



SDG 16+ FORUM - ASIA

 **September 22, 2021**
9 AM GMT - 12 PM GMT

CONCEPT NOTE

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The **fall of Myanmar** (February 1) and nearly 6 months later **Afghanistan** (August 15) to military and Taliban rule represents a major blow not only to democracy but also to the entire peace process in South East and South Asia in 2021. The blow didn't happen in just one day but has been in the making for a long time across the region.

Initiated along with other reforms in the early 2010s, the peace process in Myanmar, if not already dead, now faces an uncertain fate. The Peace Process Steering Team (PPST), a joint body of 10 Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) that have signed the so-called Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) and been in talks with the government since 2015, has announced its suspension of negotiation with the coup-makers.

It is sad to witness the Burmese military, or Tatmadaw, betraying democracy and the peace process for the advantage of complete political power. Looking critically back at the past decade, however, a sadder fact seems to be that the Tatmadaw never meant what it said about democracy and peace. At the very least, its understandings of the concepts are not compatible with the people's.

Nearly 2 decades after the United States intervened in Afghanistan to remove the Taliban from power, and in the wake of President Joe Biden's withdrawal of U.S. troops, the Taliban's stunningly rapid reconquest of the country reached its denouement on August 15 as its fighters entered Kabul and President Ashraf Ghani left the country. **What is clear the day after the fall of Kabul is that the world has collectively failed the Afghan people.**

The world leaders and the UN institutions should establish immediate access and safe havens for the millions of Afghan civilians fleeing Taliban rule. Forming an international coalition dedicated to this effort may offer respite to the most vulnerable, including activists, journalists, and members of civil society who may now be targeted for working with the United States.

The Taliban will pay lip service to human rights but its promises should not be taken at face value. In violating the terms and spirit of the Doha peace talks, it has proven to be a dishonest negotiator, exploiting these talks to establish a lull in a conflict that allowed it to reinforce its supply lines, organize its fighters, and prepare the staging ground for its offensive. Its atrocities over the coming period, including revenge killings and the violent suppression of women and other vulnerable communities, will require a unified response from the U.S., EU, NATO and the neighbouring countries of Afghanistan and its allies. Qatar, which facilitated the peace talks and could now have substantial influence over the Taliban, may be critical to any such strategy focused on pressuring the group and containing its transgressions. The Taliban will see little incentive to establish a peaceful transition, much less an inclusive political order if the U.S. is unable to convince Pakistan, Russia, and China to isolate the group.

Hence, a coordinated action under the United Nations, to assist the Afghan population and negotiate arrangements with neighbouring countries for anti-terrorism and humanitarian operations in order to restore peace and democratic values in the country is the need of the hour.

This also shows how the lack of an integrated and inclusive approach in decision making within these countries, coupled with a systematic erosion of democratic values over time, led to system failure. The heat of such turmoil and unrest will soon be felt in neighbouring countries and the most vulnerable population will be the ultimate victims if national governments, UN institutional and global civil society do not unite for the causes of peace, protection of human rights and democracy.

It is in this context, the **first SDG 16+ Forum in Asia is being organised by ADA and its national, regional and global partners**, national governments and UN institutions bringing voices together to reiterate our belief in inclusive institutions, a just society and embrace democratic values. Democracy and peace can only be made with them, not for them alone.

Output:

A global Solidarity CSO statement on behalf of the SDG 16 Plus Forum and People's Assembly

WE LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING YOU!

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

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