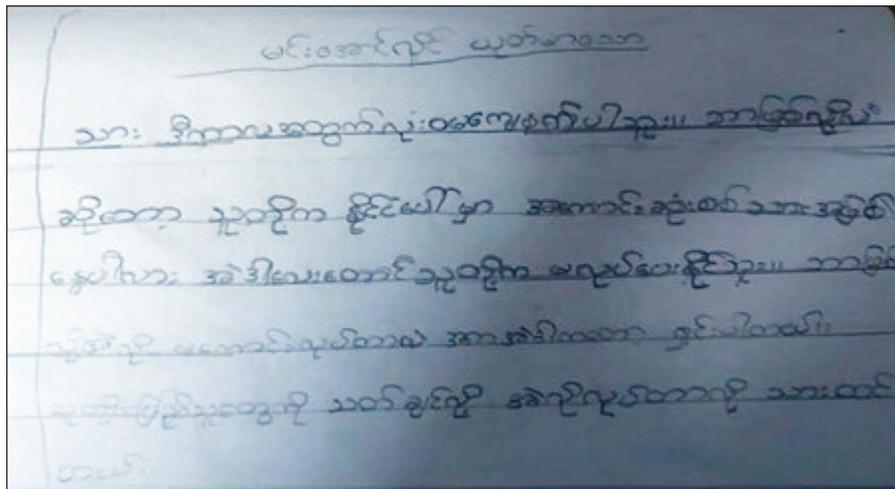
Our economy was already affected by COVID-19 in 2020, and we are hoping for a better economy in 2021. The military junta is making it challenging to survive for most of us. Since the coup, the military government is limiting our internet access to shut down our communication with the world. National news channels such as MRTV, MWD are announcing fake news every night at 8 pm news.

Generation Z, who grew up, used to have 24/7 internet access, free to learn anything with one click away. Those born with a sense of democracy couldn't stand a minute under the Military Junta's controls.

As of April 15, there are over 700 dead, 3,151 are under detention, and 813 are issued arrest warrants. There are many things I couldn't describe in words. We are all fighting in our way for democracy. We Must Win This!

Suppose you are already thinking, how you can help from abroad. You can help by spreading the news about what's happening in Myanmar on Social Media or Twitter. If you want to help some funds for those affected by this coup, please donate to organizations targeting Save Myanmar campaigns.

**7. A letter from an 11-year-old Kaman, Rakhine student; It is titled: Evil Min Aung Hlaing**



I am so angry. They cannot even be good soldiers to serve the country. They can't even do that. I know why they can't even fulfill their duties. It's because they want to kill the people.

**8. Letter from a Gen Z who volunteered to support the Civil Disobedience Movement**

We organized the team on Feb. 10, 2021, with seventeen members to support the civil servants who joined the Civil Disobedience Movement. There are no politicians in our team, and no one wants to get a political reward after the revolution, but we would like to be against the military coups. We want democracy and we want justice. We faced a lot of problems: how to fundraise, how to contact the CDM staff, how to distribute the funds, and how to hide from informants (Dalan) under the strong limitation of the military since the beginning. However, we have decided to start with what we can do. We supported six teachers from the Government Technological High School as a pilot project. They got a fever after they joined CDM and they felt unsafe when they were staying at the staff housing. They wanted to go back home. We arranged for transportation as they needed. After that we posted that we are supporting the CDM staff and people can contact us on Facebook as they needed support.

*Many people contacted our Facebook messenger and told us about their difficulties, especially financial, legal, and accommodations. We are so proud of them and willing to support, but we have to be careful to avoid spies. If this situation is going to be long time, we need more funds to sustain us. It was difficult to contact CDM staffs internal team members and also there is a problem for CDM staff to withdraw money because the military council blocked the internet. Sometimes we change contactable phone numbers to make it difficult for the military to trace, but we face communication problems. We have to delete all the data, call history and photos of CDM to avoid arrest by the military. In addition, we feel unsafe and scared when the soldiers and police come to the residential areas and investigate. Although we are scared, we will keep going as long as possible so we can support CDM till the end.*

*The Uprising Must Succeed!*

### **9. A letter from an LGBTQ+ student**

*On February 1, 2021, the world witnessed how our country began to move towards darkness. And it has been steadily sinking into darkness.*

*Before I write this, pls keep in mind that I am a member of the LGBTQ+ community. I write this letter as a citizen, not just as an LGBTQ+ person, because the violent military takeover doesn't hurt only one group. Instead, it hurts everyone.*

*After February 4, we were compelled to go on the streets to protest. It is our duty to do so for the sake of our country and community. The military might have calculated that detaining our political leaders would weaken our will to protest or that there might not be big protests. But they were terribly wrong. Young people (or lovingly nicknamed Gen-Z) led peaceful protests by decentralized leadership and showed that a top down structure with one person at the top is no longer needed.*

*When we go out to protest, we meet people who usually do not support us. Ethnic minorities, religious sects, and LGBTQ+ groups joined the protests together and this unity is unprecedented. This new synergy gives me hope and joy during these hard times.*

*Sadly, the joy is overwhelmed by news of murders. The military junta murders peaceful protestors with real bullets and real bombs. They do not spare the elderly or children. Every time an international organization publishes their support for resistance, the military shoots and kills a little more. Except for their own families, the junta doesn't hesitate to order to kill as if we are livestock. Sometimes, they will "detain" a person and asks the family to retrieve the detainee's corpse. The junta uses these techniques to bury fear into our psyches.*

*Everyone is terrified but we are more scared of returning to the dark ages. Civil servants push back against the violent junta with the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM). CDM is essentially civil servants striking and shutting down the nation. Civil servants participating in CDM are hunted, captured and jailed without fair trial or legal procedures. Actors, actresses and social media influencers who use their platform to support the resistance are also jailed or have warrants for arrest.*

*Right now, we are observing how the military will order their soldiers to destroy property and spread fake news of how the public is violent. But the world is always standing up for us and I am very thankful. These words of gratitude are not enough, I know. But I want to keep telling the world that I am very very very thankful from the bottom of my heart. Sticks and stones are breaking our bones but kind words from all over the world bring us strength.*

*I humbly ask for another favor from the world. Please help us get rid of these evil terrorists to foster a fair and strong democratic system in our home and eventually across the world.*

*Sincerely, from an LGBTQ+ member and a citizen of Myanmar*

## **10. A letter from an engineering student working with CDM via a radio program**

*I was studying online courses when the schools were shut down during the pandemic. At a press conference which was held during a huge fuss about electoral fraud of the previous election, the negative response of Major Zaw Min Tun to the question of a reporter which said, "Can we assume that the military will not take the country over?" made me think if the military would ruin the country yet again. Not only being a first-time voter but also seeing the hopes of the farming folk over the election, I had expected the military coup not to happen again. I was still considering the coup unbelievably when there was an internet cut in the early morning of the first of February, which was the day that the parliament was going to be convened. It was in the afternoon that I came to realize this was true after watching the news of the military takeover on MWD Channel. Our country has been facing challenges due to the pandemic and it is extremely disgusting to see the coup occurred at this moment.*

*As a university student who has learnt the historical events related to the military take-over, I expected that the Constitutional Tribunal would handle the case with justice until the third of February because the existing coup violates the 2008 Constitution. Then there were some protests against the coup led by some activists such as Ko Tay Zar San in Mandalay and Ko Zin Mg Phyo in Dawei since February 4. We, students from Mawlamyain Technological University went on a demonstration since February 6. At that time, the military cut off the internet and has been broadcasting the false news at their will on TV channels such as MWD, MRTV and Radio channel in an attempt to propagandize that the existing coup is legitimate. In our state where people only know Facebook as a search engine for updates, I am concerned that they are losing their rights due to the false information. Therefore, we implemented a program of sending the summarized news by SMS without any charges to the people who didn't have internet access. Later we found that the telecom operator did some interruptions due to the will of the junta. They edited our messages by deleting some parts or adding their favorite phrases. So we had to pause the SMS plan after conducting for a month. In collaboration with some young people who took part in SMS program, we decided to initiate the Radio Program to broadcast the correct information and news to the people whether they have internet access or not. We agreed to include the essence of building Federal Democracy in our radio program. Based on our manpower, it is determined to focus on Mon State and this is why we are broadcasting in four different languages: Paoh, Poe Kayin, Mon, and Burmese.*

*As a technological student, I have a dream to specialize in Natural Language Processing in the field of Artificial Intelligence and to work for disabled children in the community. At the moment, all I have dreamt about has disappeared with the coup on February 1, and I am now working on audio editing for the FM Program. While my friends are attending trainings in ethnic controlled territories, fate didn't favor me. That's why I am trying my best physically and mentally for the revolution. I wish a system in which everyone in the country, including me, will have an opportunity to create his/her life in the way he/she wants without harming others in the society, to be flourished in the future. In short, it can be said as freedom, justice, and equality. The past and ongoing happenings have proved well that the military must leave politics and stay under the command of civilian government to be able to achieve what have been mentioned above. We are now working for our goal and I believe that our efforts for justice will be recognized and respected.*

### **11. Letter from a Zomi (Chin ethnic group) Gen Z from Kalay Myo, Chin State, who is on the military's most wanted list**

*Dear friends, in life we all are fighting. I'm also one of the youth who want the world to be better place like you, so I'm fighting for my belief. I hope you are also fighting for something that is to create a better world.*

*My name is Titus (false name) and I'm studying in my second year for bachelor's degree in geology, Kalay University. My university has been taken over by the military and now they have transformed it into a mobile military camp to fight against any protesters.*

*As you know from February 1, 2021, my country is under coup and we all are fighting for our freedom in anyway we can. For me from February 2021, onward I have been participating in the longest non violence strikes in Myanmar, particularly in Kalay Township and I'm one of the strike committee members who led that strike. Now our strike has been more than 300 continuous days and continuing. We are forced to use guerrilla strikes method to avoid the brutal arrest. The military is using whatever ways they can to stop us. They arrest some of the protesters who are beaten up brutally, in the trial, before placing them into jail for their protest against the military. Painfully, some of our friends die in that trial itself.*

*Dear friends, in spite of all those difficulties, I will not stop pursuing my freedom. Please do whatever you can to support us in any possible ways. Let's create a better world for our next generation.*

### **12. Letter from Zomi ethnic Gen-Z**

*My name is Joy (nickname) and I am from Tonzang, Chin State, Myanmar. I'll be 18 years old in February, 2022. I passed the matriculation examination in 2019–2020 school year. As we know, we all are facing the COVID-19 first wave from December, 2019. Because of the spreading of this disease, my exam result was declared late, in August, 2020. At the same time, my country has been taken over unjustly with a dictatorial system by the military of Myanmar since February 1, 2021. From that day till now, all my dreams were gone that I couldn't do anything except to against the junta.*

*I have participated against the dictatorship in any way I can which is why I am on the military's wanted list. First of all, I have been participating in the longest non-violence strike in Tonzang from the first day of coup in Myanmar. As the sun goes down day by day, the military coup is using more brutal acts on whoever protests against them.*

*There have been more than 300 days of coup in Myanmar to today. In about these 300 days, the military has cut every mobile phone line twice and more many times particularly in Chin State. In this way, they exploit our rights. Not only in this way but also the military is using whatever ways they can to stop us.*

*They arbitrarily arrest and cruelly interrogate peaceful protestors, some of my friends died in jail before the trial even finished. The more they are cruel to us, the more we need to protest them. So that we need to fight with even arms if necessary. There are many ways to fight against the military to stop their brutal acts on people of Myanmar. So this incident should not be ignored by youths whoever is searching and wanting peace and freedom in life all over the world. Let me request you seriously to stand with Myanmar people. So please help us in any way you can. Your help can save many lives. Let's fight together for peace, humanity and freedom until we succeed. Thank you!*

## Additional Resources

- The Latt Thone Chaung site has many videos of the early days of the Burma/Myanmar protest: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC7UIburva6DrHDzd0TYHa4w>
- Background information on the military dictatorship from the BBC: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-55902070>
- This website shows updates on the prisoners detained and deaths by the military: <https://aappb.org>

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Mark S. Cogan, “Understanding the Three-Finger Salute from Thailand to Myanmar,” Mark S. Cogan, February 5, 2021, <https://markscogan.com/index.php/2021/02/05/understanding-the-three-finger-salute-from-thailand-to-myanmar/>.

<sup>2</sup> Bamar is the name of the ethnic majority group living in Myanmar/Burma.

<sup>3</sup> Maung Maung, *Burma's Constitution* (The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1959).

<sup>4</sup> Thant Myint-U, *The Making of Modern Burma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> From 1948–1956, Burma had a parliamentary style government under the leadership of Prime Minister U Nu. The parliament government allowed for the election of representatives to both the Upper House and Lower House.

<sup>6</sup> N. Ganesan and Kyaw Yin Hlaing, eds., *Myanmar: State, Society and Ethnicity* (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2007).

## Appendix 1: Banging of Pots and Pans



Discover ASEAN

February 10, 2022 · 🌐

MYANMAR | Banging Pots & Pans Tradition 🇲🇲

According to the traditional beliefs of the Burmese people, banging the pots and pans is a belief. It is believed to cast out demons. On the evening of the first day of the new year, after the Myanmar New Year Thingyan, after reciting the safe sermons of the monks, their houses, Road Neighborhood Demons that can lurk in the city; were expelled with iron buckets.

But in 2021, banging pans and pots means revolutionary. The sound of the banging is unarmed and loves only the truth. We want to return to a democratically elected government. These are who want to oppose injustice and just the echoes of the Burmese people who want to take a soft against the military dictatorship.

This is a unforgettable memory showing how Myanmar people were united at fighting for Justice and Democracy.

Admin\_sknn | မြန်မာ



## Appendix 2: Map of Burma showing the origin of student letters



| States and Districts | Descriptions              |
|----------------------|---------------------------|
| Mon State            | (1) Mon, (8) Mon, (9) Mon |
| Kachin State         | (2) Kachin , (4) Kachin   |
| Kayah State          | (3) Karenni               |
| Rakhine State        | (7) Kaman                 |
| Karen State          | (10) Hpa - an             |
| Shan State           | (5) Lahu                  |
| Yangon District      | (6) Yangon                |
| Chin State           | (12) Tedim                |
| Sagaing District     | (11) Kalay                |