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SCAN ME

TWO PUZZLES ADB HAS TO ADDRESS

DR. RENE OFRONEO | FREEDOM FROM DEBT COALITION

The Asian Development Bank held its 54th Annual Meeting of Governors online. President Masatsugu Asakawa (called by his colleagues as “Masa Asa”) came up with a bold theme for the Meeting: “Re-imagining Asia and the Pacific in a Post-Pandemic World.” The Meeting was accompanied by a three-day conference/webinar (May 3-5) which dwelt on the topics of Covid-19 pandemic, climate change challenges, and views of civil society organizations on the role of the ADB in a pandemic world. This writer served as a panel discussant in the session on “CSOs’ Reflections on ADB’s Covid-19 Operations.”

The ADB conference/webinar organizers should be commended for the courage to involve the CSOs in a sweeping and open review of the Bank’s operations related to Covid-19 and climate change. Hopefully, the Philippine Central Bank and the Department of Finance can have the same courage to hold an open, transparent and sustained dialogue with Philippine CSOs on how to address the different pandemics afflicting the country—Covid, climate, debt and inequality.

In the webinar with the ADB, this writer raised two puzzles related to ADB’s actions or inactions on climate change and Covid-19. These are related to the image that the ADB has been cultivating in the region, that is, as a bank “committed to achieving a prosperous, inclusive, resilient and sustainable Asia and the Pacific, while sustaining its efforts to eradicate extreme poverty.” This is a noble commitment, obviously inspired by the two historic agreements adopted by the UN family in 2015—the Paris Agreement limiting the rise of global temperature to 1.5 degrees Celsius above the pre-industrial era and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the successor program for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Now puzzle No. 1: Why is ADB, a proponent and funder of renewable energy projects, unable to make a decisive stand on the phasing out of fossil fuels?

One has to raise this question because ADB has been a major supporter of renewables, and yet, at the same time, it is a heavy investor and facilitator of fossil-based power plants. Moreover, ADB has been producing good documents explaining the existential threats posed by global warming and the critical importance for the region and individual Asian countries to meet their GHG-emission reduction targets under the Paris Agreement.

So where does ADB really stand? ADB announced that it has stopped funding coal plant projects since 2013. However, it is silent on whether it is pushing for the phasing out of existing coal projects. Moreover, CSOs tracking ADB funding for power projects have come up with studies showing that ADB is heavily investing on oil and natural gas projects. This is why the CSOs are asking—which way ADB? Phasing out of fossil fuels—coal, oil and gas—or phasing in of the renewables—wind, solar, hydro, geothermal and so on? Why can’t ADB make a stand similar to that taken by the European Investment Bank (EIB): no more coal, no more oil, and no more natural gas?

Obviously, it is difficult for the Japanese leadership of the Bank to make a blanket and sweeping declaration ala-EIB by withdrawing all support to fossil fuels—coal, oil and gas. In the last five decades, the ADB played a major role in building a galaxy of fossil-based power projects around the region with the help of big Japanese banks, Japanese engineering firms and corporate partners from Japan and other countries. These co-financiers are naturally interested in keeping the status quo. But given the existential threat posed by climate change to Asia



and the rest of the world, the challenge to the ADB leadership is how to make a decisive and resolute decision in support of what the world is demanding through the Paris Agreement, that is, push Asia towards zero GHG emissions by crafting and implementing an energy transition program.

Making the energy transition is not easy. But things can be made easier if the ADB can mobilize resources in support of accelerated energy transformation and transition programs, in close consultation with the civil society movement. It is in these transformation-transition areas where ADB materials and programs are clearly wanting.

Now on puzzle No. 2: Why is ADB unable to provide leadership and guidance to the borrowing countries in relation to the latter's response to the Covid pandemic? Specifically, why has ADB, a proponent of SDGs, failed to calibrate or align the terms and conditions of Covid loans with the SDGs?

Certainly, the ADB SDG specialists are well informed about the weak performance of Asia when it comes to SDGs. In 2019, the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) reported that all of Asia, without any exception, was on track not to meet the SDG targets. All of Asia failing to meet SDG targets! Under the SDG system, UN member-countries are supposed to achieve by 2030 zero hunger, zero poverty, healthy lives for all, inclusive and quality education for all, gender

equality, secure water and sanitation for all, affordable and sustainable energy for all, sustainable industrialization and innovation, decent work for all, reduced inequality, resilient and sustainable habitat, sustainable consumption and production, affirmative action on climate change, sustainable use of oceans and marine resources, sustainable forest management and use of terrestrial ecosystems, peaceful societies and justice for all, and partnership for sustainable development. These 17 SDGs are interrelated and require a holistic and coherent program of implementation.

In Asia, the failure of many countries to meet SDG targets is due to the obsession of governments to achieve higher GDP numbers without paying attention to the issues affecting the general population, especially those at the grassroots, such as access to health, education and basic services as well as the challenge of making socio-economic development inclusive and equitable, with "no one left behind," as the UNDP keeps repeating. With the Covid pandemic, the need to align policies on economic recovery and strengthening of the health system in response to the Covid virus spread has become clearly and doubly important.

It is in this issue of policy aligning, that is aligning terms of borrowing in the name of national recovery and resiliency building with the SDG framework that the ADB is failing.

A brief background: In response to the pandemic, the ADB quickly packaged a program dubbed as CARES or Covid-19 Active Response and Expenditure Support. Originally given a seed fund of \$6.5 billion, CARES immediately grew to a huge \$20 billion health armament. And yet, when Asian countries began trooping to ADB for loans, there were no indications that the SDG framework was adopted as a guide. Unlike the hesitation ADB demonstrated during the 1997-1998 Asian financial crisis (when the International Monetary Fund was foolishly insisting on a policy of austerity for all), the ADB this time willingly facilitated the approval and releasing of CARES loans to different countries in record time.

But there are no indications in the loan agreements, at least in the case of the Philippines, that a system of rigorous monitoring on the uses of the so-called ADB "budgetary support" for national recovery. Thus, in the Philippines, the ADB simply accepted and adopted the rationale given by the government for the four pillars for national recovery, namely: a) re-building the health sector, b) amelioration assistance to the vulnerables, c) relief to small and medium businesses, and d) liquidity support to the financial system.

As it turned out, per monitoring by the CSOs (e.g., Social Watch, Ibon, FDC) and academe (Ateneo, UP), the implementation of the foregoing four-pillar program for the entire year of 2020 failed to meet the recovery goals of the nation and the salvation of the masses. The program was littered with weaknesses. These include, among others, the following: the broken health system was bogged down by corruption in expenditures, lack of transparent health governance and incoherent health/medical response to the Covid threat; the distribution of amelioration assistance for the poor excluded many vulnerables such as the migrant workers and those with no permanent addresses; the amelio-

ration package, given once or twice, was not even enough to sustain the needs of a family of five for a week or two; the number of beneficiaries for the relief given to the displaced businesses and workers was way too small compared to the targets; and there was no clear and transparent reporting on how funds were used in providing liquidity to the financial system.

Now what has ADB got to do with all of this? A lot even if it is undeniable that it is the responsibility of every country to manage its economic and political affairs. First, as a financial institution, ADB is in a position to influence the directions of change, especially on projects necessitating financing. Secondly, as a development institution, ADB is also in a position to persuade a borrowing country on the guideposts that should be used in the crafting and implementation of development projects. Thirdly, the loans being contracted by the government are not ordinary loans; they are loans meant for the recovery of the whole economy.

What then is missing in the ADB's CARES loan to the Philippines (and probably to other Asian borrowers)? It is the failure of ADB to link spending of Covid loans to the realization of the SDG targets as part of the overall development framework. In the Philippine loan agreements, no such linkage was mentioned—except for one bland statement that the CARES loans are consistent with the ADB's SDG program. In fact, the focus of the government was simply to go back to the old normal, as if this is the only way forward.

The truth is that Covid times are an opportune time to re-think development plans in support of more inclusion, more people participation, more environmentalism. The SDG framework can be a good guide for ADB and its partner governments in Asia in this much-needed re-thinking process.

*Article first appeared in [Business Mirror](#).

A COVID-19 LOAN FOR COVID-DENYING TURKMENISTAN

LORENA COTZA | COALITION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN DEVELOPMENT

In July, the World Bank signed a [\\$20 million loan](#) for Turkmenistan, to address the health and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. In Turkmenistan, however, the [virus has not arrived](#). Or at least, that's what the government claims.

Turkmenistan is one of the handful of countries in the world that has reported zero COVID-19 cases. According to the government, this is thanks to the [successful prevention strategies](#) in place. The reality, however, is much more bleak. There have been [outbreaks](#) in the country, but the authorities have made it impossible to report on them.

[Nurgeldi Halykov](#), a 26-year-old citizen reporter, has been in jail for a year for having shared a photo of a World Health Organization (WHO)

delegation in the capital, Ashgabat. The delegation was there to assess the country's preparedness for COVID-19.

On July 12, Halykov posted that photo — taken and shared on social media by an acquaintance — on the [Turkmen.News](#) website, one of the few independent media and human rights projects that covers day-to-day news from the country and reports on cases of rights violations. The next day, the police summoned him for questioning. Since then, his family and friends have lost contact with him. They think he might be held in a prison camp in Seydi, but they are not allowed to visit or speak with him.

In September 2020, Halykov was sentenced to four years on fabricated charges of fraud, accused of having failed to repay a \$5,000 loan from a friend. Apparently, after his arrest, authorities questioned his acquaintances, trying to find someone willing to submit a complaint against him.

"[Halykov's conviction] exemplifies the absurdity of the trumped-up charges used by the authorities to gag the free press's few remaining representatives. He risks being tortured in prison," Jeanne Cavelier, head of Reporters Without Borders' Eastern Europe and Central Asia desk, said in a [statement](#). "Turkmenistan is a black hole for news and information. The media are completely controlled by the state and few journalists take the risk of doing independent reporting."

In February 2021, a group of U.N. Special Rapporteurs sent a [letter](#) to the Turkmen authorities, expressing their concerns for the "meritless charges, judicial harassment and alleged arbitrary detention" against the journalist. To date, they have not received a response.

Yet, shortly after Halykov's imprisonment on fabricated charges, the World Bank started to negotiate a loan with the Turkmen government. The paradox couldn't be starker. While a journalist was behind bars simply for sharing a photo related to COVID-19, World Bank representatives were deciding how many millions of dollars to lend to the government that jailed that journalist, to support its COVID-19 response.

The World Bank project aims to "reinforce the coun-

try's response efforts and preparedness against the health and social risks of the COVID-19 pandemic" and it also provides funds for awareness-raising and communication activities. Even more ironically, the WHO meeting that led to Halykov's arrest is mentioned in the [loan document](#). What is not mentioned there, however, is that anyone who would dare to speak about the pandemic might end up in jail.

Ruslan Myatiev, the editor of Turkmen.News, attempted to engage with the World Bank and brought Halykov's case to their attention, urging them to raise the issue with the Turkmen authorities. He also demanded the World Bank take measures to ensure people could speak freely and safely about the bank-funded project before approving it. Yet, his demands were met with silence.

"Development banks are powerful actors, and they should use their influence to take concrete actions to protect press freedom," said Myatiev. "Yet, experience shows that Halykov's case is an emblematic example of what happens when development banks are confronted with real cases of retaliation. They ignore requests from civil society, they shirk responsibility, they claim that press freedom issues are too political and sensitive and that they cannot do anything to push their borrowers to release journalists. This is unacceptable."

In Turkmenistan, the right to freedom of expression and to access to information are completely [denied](#). Turkmenistan is at the bottom of [Reporters Without Borders' 2021 World Press Freedom Index](#), ranking 178 out of 180 countries. The government controls all media and citizens can only access a highly-censored version of the internet. The situation has only worsened during COVID-19, since authorities have used the pandemic as a pretext to [further clamp down on human rights](#) and repress fundamental freedoms.

Unfortunately, Turkmenistan is not an isolated case. As exposed in our recent report "[Unhealthy Silence: Development banks' inaction on retaliation during COVID-19](#)," governments worldwide have received billions of dollars from public development banks for their COVID-19 responses. At the same time, they were threatening, attacking, and criminalizing journalists, health workers, and human rights defenders who were providing crucial information about the spread of the virus or crit-

icizing the shortcomings of the state-response to the pandemic.

According to the [report](#), published on July 27 by the Coalition for Human Rights in Development, ARTICLE 19, and IFEX, at least 335 people suffered reprisals in a total of 35 countries that received or are receiving financial support from international financial institutions for their COVID-19 response.

“Development banks have clearly failed to take actions to prevent and address reprisals”, said Dalile Antunez, researcher at the [Coalition for Human Rights in Development](#). “Even though they keep reaffirming their supposed commitment to civic participation and they have policies of zero tolerance against retaliations in place, banks stay silent when these attacks occur. The retaliations taking place in countries that receive development banks loans seriously undermine the legitimacy of those loans and contribute to jeopardize their potential impact.”

As of July 30, 2021, public development banks have earmarked more than [\\$154 billion](#) to finance

responses to COVID-19 worldwide. Development banks, as international institutions, have human rights obligations to respect. They also have to comply with their internal policies, where they commit to protect the right to freedom of expression and access to information. Last year, the World Bank also published a statement where it committed to apply a [zero-tolerance policy to retaliations](#).

“Development banks’ project documents are full of good intentions, but these words are of little use if their commitments are not upheld,” said Antunez. “Halykov remains locked behind bars for merely trying to demonstrate that COVID-19 exists, in a country where the World Bank just gave a loan to for the pandemic response. We cannot expect to stop the spread of the virus if the voices of those providing crucial information about it are being silenced.”

*Article first appeared in [Coalition for Human Rights in Development](#).



100 DAYS BEFORE COP26: WE NEED TO SEE TRANSFORMATIVE SOLUTIONS THIS NOVEMBER

DOROTHY GUERRERO | GLOBAL JUSTICE NOW

1 00 days from now, the central point of climate politics will be Glasgow as the UK hosts the 26th Conference of Parties or COP26 under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. These negotiations are the most important climate talks on the climate emergency since COP21 in Paris in 2015, when almost every nation on earth signed a legally binding treaty called the Paris Agreement, which aims to limit global temperature rises to 1.5°C.

The meeting in Glasgow is the first meeting for stock-taking of the commitments in Paris is achieving that goal. Many see COP26 as our last, best chance to prevent global temperatures from spiraling out of control.

Unfortunately, we are not yet on track to limit global warming to 1.5°C, the threshold that scientists agree will prevent the most dangerous climate impacts. Failure to reach this goal will take a disproportionate toll on developing countries. In fact, we now have less than a decade to keep global warming to that level. As we see now at 1.2°C global average since the industrial revolution, which started in England in the 18th Century, climate change is affecting everybody. We have recently seen the devastating floods that affected Germany and Belgium, the heatwave in Canada and the US, as well as floods in India and elsewhere.

However, vulnerable nations that have been experiencing such climate-induced catastrophe for decades now, have watched their key demands and needs ignored by huge and historically-emitting nations in the negotiations. These vulnerable nations, small island developing states and least developed countries are the least responsible for creating the climate change problem. But they are often the most affected by its impacts like sea level rise, floods, droughts and more.

What do we need to see this November?

- More ambitious commitments to reduce emissions, especially from big and historic polluters. The Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) submitted by countries in 2015 in the Paris Agreement will take us to at least 3°C, which would mean death and increased poverty for many people in the global south and extinction of many plants and animal species globally. The UK, US and other high-income and highly industrialised countries should make more appropriate commitments as part of their fair-share responsibility.
- According to more than 100 developing countries, the UK should commit to a 70% emissions cut by 2030 plus \$46bn a year in climate finance. The UK is the world's sixth highest historic emitter since 1850 and the world's fifth wealthiest country with wealth accumulated from global fossil fuel extraction and colonialism. Consequently, leading climate campaigners argue that the UK must reduce its domestic and overseas greenhouse gas emissions by a total of 200% by 2030 as a just 'fair share'. This means the UK must decarbonise its economy as soon as possible (100%) and the other 100% would be contribution to a climate finance.
- 'Net zero' targets need to be transformed into Real Zero targets, including a phase-out of fossil fuels through Just Transition based on principles of climate justice, equity, and support for rights for communities. The UK government as host of the summit should set an example by ensuring it will stop funding fossil fuels at home and abroad.
- Wealthier nations are failing in fulfilling their climate finance commitments to enable developing countries cope with climate impacts and to do the work of reducing or avoiding emissions. They must now deliver the \$100-bil-

lion-a-year (£73bn) target they pledged in the Copenhagen Accord at COP15 to provide for developing countries, which was supposed to happen by 2020.

- It will be very difficult for vulnerable countries to adapt to Loss and Damage due to climate impacts. These are existential threats for countries facing rising sea levels and increasingly severe weather events, forced migration, and loss of productive agricultural land. Rich countries are rejecting the principle of reparations. We need to see the negotiations on Loss and Damage moving progressively and positively for vulnerable countries.
- If we want just transition to be a reality, we must challenge the continuing dominant role of transnational corporations and the systems of power that have allowed for the continued exploitation of resources, which have caused immeasurable ill-effects to poor communities and people for centuries. The same system has

allowed fossil fuels to influence key meetings of global leaders, including the COPs. Fossil fuel corporations must be kick-out of COP26 and not allowed to use their 'net-zero' programs as an excuse.

Outside the climate negotiation process, but with impacts that undermine climate actions, are global trade rules and processes. These include Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) mechanisms or corporate courts in trade treaties and the Energy Charter Treaty (ECT). With these agreements, governments that phase out coal, end gas production, or stop oil pipelines can be sued by corporations in private courts and be held liable for billions in damages. This means coal, oil and gas corporations can obstruct necessary government climate actions to address the climate emergency and just transition to a clean energy system.

*Article first appeared in [Global Justice Now](#).



BURMA/MYANMAR: FROM CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE TO ARMED RESISTANCE - WHAT NEW MYANMAR CAN EMERGE FROM TODAY'S CHALLENGES?

PIERRE ROUSSET | EUROPE SOLIDAIRE SANS FRONTIÈRES (ESSF)

In the aftermath of the military putsch of 1 February, a huge movement of civil disobedience prevented the junta from asserting its control over the country. However, it was able to redeploy its repressive arsenal to try to crush popular dissent. The army intervened throughout the country and no longer only against ethnic minorities in the periphery. In the face of this murderous repression, new forms of popular self-defence have become widespread. Resistance is now a long-term process and is undergoing major changes. A simple return to the situation before the putsch (cohabitation between the elected government and the military) was already impossible. From now on, the question that arises is that of alternatives: in this area too, there will be no return to the past. We have truly entered a new period [1] What kind of new Burma can the present mobilisations herald?

Last February, the junta could have been defeated if the international sanctions had been radical and if solidarity with the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) had been equal to the task. This was not the case, and the army had time to take the initiative again, waging an all-out war against the population - a war that is all the more deadly because China and Russia are providing it with heavy weaponry (aircrafts, tanks, artillery) that it did not have before, and because firms (including Western ones) are selling it the latest electronic surveillance devices.

As a result, popular resistance continues under extremely difficult conditions. The civil disobedience movement has gone underground and forms of self-defence are spreading throughout the country, not just in peripheral areas populated by ethnic minorities.

Traditional street demonstrations have become impossible and strikers face severe retaliation. However, "non-violent" forms of struggle continue, including strikes (albeit much less widespread than before) and passive resistance. The junta had to pay lip service to the fact that the "return to normalcy" was not complete [2]. Indeed, the number of qualified per-

sonnel working in the banks or in the administration remains insufficient and health workers to a large extent continue to refuse to work under military orders.

Despite the risks, in some urban centres, such as the capital of the Sagaing region (Monywa), flash demonstrations are organised to keep the symbol of civil disobedience alive [3]. The 2021-2022 school year started on 1 June, but the army has not been able to effectively enforce the reopening of schools (which were closed for a year due to Covid-19) [4].

The junta responded to this multiple and diffuse resistance by evicting people from their homes, by the intervention of paramilitary groups, by assassinations or arrests, or by convictions for collaboration with the new National Unity Government (NUG).

The National Unity Government

The formation of the Government of National Unity (NUG) is indeed one of the new factors of the situation. Rather than being in exile, it is a clandestine government whose members apparently remain in the country. It embodies the continuity of legal civilian power. It still has Aung San Suu Kyi as its 'State Counsellor',

who is now in detention and on trial for high treason, totally isolated from the world. Nevertheless, the NUG is emancipating itself, for the better, from the traditional orientation of the National League for Democracy (NLD, of which Suu Kyi was the leader), which was marked by Bamar ethno-nationalism (Bamar is the name of the majority ethnic group in Burma).

The composition of the National Unity Government is multi-ethnic [5]. On 3 June 2021, the (NUG) published its "Policy Position on the Rohingya in Rakhine State" [6]. This is an important document in many ways. It shows how 'new' Burma could be in the future.

- The NUG acknowledges the seriousness of the harm done to the Rohingya Muslim population, victims of genocide in Rakhine [Arakan] State, a subject that was previously taboo. The dominant Arakanese armed parties [7] in this coastal state violently denounce this statement and for good reason: they were complicit in the genocide and are more often on the side of the Burmese military junta than the democratic resistance. The National Unity Government pledges that "striving to hold perpetrators accountable is not only a way of achieving

justice, but also a deterrent to future atrocities. That is why we consider this a priority task. Reparation and justice will be guaranteed in the future constitution of the Federal Democratic Union." The NUG proposes that a genuine international criminal court be established.

- The NUG proposes that true federalism be established in the Union [8] "Sovereignty belongs to the member states and the people of the member states [...]. Everyone in the Union has full enjoyment of fundamental human rights. All ethnic groups who are native to the Union have full enjoyment of individual rights held by individual people and collective rights held by ethnic groups. All citizens who swear allegiance to the Union regardless of their ethnic origins are considered to have full enjoyment of citizens' rights. The National Unity Government will not tolerate any form of discrimination."
- On this occasion, the NUG clarifies its understanding of citizenship, which should replace the 1982 law, in preparation for the drafting of a new constitution: "This new Citizenship Act must base citizenship on birth in Myanmar or birth anywhere as a child of Myanmar Citizens." This definition,



commonplace for a Frenchman, represents a real revolution in Burma.

The 1982 law distinguishes three degrees of citizenship designated by the colour of the corresponding identity paper [9]. The pink card grants full citizenship. It is automatically granted to all persons whose ancestors resided in the country before 1823 [10], or born to parents recognised as full citizens. The Blue Card is reserved for associate citizens, i.e. those who were recognised as citizens under the previous Union Citizenship Law of 1948. The Green Card is for citizenship by naturalisation of persons who can prove their presence on Burmese soil before 4 January 1948 and who apply for the first time after 1982. The granting of cards is subject to arbitrary exceptions or restrictions, notified by the Council of State, for sometimes surprising reasons. For example, persons applying for citizenship by naturalisation must be of good character (art. 44d).

It could hardly be more complicated.

A white card was distributed in the 1990s to residents who did not fit into any of these categories. It does not give any rights.

Finally, citizenship is recognised through membership of one of the 135 officially recognised ethnic groups. Not only is it unequal, but it also contributes to the entrenchment of these affiliations (as well as the rejection of populations declared to be 'foreign') according to divisions born of the colonial era between Bamars in the plains, minorities in the periphery and imported labour.

There is obviously a long way to go between such commitments and their implementation, but they confirm that there is indeed a generational break and that the "possibilities" envisaged yesterday by marginalised circles, with little voice, are today widely debated by all those who think about the future, about the post-military junta. This rupture is also manifested in the expansion of armed resistance.

Armed resistance

Popular opposition to the military putsch was evident throughout the country, but the response of parliaments, parties and armies in the ethnic states was often effectively cautious and wait-and-see. A constellation of organisations emerged in many of these states, some negotiating a ceasefire with the junta, others fighting it. This in-between (fighting and negotiating) has been something of a tradition since independence. New factors in this area include:

- The role of China. It absolutely needs an agreement with the military junta to protect its investments (considerable in infrastructure) and its companies (textiles in particular, which have been attacked by the resistance in industrial zones). It needs to guarantee the development of its "Burmese Corridor" which gives it access to the Indian Ocean, west of the Strait of Malacca, which the US can block. In particular, it has strategically important oil and gas pipelines there. The border area is the scene of a thousand traffics, from teak wood to precious stones, which in return allow the enrichment of a good number of Burmese army officers. On the northern border, China uses its strong and direct influence on ethnic movements to prevent them from dissenting. This is the case of the very powerful United Wa State Army (UWSA), the best armed and comprising some 30,000 regular soldiers.
- The use by the Burmese army of its air force and artillery. It was not equipped with them during the previous major conflicts. It bombed villages, causing massive displacement of the population. This is how the leadership of the Fifth Brigade of the Karen National Union (KNU), which played a leading role in the resistance to the coup and which hosted and protected representatives of the Civil Disobedience Committee (CDM), explains the fact that it signed a ceasefire with the junta: the human cost was becoming too high. However, she says that when the National Unity Government launches an offensive, she will par-



ticipate. In any case, the Karen state is one where many dissident armed groups have emerged and are still actively fighting.

- The formation of the People's Defence Force (PDF, attached to the NUG). There had been talk of forming a federal army - too ambitious a project at the moment if it were to include armies from the ethnic states on the periphery. The government of national unity then created the PDF, under its authority, which operates throughout the Irrawaddy basin. It is staffed by police and army defectors and former officers.
- The spontaneous emergence of numerous local groups that take action with makeshift means. They are not under the command of the PDF and the NUG, which they regard (sometimes, often?) with distrust, as a structure that is too bureaucratic for their taste. They are the ones who exploded bombs in schools before the start of the school year as a warning - a mode of action officially condemned by the PDF.
- Making the junta's supporters insecure. In lowland areas, armed action rarely takes the form of a frontal attack on the military. It often targets informers in the service of the junta who provide information to the military, or administrators who have taken over from opposing local authorities - some groups also threaten the families of soldiers, which is a matter of debate, especially with the PDF.
- The beginnings of a guerrilla war in the plains. As a recent development, actual guerrilla operations are reported in the Sagaing and Mandalay areas. According to information received by The Irrawaddy [11], a thousand members of the civil resistance have carried out a series of coordinated attacks with makeshift weapons, which have cost the lives of some thirty soldiers. In Mandalay, three soldiers, including a lieutenant colonel, were killed when they entered a building used as a PDF base.

In the future, the question of the coordination of armed resistance (and the improvement of its armament) will arise. So, perhaps, will the place of women in the struggle. It was prom-

inent in all the popular social sectors from the first hours of the uprising which followed the putsch of 1 February (high school students, health workers, textile workers, civil servants, educators...). It remains evident in the clandestine civil disobedience actions. For my part, I have no indication of their role in the military field.

Solidarity in the long term

Long-term resistance must be matched by the development of long-term political and financial solidarity. Too few organisations in France mobilised immediately at the beginning of February to build it. We must push for the extension of international sanctions against the Burmese military-economic complex. We must demand the formal recognition of the NUG as the legal representation of the country in place of the junta. Cooperation between the various components of solidarity must be ensured.

The association Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières (ESSF) had launched an appeal for financial solidarity with the Burmese resistance. It collected and transferred €6080. We have recently received confirmation that these funds have been received and distributed via a border area for emergency food and health aid to refugee populations, for the distribution of indispensable means of communication, for the reinforcement of the organisational infrastructure of the CDM-GUN and the links with regional solidarity...

The least we can say is that the French government and presidency are not very vocal about the situation in Burma. Yet they are particularly implicated, because of Total's role in the crisis, given its past and present links with the regime.

Total employees would like to go on strike to protest against the oil giant's support for the military order, but they fear being sacked if they are not defended by the "international community". Emmanuel Macron is silent.

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NGO Forum on ADB
85-A Masikap Extension, Diliman, Quezon City, Metro Manila
Philippines
www.forum-adb.org